



LONG LIVE THE
KING

ROYAL CROWN ACADEMY BOOK ONE

KHAI HARA

Long Live The King

Khai Hara

Khai Hara

Copyright © 2022 Khai Hara

Long Live The king Copyright © 2022 by Khai Hara
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual personas, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

BLURB

“Go ahead, scream for help.” He taunts darkly as his hot breath tickles my ear. “No one here will save you from me.”

When I get a scholarship to finish high school in Switzerland, I don't expect to meet a villain.

Rogue Royal.

He's the kind of gorgeous your mom tells you to stay away from, filthy rich and his family founded the school I just got accepted to.

Did I mention that he makes my heart race? Only because he hates me, of course. The first day we met, I accidentally spilled a milkshake on him and he's made my life hell ever since.

But this is my best chance at a better future for my mom and I. I won't let him break me.

****This is a full length stand-alone dark romance novel, containing scenes that are not suitable for all readers.***

AUTHOR NOTE

Hello friend,

First of all, thank you so much for reading *Long Live the King*. This is my debut novel and I'm so excited to be sharing it with you. You're such a supportive community and I can't wait to get your feedback and your thoughts on our friend, Rogue.

Speaking of Rogue, I wanted to give you a heads up that this story is darker than most and contains material that may be upsetting or triggering to some readers.

Long Live the King is a dark high school bully romance and readers should proceed with caution.

To all the people who said I should.

Look at me now. I finally did.

Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[BLURB](#)

[AUTHOR NOTE](#)

[Dedication](#)

[PLAYLIST](#)

[1.](#)

[2.](#)

[3.](#)

[4.](#)

[5.](#)

[6.](#)

[7.](#)

[8.](#)

[9.](#)

[10.](#)

[11.](#)

[12.](#)

[13.](#)

[14.](#)

[15.](#)

[16.](#)

[17.](#)

[18.](#)

[19.](#)

[20.](#)

[21.](#)

[22.](#)

[23.](#)

[24.](#)

[25.](#)

[26.](#)

[27.](#)

[28.](#)

[29.](#)

[30.](#)

[31.](#)

[32.](#)

[33.](#)

[34.](#)

[35.](#)

[36.](#)

[37.](#)

[38.](#)

[39.](#)

[40.](#)

[41.](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[About The Author](#)

[Books In This Series](#)

PLAYLIST

Bitch – Ruby Amanfu

My Way – Queen Key

Born For This – Royal Deluxe

How Does It Feel? – London Grammar

Hurts So Good – Astrid S

Drown – Boy In Space

Hold Up – Jerub

Wait – M83

Nightcall – London Grammar

Elastic Heart – Sia

Hurt Me – Låpsley

In This Shirt – The Irrepressibles

Die Another Day – Madonna

Only Love (Seaside Wounds Remix) – Hummingbird
Hotel, Seaside Wounds

*“The king is dead.
Long live the king!”*

A traditional announcement made after the ascension of a new king or queen.

1.

Bellamy

“Bellamy, wake up.”

I startle awake and immediately groan. My neck feels like a drunk group of Irish tap dancers spent the night practicing on it. Massaging the back of my nape with one hand, and rubbing the sleep out of my eyes with the other, I turn towards the person who woke me.

“We need to work on your bedside manner, Thayer. That was not it.” I groan again. “Why does my neck hurt so bad?”

“Probably because you’ve had it bent at a twenty degree angle for the past six hours. The minute they took the food trays away, your head dropped on my shoulder and stayed there. I’ve got to say you’re very cute when you sleep. I think it’s the drool.” She says teasingly.

“Shut up, I do not drool.”

“I may or may not have photographic evidence. Keep telling me how bad my bedside manner is, I’ll whip out my phone and show you.”

“Okay, okay. You win.”

“Gracias.” She sing-songs happily, proud of herself.

“Sorry I slept the entire flight. Did anything happen while I was asleep?”

“Apart from me ugly crying while watching *If I Stay*, you really didn’t miss much. I thought there’d be more action on a flight this long.”

It’s our first flight together and our first overseas trip. I’m a little bummed I slept through it and didn’t enjoy the

uneventful trip with her. Which reminds me. “Why’d you wake me up anyway?”

Before she can answer, a voice comes in over the announcer system.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we’ll be touching down at Geneva International Airport in just over 30 minutes. Please stow away your tray tables, make sure your seats are in an upright position and-”

I miss the rest of the announcement as I lift the shutter on the window and get my first look at Switzerland.

Land stretches out below us, a mixture of city structures, lush fields, and a beautiful lake. In the distance, snow covered mountains peak out from under the clouds.

Excitement bubbles up my throat and a small sound of joy escapes my mouth as I turn back towards Thayer.

“We made it.”

“We made it.” She confirms, grabbing my hand and giving it a tight squeeze.

“This feels surreal.”

“I think it’ll continue to feel that way for a while.”

“God, I hope so.” I say with an excited squeal, as we both turn back towards the window and take in the view as the plane prepares to land.

As I watch the plane getting closer to touching down in Geneva, I can’t help but think back on the journey that brought us here, together.

We were never meant to leave the United States, Thayer and I. Both poor Chicago kids, neither one of us had ever set foot outside of the country before today, let alone moving halfway across the world for our senior year of high school.

Previous trips for me included a bus ride with my eighth grade class to Springfield, the capital of Illinois, and a weekend in Florida for my cousin's eighteenth birthday. Apart from that, vacations were spent in Chicago working and going to the beach.

And now we're about to call Aubonne, Switzerland home for the year. I've pinched myself enough times to know that this is real, no matter how hard it still is to believe even as I'm about to touch down in Geneva.

Aubonne is home to the Royal Crown Academy, a private British boarding school for the children of the rich and famous. The school is exclusive in the extreme, a certain amount of wealth and scholastic aptitude needing to be proven in order to even apply. From there follows a strict application process that includes an essay, a video portion and an in-person interview with a member of the board.

The website proudly boasts an impressive list of alumnus, from fashion designers and movie stars to ambassadors and heads of state.

Thayer and I don't fit into the 'rich and famous' mold — 'broke and barely getting by' is more our style — but last year RCA initiated a scholarship program funded by the most powerful backing families of the school. The program would offer two scholarships in its inaugural year, one for academic acumen and the other for sports performance, the goal being that once the scholarship had been proven successful, they'd increase the number of recipients.

With the campus based in Switzerland and having a decidedly European student body, the grant was limited to Americans only, which had helped our odds.

It was a warm May day when we first heard about the scholarship. Thayer and I had been chilling at my house, a paused episode of a Netflix true crime docuseries before us as we debated who we thought the killer would turn out to be.

"I think the brother did it. He's got twitchy eyes."

“If twitchy eyes are indicators of a murderer, then we should switch out of chem next year. Mr. Friedman perpetually has one eye at half mast. I keep thinking he’s winking at me when I run into him in the hallway.”

“Yeah, but I think that’s because he’s in the lab huffing chemicals all day.”

I pondered her point as her brother Nolan bounded into the room, a pamphlet in his hand.

“Have you guys seen this?” He asked, slapping it onto the coffee table.

“No, what is it?” I picked up the pamphlet, the words Royal Crown Academy standing out on the front page above an image of a sprawling campus.

“They were handing them out at LP. Apparently some fancy school in Switzerland has a couple scholarship spots open and they’re looking for students to apply.”

‘LP’ referred to our high school, Lakeshore Public. A neighborhood school with a student population of over three thousand kids, LP had metal detectors, yellow, run down walls, and what I can only describe as prison-style bathrooms.

It wasn’t abnormal to have to try a few different stalls before finding one that locked.

Or had a door at all.

I tossed the pamphlet at Thayer who caught it with her left hand, quickly perusing the cover before unfolding it.

“Why are you asking us?” I asked Nolan. “We’re incoming seniors, we only have one year left. Scholarships are usually for freshmen.”

“The lady who handed it to me — who had a very cool accent by the way, that’s why I stopped originally,” I rolled my eyes at Nolan. He’s a typical 17 year old boy and he’ll flirt with anything with a pulse. “Anyway, all the classes are in English and apparently basically everyone in Switzerland speaks it too which is helpful because it’s an international school. She said culture shock would be minimal and that

anyone can apply. And that actually since the program is new, they're particularly open to sophomores and juniors, students that would only spend a couple years there max."

"B, did you see this? In the list of accommodations it says there are suites. We could room together! Get a taste of our college life." She kept flipping the pages. "Jeez, this also lists three olympic sized pools, a sauna/hammam, jacuzzis, tennis courts and a football field. What *is* this place?"

"Somewhere we don't belong." Was my clipped answer.

She lifted her head to look at me. "Says who?"

"Our tax bracket." I said dryly.

She tutted at me. "That's one way to look at it. *Or* we can see this as an opportunity to get a bunch of rich folks to fund an amazing year abroad."

That thinking is exactly why I love and admire Thayer. In our friendship and in life, Thayer is the bold one. The brave one. She has big dreams and even bigger aspirations for herself, and she fuels herself with 'what's possible?' thinking.

While my ambitions match hers, mine are rooted in realism. They need to be. I can't afford to let myself get off course and distracted from my goals. The goals I set for myself are reasonable and reachable, not far reaching dreams like moving to Switzerland.

I'll graduate as valedictorian of my class and I'll go to UIC. I'll study accounting, graduate with honors and get a job that pays well enough to allow me to buy a small house for my mom.

That's my dream.

Anything else is unrealistic for a girl from the rough side of Chicago.

The reality is that in this world, your connections get you ahead. Sure, your skill and tenacity can help move you ahead incrementally, but it's your connections that propel you forward and into opportunities.

And we have none.

We're going to have to fight tooth and nail just to scrape our way out of poverty and into the lower middle class.

Our fun afternoons include a cold Miller Lite and an episode of *Deadly Suspects*, not sipping an espresso on a terrace in Switzerland.

I don't want Thayer to get her hopes up that we're going to be able to change our lives this way, only for both of us to be bitterly disappointed when we get passed over. I have to be both feet firmly planted on the ground at all times, laser focused on achievable goals.

So I don't let myself even entertain it. Because I know from experience that hope is a bitter mistress.

"I'm late for work."

Case in point, 'work' for me includes waiting on people and wiping down tables at my local cafe for five percent tips, if I'm lucky.

Thayer doesn't say anything as I leave my house, just watches me depart with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes.

In retrospect, I should have known she was up to something. That's the look she gets when she's concocting an evil plan that we'll both be roped into.

A couple months went by and I'd forgotten about our conversation and RCA. Or at least I'd told myself I had, but life had moved on anyway. Until one day, when a thick envelope arrived in the mail for me. Thayer was at my house — a regular occurrence for her as she tried to avoid her mother's new boyfriend — and her eyes widened as she saw what I was holding in my hand.

"What?"

"No, nothing." She'd said looking down quickly. But I knew my friend better than I knew myself, courtesy of meeting when we were in diapers.

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. Or potentially something, depending on what's in the envelope you're holding in your hand. And how

disappointed you'll be if it's not good news."

Flipping the envelope over in my hand, I tore open the glued flap and pulled out a thin pile of documents. On top was a single sheet of thick, expensive paper with a beautiful red crest at the top.

Something niggled at my memory as I ran my fingers over it. I felt like I'd seen it before.

"Dear Bellamy," I read. "Congratulations! It is with great enthusiasm that I write to let you know you've made the shortlist of ten candidates we're considering for the Royal Crown Academy academic scholarship."

Before I can continue reading, Thayer lets out a shrill scream and wraps her arms around me.

"Oh my god, B! Congratulations!" She jumps up and down, clapping her hands together.

I stand there in disbelief, holding the letter in my hand. "Did you...did you only submit an application for me?" I asked, overwhelmed.

"No, I applied for the both of us. And I'm shortlisted for the sports scholarship! Please don't be mad, I just thought what was the harm in applying? We may never get another opportunity like this again." She explained, looking at me expectantly.

"No, I'm just..." I said as I hugged her. "Overwhelmed, I think."

"Overwhelmed is better than angry, I'll take it." She replied with levity. She looked at my surprised face, her eyes boring into mine knowingly. "Are you feeling okay?"

"Yeah, don't worry."

I don't know how to process the emotion I'm feeling for the first time in a long time.

Hope.

"Well now that we've come this far, we need to see this through. I'm down to apply."

I'm met with more cheering and dancing from Thayer.

“Now that you've gotten me into this, let's do it right. We should strategize how we tackle the next stage of the application process.”

And strategize we did.

We quickly realized that our friendship was our differentiator, what would make us stand out amongst the other applicants. That we were strong as individuals, but we were stronger together. So we'd combined our applications into one, describing Thayer's heroics on the soccer field and my leadership on the debate team. The 10k races Thayer organized to raise funds for immigrants who were petitioning for citizenship. The afternoons I'd spent volunteering at soup kitchens.

We finished our application with a video montage of our friendship, including clips where we'd argued that together we'd have a better chance of assimilating to a different school, country, and culture.

Finally, we each had our interviews with one of the board members, a man who ran a Fortune 500 company who'd quizzed us repeatedly about our backgrounds, our interests and why above everyone else should receive the scholarships.

And then we'd waited with bated breath until one day my phone had dinged while we were sitting at the Ledge.

“Thayer.” I said urgently, smacking her arm

She was laying on her back, shirt rolled up under her bra and sunglasses on as she worked on her tan.

“Hmm?”

“I have an email from RCA.”

“Shut up.” She replied, sitting up abruptly and ripping the sunglasses off her face. “What does it say?”

“I don't know. Did you get one?”

She checked her phone, her shoulders drooping slightly as she shook her head. “Nope.”

“Maybe I should wait until you get yours to open mine.”

“Are you insane? Open that email up right now!” She exclaimed.

And like the other times, there was no warning before the wave of anxiety was upon me, suffocating me.

The physical symptoms began to swarm, the blurry vision almost blinding me as the anxiety tore through my body until the negative drowned out the positive ones. The *what ifs* swirled around my brain like a tornado.

What if neither of us got in?

What if I did, but I went to Switzerland and failed catastrophically?

What if this was it? What if there was nothing greater waiting for me and I spent the rest of my life cleaning up after other people?

My throat constricted and I couldn't breathe.

The letter dropped to the floor.

“Hey.” Thayer's soft voice broke through the wall of panic, and a gentle hand came to rest on my arm.

I opened my eyes, having not even realized I'd closed them to begin with, and met Thayer's open gaze. She'd been concerned this would trigger another anxiety attack, and here it was.

She squeezed my arm, rubbing it up and down my forearm reassuringly.

“Breathe. It's going to be okay. Focus on my hand.”

Having witnessed a few of my anxiety attacks, Thayer knew how to help.

Telling me to breathe. Having me focus on something real in the room.

And my least favorite, waiting for it to pass.

I turned my head so she couldn't see the stricken look on my face as I tried to calm the racing beat of my heart.

“Hey, none of that.” She said, grabbing my shoulder and turning me back towards her. “There’s nothing for you to be ashamed of.”

This was my fourth anxiety attack in the last six months and with each new one, fear wedged deeper into my brain and made a home for itself.

I knew there wasn’t anything wrong with me.

That this was an uncontrollable biological response to the stress of maintaining perfect grades and extracurricular activities so that my UIC application was perfect.

But the lack of control was terrifying and numbing all at once.

“You okay?”

“Yeah,” I said, swallowing around the lump in my throat. “That one wasn’t so bad.”

“You know, I think this year could help with the anxiety attacks. Maybe knowing we’d benefit from a better education and have access to more resources and connections in general would help ease your stress.”

“Better hope I’m accepted then.”

She crossed her fingers. “You can’t see them, but I’m crossing my toes as well.”

I shoved her playfully at that.

“It’s important to remember that there are no negative outcomes from this. Either that letter contains an acceptance or it doesn’t, but either way you’re brilliant, super kind, sometimes annoying—”

“Hey!”

“Funny, brave, beautiful. You’re the whole package, babe.” She said with a snap of her fingers. “Now, read the damn email. Out loud, please.”

I swiped up on my phone and clicked on the email notifications.

“Dear Bellamy, thank you for your continued interest in RCA. We’re pleased to inform you that you’ve been selected as the inaugural recipient-”

Before I could finish reading the email, Thayer tackled me to the ground with an ear piercing shriek.

“Bellamy,” She said, grabbing me by my shoulders and shaking me slightly, “Do you realize what this means? Your whole life is going to change!” She leaned back in to hug me, wrapping me in her strong embrace.

Elation rushed through my bloodstream like liquid fire, pushing out the remnants of anxiety. But as thrilled as I was about the opportunity, I wasn’t leaving my best friend behind.

“I’m not going if you’re not.”

“No, I won’t hear th-”

“No, you listen to me this time.” I said, interrupting her. “If the sports scholarship goes to somebody else, there’s no way I’m leaving you here. And before you get any ideas, even if you tie me up and ship me there, I’ll walk and swim back to Chicago, you hear me?”

“Yes, Boss B. I love it when you lay down the law.”

Just then, a phone dinged behind us and we both dove towards it.

Thayer’s phone with a notification.

She grabbed it, bringing it face down against her chest.

“Okay, breathe.” She said, speaking to herself. Clicking on the screen, she read out. “Dear Thayer, yadi yadi yada, unfortunately, I regret to inform you...”

“What?” I asked in disbelief, “That can’t be right. There’s no way they’ve found someone more qualified than you. You led our team to nationals last year for chrissakes! There’s got to be a way we can find out who got the scholarship.”

“B, it’s okay.”

“Maybe we can write back under the guise of wanting to understand what we could have done differently to have a

successful application. And then ask them who received it? Let me draft something quickly.” I said as I started typing on my phone.

“Bellamy-”

“No! Why aren’t you more upset? I need to know who this fucking unicorn of a human they gave the scholarship to is, I refuse to believe they’re superior to you in any way.”

‘I’m not upset because I was joking.’ She said. My gaze snapped to hers as she spoke. “I got it. I got the scholarship, B!”

“What is wrong with you? Are you trying to put me in an early grave?”

We fell into each other’s arms, me cursing her for the prank, her laughing gleefully as she hugged me to her.

I pulled back to look into her eyes.

“We’re really doing this?”

“Looks like it.” I said with a smile.

“We’re moving to Switzerland, bitch!”

Everything moved quickly after that. Our official acceptances were out that day, the transfers confirmed and our passport paperwork filed.

When it came time to leave, we didn’t have much to pack, each of us bringing only one suitcase. The scholarship was incredibly comprehensive, covering the flights and tuition fully and providing a healthy monthly stipend for our discretionary use, so we’d be able to buy things once we got there.

We’d kissed our moms, hugged Thayer’s brother, and headed to the airport where we’d gotten on a flight to New York City, followed by our connecting flight to Geneva.

2.

Bellamy

As the wheels touch down on the tarmac, Thayer lets out a small sigh of relief.

“Thank god that’s over.”

Thayer doesn’t do well with tight spaces. Having to spend six hours in a flying sardine can, crunched into seat 42A with my head on her shoulder and apparently my drool on her shirt, couldn’t have been easy for her. She’s a trooper.

She doesn’t look worse for wear from this trip, though. She’s gathering her long, silver hair into a high ponytail, the bracelets on her slim wrist clanging together as she does so. Her eyes, almond-shaped and a startling shade of blue, don’t carry the signs of sleep like I’m sure mine do.

As she tightens her ponytail, I can’t help but stare. Years of sports and a sheer natural athleticism have lent a grace to her movements that I wish I had. She exudes power, confidence, and grace with everything she does. She scrunches her button nose and sticks her tongue out in my direction when she catches me staring.

“Who’s picking us up, again?”

I look down at the information I stored in my Notes app. “I’m absolutely going to butcher this, but her name is Sixtine Tellier.”

“Like the number?” She asks as we exit the plane and make our way to border control. “I wonder how she got stuck with tour guide slash chaperone duty.”

“Like the chapel. Maybe she was bored and volunteered.”

“Rich people don’t get bored. They just go ride an ostrich or kill poor people for sport if they start to feel boredom.”

I pause. “*Squid Games* reference?”

“Yup.”

Once we clear border patrol, we head towards baggage claim.

“I’m going to call my mom quickly and let her know we landed.” I say to Thayer as we stand in front of the carousel.

“Say hi to her from me. I’m going to call Carter.”

I don’t say anything in response, but I don’t need to. She knows what I think.

Carter is Thayer’s boyfriend of two years. Two months ago, during “a moment of extreme intoxication” Carter “made a mistake” and slept with a girl but “it meant nothing”. To add insult to injury, the girl was a rival of Thayer’s on an opposing soccer team. She’d seen him in the stands cheering for her at their games.

Bitch.

The way Carter had described it to her — absolving himself of all responsibility in the process — you’d have thought he tripped and his dick just accidentally slipped into this girl.

I’d cursed him out when she hated him, held her when she cried, and supported her when she took him back. In my mind, he didn’t deserve a toenail clipping of hers, let alone a second chance.

But she’d wanted the stability he provided and I understood that. Her home life was chaotic and she needed someone other than her best friend to comfort her in moments when it became too much.

He’s been the perfect supportive boyfriend since they got back together, but I’ve got my eye on him and my knives sharpened in case he ever fucks up again.

I know in my heart that this reunion will be short lived. Carter is just too small-town for Thayer. Her dreams and ambition could single handedly power a small country and she has the work ethic to back it up. She’s going to change the world, and one day soon I know he’ll be in her rearview

mirror. The rift between them caused by his cheating will only get more pronounced with her move to Switzerland.

I press call on my mom's number. "Hey, mom." I say as she picks up.

"Hey, honey. It's so good to hear your voice. I miss you already!"

I try to ignore the guilt that eats at my stomach. My mom is my confidante, my biggest supporter, my best friend. It's been her and me — and Thayer — against the world since the moment I was born.

She met my dad in a bar, a trucker on a pit stop in Chicago, and they spent the night together. When she learned she was pregnant, he simply got in his truck and drove away, never to be heard from again.

My mom works three jobs and sometimes sixteen hour days to make ends meet. She cleans homes and offices, and also works at the same restaurant I waited tables at. Even though we've struggled financially, she's always provided an overabundance of love and optimism.

Leaving her was one of the hardest decisions I'd ever had to make. The enthusiasm I felt when I received the scholarship took a nosedive when I realized it meant leaving her behind. Ultimately, my mom wouldn't hear of it — I was going and that was the end of it.

Like I said, my greatest supporter.

"Miss you too. We just landed and we're waiting for our luggage."

"How was your first international flight? Did you fall in love with your hot European neighbor?" She asks, wagging her eyebrows.

"No, mom. The man next to me had what he referred to as 'travel heartburn' and burped pretty consistently until I fell asleep. I'm just as shocked as you to find out the Hallmark movies lied, mom."

“Well maybe you’ll meet someone in Switzerland.” She says hopefully.

Second only to being happy, my mom wants nothing more than for me to meet someone. She’s seen the change in Thayer since she’s been with Carter (pre-cheating, obviously) and she wants the same for me.

It’s not like I’m not interested, I just haven’t met anyone who’s stood out to me. A small part of me hopes I meet someone at RCA, but the anxious part of me knows I’m only there because of an academic scholarship. I’ll be expected to maintain a level of scholastic and personal excellence at all times, and that needs to be my focus.

But I don’t want to disappoint or worry her.

“We’ll see.” I say noncommittally

“I just don’t want you to be so wrapped up in school that you miss out on life, hon.”

“I know, mom.” And to appease her. “Maybe I’ll meet a French man who’ll take me to Paris.”

“If you do, you’ll have to call me from the top of the Eiffel Tower!”

After promising my mom that I would take advantage of the lower legal drinking age to have a drink, I hang up and rejoin Thayer who has both our suitcases at her feet. She looks annoyed.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” I raise an eyebrow at her. “Nothing important. Carter and I argued, that’s all.” She wraps her arms around herself and looks to the side.

“I’m sorry.” I pause. “Does it help if I tell you the legal drinking age here is 18?”

She laughs. “God, yeah it does.”

We grab our suitcases and head for the exit that leads us to the arrivals section. As the doors open, I look out into the crowd of people, searching for someone holding an RCA sign.

In a colorless sea of people, my gaze catches on red hair. It stands out like the sun peaking out from behind the clouds after a thunderstorm. I lower my gaze and take in the sign she’s holding that says Walsh/Ward.

I point it out to Thayer. “There she is.”

As we get closer to who we assume is Sixtine, I get my first full glance at her. A bright smile is the first thing I notice. Like her hair, it makes her stand out in a crowd. A sea of freckles covers her cheeks and nose, a few stragglers hanging out around her mouth. Her eyes sparkle in her round face as she watches us approach.

“Hi!” She says, and I detect a faint hint of an accent. “You must be Bellamy and Thayer. I’m Sixtine, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you as well.”

She leans in and I look at her questioningly. “Oh sorry, my fault.” She says and smacks her forehead with her palm. “I was going to give you *la bise*, the kiss on the cheeks, but I don’t think they do that where you’re from.”

Thayer laughs. “No, but we do hug.”

“That works for me” She says as she leans in and hugs us both. “Come on, let’s get the car and get on the road.” She grabs Thayer’s carry on and starts walking, speaking excitedly as she goes. “I’m excited to have you here. I don’t know if anyone told you, but the four of us will be sharing a suite.”

“Four of us?”

“Nera’s the fourth. She’s my best friend and a total badass as you would say. She’s Japanese, grew up in Hong Kong, speaks four languages, *and* she’s a pro fencer. She’s hoping to make it on the national team next year. Also has a razor sharp wit. There’s nothing she can’t do.”

“Sounds like we’ll get along.” Thayer says with a wink in my direction.

“Sounds like you might finally meet someone more competitive than you. Who would have thought it was possible?”

“Hey now, don’t go giving away my title like that. Until proven otherwise, I’m still ‘Most Competitive Person Alive’.”

“Only time will tell.” I say dryly.

By this point, we’ve made it to the parking lot and Sixtine pulls the carry on up to a Porsche SUV.

“Is this your car?”

“No, it’s Nera’s. My Mercedes is getting a tune up.”

“Of course.” I say, like it’s every day that I meet 18 year olds who drive hundred thousand dollar cars.

As Sixtine pulls out of the parking spot, she turns to us. “The pamphlet says RCA is located in Aubonne but it’s really located a little further out into the countryside. It should take us about an hour to get there. Feel free to take a nap, you guys must be knackered after your flight.”

Her accent is more pronounced as she keeps talking. I can’t place it exactly — perks of having never left the country — but I think it might be French.

“Thanks, Sixtine.” I say before adding, “Are you named after the chapel?”

“Yes! You can thank my mom for that. Apart from my name, don’t worry, I’m normal. Well, at least I certainly like to think so.”

I laugh as Thayer replies. “I think we’re going to get along.”

“Then call me Six. My friends do.”

We continue chatting, the conversation flowing easily the entire ride to RCA. Before I know it, we’re pulling up to a beautiful wrought iron gate. It stands over twenty feet wide, with intricate golden designs of roses, crowns and daggers

interwoven into the barriers. Brick walls covered in ivy extend out from either side of the gate, privatizing the school in an enclave.

“Wow.”

“The gates? Yeah, they’re impressive. They were hand forged in Italy in the 16th century and brought over in 1602 when the school was founded.”

The gates open, revealing a long pathway with manicured lawns on either side and sprawling buildings in the distance. Six points out details as we drive into the grounds.

“RCA values sports just as much as academics. That’s why we’re really excited to have you, Thayer.” She adds. “On campus we have state of the art facilities for pretty much every sport you can think of. We just passed the stables, the tennis courts are coming up on your left, the football field is a little further downfield, next to the pond. There’s a master gymnasium behind the lab which is just to your right. That’s where you can go for any indoor courts — basketball, squash, tennis, etc. That’s in addition to the gyms in each dorm building for functional training.”

“Do you get lost three times a day?” I ask in disbelief.

Six laughs. “Oh no, generations of my family have gone to RCA. I’ve been coming to campus for gala events since I was a child.”

Thayer and I exchange a quick look.

“What?” Sixtine asks

“Oh, nothing. We’ve just led very different lives.” I say, laughing easily.

She blushes in response. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be, it’s fascinating.”

She points to our left. “There are golf carts available to take you across the estate. Stations are located on the northern, eastern, western, and southern points of the property. And just in front of us — finally, right? It’s a hike and a half to get here

— anyway, those are the dorm buildings. You’ll probably hear people refer to this area as ‘the pen’.”

Four buildings stand before us, two on either side of the road. Five stories tall, made of red brick and covered in the same ivy as the welcome gates, the pen gives off the same old money vibes as the rest of the property. Sixtine parks the car in front of the second building on the left and jumps out.

“Voilà! This’ll be your home for the next year.” She says, extending her arms up above her head.

“I think our suite is going to be nicer than my apartment back home.” Thayer muses.

“I realized that when *the stables* were the first thing Six pointed out on this school tour.”

Sixtine laughs as she escorts us up the elevator to the fourth floor and down the hallway before swiping her phone in front of the door and throwing it wide open.

“Shut the fuck up.”

Thayer’s the one who speaks but she takes the words right out of my mouth. The door opens into a large living space dominated by an open kitchen with the latest appliances. An island with four gold and burgundy stools separate the kitchen area from the living room. Looking at it, I know that’s where I’ll be living. I can imagine myself curled up with a good book on the plus chair in the corner, or laying on the couch laughing with the girls as we watch Love Island.

“There’s two bedrooms down that hallway,” Six says, pointing towards a small hallway with three doors. She turns and points in the other direction where a matching hallway with doors awaits. “And two others on that side. Those are for the two of you, we thought you’d like room next to each other. That last door is your shared bathroom. We have one on our end as well.”

“You’re so thoughtful, thanks for making us feel so welcome.” I say with another hug.

“Seriously. You’ve been amazing, Six!”

The front door opens as I pull back from the hug.

“Are we best friends already?” The girl who walks in asks with a small smile.

“Never without you.” Six replies, fake aghast.

“Better not.” She gives a small wave in our direction as she sets down the heavy shoulder bag she walked through the door with. “Hey guys, I’m Nera.”

Nera is hands down one of the most beautiful and best dressed people I’ve ever met, and I try desperately to tamp down the absolute girl crush threatening to send cartoon hearts shooting out of my eyes when I look at her.

Once again I metaphorically shake a raised fist at the sky, cursing the fact that I don’t like women.

Poker straight, thick black hair falls down her shoulders and past her breasts. She’s got striking, heavy-lidded ink black eyes that power an intense gaze, combined with a small nose and thick lips.

She’s wearing a black, short-sleeved turtleneck that hugs her body. Cutouts around the shoulder add an asymmetrical element and a silver ring holds the neck piece to the rest of the shirt. She’s combined it with bright orange cargo pants and black Prada combat boots. I remember lusting after those during a particularly intense session of fake online shopping. I pretend to shop like I would if I were a millionaire, adding thousand dollar items to my cart like they’re nothing, but never checking out. It’s very therapeutic on a bad day.

“I’m Thayer, she’s Bellamy.”

“Sorry I couldn’t come get you, I was at the gym. My new coach is an asshole, but that’s a whole other story.” She heads into the kitchen and opens the fridge. “We have beer. Do you guys want to order a pizza and we can make it a night?”

“Sure.”

“Pizza and beer night is a thing here too. Bellamy, I’m never going home.” Thayer says, splaying a hand across her chest dramatically.

“It’s a relief, really. I half expected her to bring out champagne and caviar with how things have been going.”

Nera reaches into the fridge with an easy laugh and pulls out both items, one in each hand. “I thought I’d ease you guys into the caviar, but if you’re ready say the word.”

“Definitely ease us into the caviar.”

An hour later, Thayer and I have mostly unpacked and moved into our new rooms. We sit around the coffee table with Six and Nera, biting into warm slices of delicious pizza as we trade stories.

Their friendship reminds me of the one I have with Thayer, the sarcastic banter flying back and forth easily between the two of them.

I ask Nera to take a photo of me taking a sip of my beer. I text it to my mom with a short message.

Me: First (legal) drink. I love my roommates already. Love and miss you too.

Mom: Enjoy, sweetheart. I’m so proud of everything you’ve accomplished.

My chest squeezes at those last words.

Making my mom proud is the most important thing to me. I want to show her that all the sacrifices she’s made for me over the years haven’t been for nothing, that I’m going to make a name for myself. The reminder of that self-imposed pressure is what usually triggers my anxiety.

I heart the message and put the phone face down on the couch next to me. Hitting it off with the girls has made my first day on a new continent surprisingly easy emotionally. I’d

expected to feel more lost and adrift. But while I miss my mom, the dominating emotion I feel is excitement.

“What about boys?” Thayer asks. “Are there any cute guys?”

“Forgot about Carter already?” I say sarcastically.

“Who’s Carter?” asks Nera

“My boyfriend. And I’m asking for you B, not me. Although if you have a whirlwind romance with a European hottie, I will secretly hate you.”

“Thayer thinks my vagina might seal up because I’ve never had a boyfriend before.” I say to the girls, rolling my eyes.

It’s not like I haven’t done anything before. I’ve made out with a few guys and let a couple feel me up, but I’ve never wanted to take it further with any of them. Whether it be emotionally or sexually.

“I haven’t either.” Adds Sixtine.

Nera snorts. “That’s only because Phoenix has made it clear that anyone who comes near you will be pissing blood by the end of the night.”

“Who’s Phoenix?”

“Oh, just her arch enemy.” Nera replies flippantly.

“He’s not my arch enemy. We used to be best friends.” A shadow passes across Six’s face. “He hates me because he thinks I betrayed him. It’s a long story.”

“Got it, well we’ll stay far away from him then.”

“Stay away from his friends, too. The three of them have known each other their whole lives and they run RCA. You don’t want to get on their bad side. In fact I’d say that your best bet is staying far away from them altogether. You don’t want them to notice you, believe me.”

“Who are the other two?”

“Rhys Mackley and Rogue Royal.”

“Rogue Royal? That’s his name?” I ask, interjecting. “He sounds like a superhero.”

“More like a supervillain.” Six answers, correcting me.

“Rhys is the joker of the group. He may seem like the most harmless of the three, but I wouldn’t let the easy smile fool you. There’s a darkness there that he’s got tightly controlled, but it’s bound to come out one day. And Rogue, well...”

“Let’s just say Rogue makes Phoenix look well adjusted compared to him. He’s completely unhinged. His mother abandoned him and his dad when he was nine, and his father parents exclusively via direct deposits into Rogue’s checking account. I’m not sure how often he’s even in town.”

“Stay out of his way. His anger issues have anger issues. Whatever you do, don’t make an enemy of him. Not only will he make your life hell if you do, he’ll laugh in your face while he does it.”

“Wait, Rogue Royal. As in the Royal in Royal Crown Academy?” I ask.

“Yup. His family started the school five centuries ago. His great-great-great grandkids’ names are already on the list to come to RCA.”

“He sounds like he could ruin your life if he wanted to.”

Six leans towards me. “He could ruin it with the snap of his fingers. That is an enemy you do not want to make.”

3.

Bellamy

I wake up the next morning and amble bleary-eyed into the kitchen. We'd continued chatting well into the night, eventually swapping the beers for champagne.

My body craves carbs and Alka-Seltzer, not necessarily in that order.

I throw a bagel in the toaster and am taking the eggs and bacon out of the fridge when Thayer walks through the front door, fresh from a run.

"You make it really hard to be your friend when you go on these 6am runs you know."

"Baby B, you can thank those 6am runs for getting me to Switzerland." She says, blowing me a kiss as she walks to the bathroom. Stopping at the door, she turns back towards me.

"I think we're going to be happy here."

"Agreed. Breakfast is coming right up. Are you still pretending to be vegan or can I put cheese in the omelet?"

My laughter follows her as she gives me the finger and closes the bathroom door. Moments later my phone dings on the counter.

Thayer: Just put the damn cheese in.

Twenty minutes later, we're eating breakfast when Nera and Sixtine join us.

"There are eggs and bacon in the pan on the stove if you guys want some."

“Fresh breakfast? You spoil us.” Nera says, serving a heaping helping of eggs onto her plate.

“Yeah, I could get used to this.” Six adds as she sits next to me. “After breakfast, we can take you to the main building to get your schedule if you want.”

“That’d be great. Is that the building where our classes will be?”

“Most of them, yeah. Except for any science courses, those are in the building known as ‘the lab’. I think I pointed it out to you yesterday.”

“Oh yeah, I remember it.”

“The real question now ladies is,” Nera adds with a dramatic pause, “Should we walk or take a golf cart.”

“Dibs on driving the golf cart!” Thayer exclaims.

“Sounds like golf cart it is.”

“Hope it comes with seatbelts.” I deadpan.

Nera sends me a quizzical look. “What do you mean?”

“Nothing, please just ignore her. She sometimes rambles unintelligibly before she has her morning carbs, you’ll have to forgive her.” Thayer says with a sweet smile in my direction.

An hour later, we exit the main building with our schedules in hand. We made it there safely, despite Thayer’s best attempts at introducing the cart to the ditch on the side of the street.

“I really don’t think it’s my fault. I mean, what kind of school has such tight corners on their campus roads? It’s like they’re asking for a *Tokyo Drift* repeat.”

“Okay Vin Diesel, that doesn’t mean you have to crank the wheel all the way to the right when you’re turning. I’m

personally trying to avoid a Paul Walker repeat.”

“Dark joke, but I respect it.”

The four of us take the next ten minutes to compare our schedules against each other’s. I’m relieved to see that I’ll have a couple classes with Thayer and Nera before their sports-focused afternoons, and the majority of my remaining classes with Six.

“Now it’s time for an RCA tradition.” Nera says as we walk back to the miraculously intact golf cart. “The day you pick up your schedule, it’s customary to get a Malteser milkshake at *Bella’s*. You’ll see, they’re delicious.”

“Who’s Bella?”

Sixtine laughs. “*Bella’s* is one of the two restaurants on campus. It’s run by an American couple who moved to Switzerland when they retired. Bored out of their minds two years later, they opened *Bella’s*. The Malteser milkshake is their specialty.”

“That sounds so good, I’m down.”

“And since schedules have been posted for almost two weeks, there should only be a few other last minute arrivals there so no crazy wait time.” Six adds.

We get back in the golf cart, Thayer occupying the much safer left back seat position, and head to *Bella’s*. A warm feeling fills me when I walk in. It’s a traditional American diner with red leather seats, booths against the windows and a bar facing the open plan kitchen. A vintage jukebox stands to the right of a Pac Man machine. The staff are dressed in classic red and white uniforms and are buzzing around the space tending to customers.

“This place is so cool.” I say, still taking it all in.

“I thought you’d like it.” Sixtine replies as she walks to the counter. “Hey, Bella!”

Bella, who I assume is the eponymous owner of the diner, turns at the sound of her name and gives Six a warm smile. “Hey, hon.”

Her accent is thick and soothing like honey. I'd guess that she's from one of the Carolinas. She's in her early 70s, with dark hair streaked with gray and a sparkle in her eye that makes her look younger.

"This is Bellamy and Thayer." I give her a small wave. "They just arrived from Chicago yesterday."

"Well, welcome, girls! Are you here for your Maltesers shake?"

"You know it. Can we get them to go?" She turns towards me. "I was thinking we could go drink them by the pond?"

"That sounds great."

"You bet. I'll put extra whipped cream on top as a little welcome treat." She says with a wink before disappearing into the kitchen.

She reappears ten minutes later carrying two tall to go cups topped with about five inches of whipped cream and chocolate.

"Wow, thank you. These look so good." And I'm not lying. These milkshakes look like they could single handedly bring about world peace if put on the table during diplomatic talks.

As Sixtine pays, I bring the first two to Nera and Thayer who've been chatting outside, taking advantage of the gorgeous day.

"Holy shit." Thayer says, taking the cup I hand to her. "She wasn't exaggerating about the welcome whipped cream."

"Personally, it's the best welcome I've ever had. Sorry Nera, I already know without having tasted it that it's going to dethrone beer and pizza night."

"I knew I should have pulled out the champagne and caviar combo."

I laugh. "Hold on, I'm going to get the other two."

Back inside, I find Six putting her wallet back in her purse as she grabs one of the two cups. "Ready?"

"Sure am."

I grab the other cup and lead the way out, going first through the door.

And that's when tragedy strikes.

I see it unfold as if in slo mo, incapable of doing anything to stop it.

The front door's closing mechanism is either broken or missing the device that slows down the speed at which the door closes, something I'd noticed when I'd narrowly missed having the door slam into me as I exited the restaurant the first time.

I go through the door first, holding it open for Sixtine who puts her hand out to keep it open as she passes. At the same time, a trio of men walk up to the door and effectively block my path. I slow down to avoid bumping into the middle one, only for Six to bump into me as I abruptly stop. I manage to keep my balance until the door Six had let go of moments earlier slams into her, causing her to trip into me and me to fall forward a couple steps.

I watch in horror as my cup, filled to the brim with the famous Malteser shake and topped with the world's most generous helping of whipped cream goes crashing against the hard body now standing in front of me.

The cup is still in my hand somehow but the entirety of the drink has landed on his shirt, dripping down his chest in rivulets of chocolate and cream.

"Oh, my god." I say, horrified.

For a moment, I say nothing as I take in the carnage before me. And I'm not the only one.

The man hasn't reacted in the slightest.

He stands as if frozen in time, his body in the exact same position he was in when the milkshake hit him — both hands fisted in his pockets, one of his legs still partially bent from being stopped mid-step.

His face is tilted downwards, taking in the mess on his shirt and blocking his features from my view. All I can focus

on is his head of dark brown hair; it's thick and shiny and I immediately want to run my fingers through it and see if it's as soft as it looks.

What the fuck.

He still hasn't moved, and it's unnatural the stillness in him. It's inexplicable, but there should be more movement to him. His muscles should be twitching, his balance should be starting to give, his pulse should be thumping in his veins, his chest should be moving up and down in a steady beat.

Or a furious one like mine is now.

In, out. In, out.

Hell, the slight breeze in the air should be caressing his hair and moving through his locks.

But those things aren't discernible at all, his stillness making him look almost statue-like. It's like even the elements know to stay far away.

His lack of reaction allows me to quickly inspect the parts of him I can see.

His shoulders are tense beneath a t-shirt pulled tight around his chest due to the rigidity in his upper body. The short sleeves of his shirt allow me to see the sinewy muscles of his arms, almost completely covered in gorgeous patchwork tattoos. I want to trace my fingers across his arms, discovering them one by one as he explains the stories behind them. From where I stand, I can make out a thick Japanese-style dragon wrapped around the top half of his right arm, above a collection of smaller tattoos. I see roses, figures of Greek mythology, a dagger, the words 'memento mori', a skull. His left arm is less tattooed, revealing some golden skin and defined veins leading into his clenched fists.

His body speaks of hours spent in the gym, although he's not overly bulky. And he's tall. Even with his head bent, he towers over me.

"I'm so sorry."

The sound of my voice seems to break the trance he's in, his stillness shattering like glass at our feet. His head lifts slowly and I get my first look at his face.

He's beautiful.

The golden skin of his arms continues into his chiseled face, unblemished except for a healing cut on his nose which only adds to the dangerous vibes exuding from him. If I were to guess, I'd say he's of Middle Eastern descent.

His bottom lip is slightly larger than his top one and he has the thickest, longest eyelashes I've ever seen. They sit beneath a set of thick eyebrows and frame a pair of deep green eyes.

My breath hitches as our gazes clash because the look in his eyes is the opposite of the stillness in his body from before.

They're shooting pure venom in my direction.

A look of such downright hostility the force of his gaze almost knocks me backwards.

He looks furious.

"Shut the fuck up." He says, grabbing the cup in my hand and hurling it against the wall behind me.

4.

Rogue

The cup hits the wall with a bang, and she reacts with a satisfying flinch.

I don't know who she is.

Not that I give a fuck about any of the other students, but I know who goes to RCA. I have to approve every one of them before they can formally be accepted.

And I know for a fact I didn't approve her.

"Excuse me?" She asks, a tentative frown creasing her face.

American.

My face falls and my eyes darken at her accent. The rage I'd been working to keep tightly controlled explodes out of me.

"Are you stupid in addition to being clumsy as fuck" I ask, savagely. "I told you to shut up while I figure out what to do with you."

This time her reaction is anything but tentative.

Anger flashes in her eyes as she crosses her arms against her chest. "And who the fuck are you to talk to me that way?" She demands furiously.

My hand snaps out and grabs her neck, my fingers wrapping around her throat in a firm grip.

Whoever this girl is, I'm about to teach her a lesson on how to respect her superiors.

She goes still in my hold as her eyes open in fear. Her hands come up to grab mine and try to pry my fingers off her.

Her hands push and pull, struggling to weaken my grip. Her fear is a palpable thing in the air, and it's fucking intoxicating.

"Rogue." Sixtine says hesitantly, trepidation filling her voice as she approaches me like someone would approach a dangerous animal.

Recognition flashes quickly through the girl's eyes and I smirk internally.

She's heard about me.

The thought sends a bolt of lust straight to my dick.

I want her to know exactly who I am and what I'm capable of before I destroy her.

It'll make victory taste that much sweeter.

"Give her a break, it's her first day here."

To my left, Phoenix shifts from his position as uninterested onlooker and steps up to Sixtine.

"Stay out of this Six. I'd conveniently forgotten you exist over the summer." He takes her chin in his hand, but she whips her head out of his grasp and doesn't say a word. "Don't remind me that you do." He warns.

"You're American?" I question the girl in my grip. She's stopped trying to pry my fingers off her neck and instead stands looking at me with a stare I can't decipher.

"*We're* American, actually." Two other girls have walked up to us. It's Nera's silver haired companion who speaks. "What's going on here? Let go of my best friend, you psycho."

Rhys extends a hand onto her shoulder, stopping her mid-step with an easy grin.

"Nothing you need to worry about, love." He says, speaking with an alluring English accent.

She puts her finger in her mouth and fake gags at him.

"Don't call me that. Also I know twelve different ways to castrate a man. If you don't want me to introduce you to my

favorite, the Chicago Special, I'd suggest you let me go.

As they continue arguing, I turn my gaze back to the girl in my grip and take a moment to really look at her.

Her wavy black hair frames an oval face with big hazel eyes and puffy blood red lips. I run my thumb over them to see if the color is real or a lie.

“What are you doing?”

Her hands have wrapped around my wrist, but they're no longer fighting me.

She's tiny compared to me. Her head barely reaching my shoulder in this position, forcing her to tilt her head backwards.

My sheer size and power dwarf her.

I imagine her on her knees before me, those same small hands wrapped around my dick. That image coupled with her sudden submission have me hard as a rock.

I look down at my thumb.

Clean.

I get the sudden urge to bite her lips.

The urge to destroy her and consume her entire world.

She swallows and I feel her throat work against my hand. I tighten my grip a beat, smiling cruelly when she chokes and sputters.

She needs to know who's in control here. Who's going to ruin her tidy little life.

“You made a mistake making an enemy out of me.” I promise, sadistically.

“Rogue, it was an accident. It's just a milkshake.”

I silence Nera with a glare.

They're awfully brave defending this girl they can only have known less than a week.

Turning back to her, I ask. “Who the fuck are you?:

“I’m new. I’m one of the two scholarship students. Now, let me go before I scream.”

“Go ahead, scream for help.” I taunt darkly as I bring my mouth to her ear, my hot breath tickling the side of her face. “No one here will save you from me.”

Internally, I’m processing what she just said.

She’s the scholarship student.

Which means my father went around me for the approvals. He’s Chairman of the Board and he’s the only person who has final authority above me on the selected students.

My blood boils when I realize what he’s done.

And for *her*.

My vision blackens as it focuses on her.

“What do you want?” She asks, and I can’t help but notice that her voice doesn’t tremble. She’s terrified, but she’s holding it together.

She may not be as easy to break as I originally thought. I smile darkly, my flatlined black heart beating once at the prospect of the only thing I enjoy.

A challenge.

I release her with a shove and she stumbles back a couple steps.

My jaw is tight and my muscles corded as I pull my shirt off by the back of the neck and toss it at her. She catches it with a glare in my direction.

“I want that dry cleaned and returned to me by Monday.”

She throws it back at me.

“Do it yourself.”

I laugh humorlessly, balling the shirt up as I step towards her. She holds her stance until she physically can’t any longer, stumbling back against the wall, trapped.

My arm comes up to rest above her head as I bring mine down an inch from her face.

“As you wish.”

I drop the balled up shirt at her feet and take a step back from her. “Don’t say you didn’t ask for it.”

With those parting words, I head into *Bella’s*, Rhys and Phoenix on my heels.

I don’t look back to watch her go.

“You want to tell us what that was about?” Phoenix asks.

“She ruined my shirt.”

“You could buy that entire store tomorrow.” Rhys chimes in. “Actually, it’s not that I don’t enjoy staring at your shirtless chest while I’m about to have a meal, but we can go now if you need, mate.” He says, throwing a hand in my direction as I drop into one of the booths, shirtless.

“You’ve fucked a girl while I was in the room eating and you’re going to play the prude act?”

“Yes, but that was different.”

“How?”

“I’m the one eating now.” He says with a grin, and I lob a bread roll at his head.

“She didn’t listen.”

Anger slams back into me as I recall the way she’d tossed the shirt she’d dirtied up back at me.

Like she wouldn’t do what I fucking said.

I was going to neuter that little rebellious streak in front of the whole school, and I’d take sick pleasure in doing so.

“God forbid someone doesn’t.”

Phoenix watches our exchange silently. That fucker’ll probably seething over his run in with Sixtine for the next day.

“She’s fucking American.”

Rhys’ mouth twitches and he nods.

He knows how I feel about anything related to America. It’s where my mother ran off to when she abandoned her nine

year old son. It's where my dad spends ninety eight percent of his time. And he's a real piece of shit so I know that place is rotten to the fucking core.

I'd needed to grab her throat when I heard her accent. To feel her heartbeat pulsing madly against my hand, knowing that I could put a stop to it at any moment.

I stand up abruptly, startling Rhys and Phoenix.

"I'm going to head home. Robert and I need to have a little chat about how two Americans found themselves on Royal property."

I leave *Bella's* without a goodbye and drive the ten minute journey back to my home.

Officially, my father is based out of Switzerland for tax purposes, so he keeps a mansion in the country. But in reality, he lives in New York City and comes back two to three times a year for school business.

In his absence, I live there with Rhys and Phoenix. They'd had a suite in the pen our first year of school but had handed up crashing at the house more nights than not. Starting second year, they'd moved in.

My sperm donor hadn't liked coming back and finding two other people living in his home.

I'd enjoyed seeing the rage twist his face when he understood.

I run up the grand princess staircase that greets me as I enter the foyer, and turn towards my father's office at the end of the left corridor on the first floor.

The house is massive, sprawling over seven thousand feet. Signs of wealth are displayed carelessly, gaudily throughout the house.

"Hello, Robert."

My father lifts his head from the papers in his hand and looks at me leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed.

He brings his gaze back down to his document. “I told you not to call me back.”

I suppose my father has an attractive shell. He wears a power suit with an ease most people wish they had in their skin, his shoes always perfectly shined and his hair impeccably combed. Gray shades the hair at his temples, adding an erudite air to his overall look.

“You said not to call you that in public. And, well would you look at that. We’re alone.”

His eyes come back up to meet mine. “I don’t have time for whatever this is.” He nods towards the door, dismissing me.

Anger bubbles up my throat and demands to be let out. I cross the room in two steps and slam my open palms down on his desk.

“Too bad, you’re going to listen to me today.” I sneer at him. “Imagine my surprise when I stumbled across two Americans on campus today. It’s weird, I don’t remember ever approving either of their applications.” I say, playing up my fake confusion. “Why did you go around me for approvals? What game are you playing?”

He doesn’t immediately reply or react to my palms slamming on his desk, just watching me unflinchingly.

He gets up and comes around the desk to stand in front of me. “You think I give a shit what you want?”

I open my mouth to give a sharp reply and his fist slams into my jaw before I even see it coming.

My head snaps to the side, but I remain standing.

There’s ringing in my ears.

And pain spreading through my cheek.

But I won’t give him the pleasure of reacting.

I turn my face back towards him, but this time when his fist hits my jaw for the second time the force is enough to send me careening to the floor.

The heavy ring on his right hand slashes my cheek.

The cut on my nose from the last time he hit me, on the day he'd landed in Switzerland last week after being away for six months had just begun to heal.

“You watch your mouth when you fucking speak to me.” He spits out at me, the anger transforming his face into a mottled red mess.

He pulls his leg back and kicks me in the stomach. The blow makes me double over in pain, and sends the breath whooshing out of my body. I muffle it as best I can so he can't hear it.

“Have you had enough? Say something.” He demands.

Don't fight back. Don't give him the satisfaction.

I say it over and over to myself in my head, like a chant.

I never fight back. He'd like it too much if I did. The only power I have in this moment is to give him no reaction.

So I retreat further inside myself, embracing the cold detachment and using it as a shield. I look him in the eye unflinchingly, refusing to back down.

If the twitch in his eye is anything to go by, my act of rebellion is only serving to fuel his viciousness.

He crouches down next to where I'm lying on the floor. “What I decide to do with this school has absolutely nothing to do with you. Those girls both had stellar school records and will help reinforce RCA's sports and academic standings.”

I still refuse to speak, looking at him with a goading smile on my face.

He throws me a lethal look before standing up. His foot shoots out and kicks me in the stomach a second time.

He buttons his suit jacket and smooths out his hair.

He wouldn't want his colleagues in New York to know he just finished beating his son. That wouldn't be good for the family image.

“I’ll be home more frequently now to oversee the board as we review applicants for the next batch of scholarship students. Looks like we’ll be seeing a lot more of each other, *son.*”

He adds the last word with a sneer.

With that, he spits at my feet and walks out of the room without a backward glance.

I extend a hand to grab the edge of the desk, using it as leverage to haul myself carefully to a standing position, wincing as I put a hand on my stomach to soothe my bruised abdomen.

I feel like I’m spinning out of control, my rage threatening to take me over completely. I grab the open decanter and hurl it against the wall.

It shatters on impact, the brown liquid dripping down the wall and adjacent bookshelves.

It does nothing to calm me down, the frenetic energy in my body still looking for an outlet. It started with her, and only grew stronger as the confrontation with my father unfolded.

Her.

He thinks she’s so fucking special.

The altercation with my father does nothing to overshadow my earlier exchange with her, instead fueling an imperative need to destroy her.

I’m going to make her regret that she ever left her quaint little life.

I’m going to make her regret that she ever crossed me.

5.

Bellamy

“On a scale of 1-10, tell me honestly, Six. How bad was that?” I ask her.

The moment he steps into *Bella's*, the four of us hightail it back to the golf cart and drive off, our plan to sit and enjoy milkshakes by the pond forgotten.

I'm sitting in the passenger seat, turned towards Six as she drives us towards the pen.

“It's not great.” She says with a grimace in my direction. “Hopefully in a day or two someone else will have caught his attention and he'll have forgotten about you.”

There's not much hope in her voice.

“How likely do we think it is that someone will attempt to stab him by Monday?” Nera asks hopefully.

“Based on that display, I'm surprised people aren't lining up to do the honors.” I reply, dryly.

“No, but seriously what was that?” Thayer asks, and I hear the slight tremble in her voice. “Are you alright Bellamy?” Her hand comes towards the front of the golf cart and she squeezes my shoulder reassuringly as I nod. “Why aren't you freaking out more?”

I'm honestly not sure.

The initial moment of my gaze meeting his chilling, soulless one had rooted me to the spot. Where the rest of him was cold as ice, his gaze burned with an inferno that promised retaliation for spilling the milkshake on him.

He'd told me to shut the fuck up and immediately sent my back up.

And then he'd wrapped his large hand around my throat, and fear had sent anger careening out of my body.

Fear and something else.

Something that felt oddly like lust at the way his dominant grip held me.

The parts of me under his hold had tingled, sending an awareness to my brain of a part of my body I hadn't even known was an erogenous zone.

I was more horrified at the way my body had reacted to the threatening grip than I was at the whole situation.

"We have to tell someone about this. Should we go to the principal?"

"No!" I cry out. "No, we can't. He runs this school. His family probably had a hand in financially backing the scholarship, I can't risk putting it at risk."

"We can't just do nothing."

"That's exactly what we're going to do. I'm going to lie low and hopefully by Monday he'll have forgotten all about this."

"Yeah, that sounds like a great plan." Six adds with faked enthusiasm. I know what she's really thinking.

I shouldn't have provoked him.

But if he thought I was going to bow down to him because of one mistake, he had another thing coming. I felt bad about ruining his shirt, but I wasn't going to do his laundry.

An idea emerges.

"Do you think I can buy him another shirt? I can get things delivered here, right?"

Nera whips her phone out and starts typing away. "I'll find it, just give me a couple of minutes."

"It's probably going to be really expensive, Bellamy." Six warns.

"It's \$300." Nera says, looking up from her phone.

“Three hundred dollars?” I ask, indignant. “For a t-shirt? Was it hand stitched with gold thread?”

“It’s Off-White.” She replies with a shrug.

My monthly scholarship stipend is five hundred dollars, so that’s going to be tight. But I’m used to shopping on a budget and if it’s going to resolve an unnecessary conflict, I’ll make it work.

“Just buy it.”

“I can grocery shop for the both of us, we’ll make the stipend work.” Thayer says, understanding what the decision I’m making means and reading my mind, as always.

“Yeah, obviously what’s mine is yours. That goes without saying.” Six adds.

“Retweet. Also, the t-shirt is ordered.” Nera says, thrusting the phone in my direction to show me the anticipated delivery date.

It should be here on Saturday, which means I’ll be able to give it to him on Monday when classes start. Perfect.

I put the confrontation from earlier behind me and enjoy the rest of the day and the weekend with the girls.

At least, I try to.

But thoughts of empty green eyes flit through my mind every so often.

I startle awake.

Bleary-eyed, I reach for my phone and check the time. Eight fifteen am.

Monday.

Shit.

I have class at nine am. Why did no one wake me?

I put on a pair of jeans and a light sweater, throw my things in a bag and stumble into the living room.

I grab the t-shirt, still in its packaging, and tuck it under my arm.

“Thayer? Are you here?” I ask, opening the door.

She’s still in bed and, if her face is anything to go by, I’ve just woken her up. “Get up! We’re going to be late for class.”

That’s enough to send her hurtling out of bed and towards the bathroom. “No, no, no. We can’t be. Why didn’t the girls wake us up?”

“Nera had practice this morning and Six had Spanish.”

I’d remembered they’d reminded us on Sunday when we’d gone to brunch at a small restaurant in a nearby town.

A very boozy brunch, and combined with the jet lag, had clearly wiped us both out.

“Oh, right. Okay, give me five minutes and I’ll be ready.”

We’re on campus ten minutes later, Thayer’s *Tokyo Drift* style of driving having come in handy for once.

We’ve made good time and have about twenty minutes before classes start.

As we’re walking across the grounds towards the main building, I take in the students milling about the campus. They’re headed in different directions, all walking hurriedly towards their classes.

Only one small group is still stationary. There’s about ten of them, all sitting on a section of the lawn under a large oak tree.

Their leisurely demeanor is at odds with the activity around them. They’ll be late for class and they don’t care.

It's a show of power.

A taunt that they control the school, students and teachers, and can do whatever they want.

Among the crowd, I notice Rogue.

My heart skips a beat at the thought of approaching him.

He's deceptively relaxed.

A position that seems harmless to the general onlooker but that I know is more dangerous than it seems, even after just one meeting.

He's poised to strike if needed.

He sits like a king lording over his court. A few girls mill around him, trying desperately to get his attention. But his eyes are closed and his head is leaned back casually against the trunk of the tree as a cigarette dangles loosely from his lips.

He inhales and I watch as the butt of the cigarette turns red. I watch how his lips pull around the cigarettes, the movement sensual without even trying to be.

It's while looking at his lips that I notice the bruises running along his jaw and up his cheek to his eye socket. They're purple and blue and they look like they hurt.

He took a beating.

Deserved, I'm sure.

But I can't help but wonder who would dare hit him. I felt the tightly coiled muscles of his forearms and the strong grip of his fingers.

He wouldn't have been easy to beat.

"Thayer, look at Rogue."

"Where?"

"To my right."

"Jesus, what happened to his face?" She asks, before pausing. "Actually, who cares. I hope it hurts."

“It looks like it does.”

“He looks like he gets into underground fights. I think that’s another thing rich people do.”

“Whatever happened, I hope he got the anger out of his system. I’m going to give him this.” I say, raising the hand holding the package as I do.

“Good luck. I’m headed to Physics.”

She waves as she walks off and I turn back towards where Rogue is sitting. I don’t know why I’m nervous. He’s just going to thank me and then we’ll put it behind us.

Easy.

Unease tickles the back of my neck as I head in his direction. Halfway to him, his eyes snap open and he notices me. His awareness of me in that moment is very much like a predator smelling its unsuspecting prey approaching in the wild.

His head lifts off the tree and his gaze tracks slowly down my body, inspecting me like a horse for sale on the market.

He takes in my legs. The curve of my hips leaning into the dip of my waist. My small breasts.

His eyes flare as they look at my neck, and I know he’s remembering his hand wrapped around it like a necklace.

When his eyes come back up to meet mine, they’re ice cold and cutting, like sharp blades on skin. The sadism in them makes me falter, but I don’t stop.

I didn’t come here to deal with this petty shit and I refuse to let it drag out any longer than it has to.

When I’m ten feet away from him, I throw the bag so it lands next to him.

“Look, I think we got off on the wrong foot.” I say with as sweet a smile as I can muster. “I really am sorry about your shirt. There’s a replacement in that bag for you.”

He doesn’t say anything, holding my gaze for a few more beats before flicking his gaze to a girl next to him. She rushes

to her knees to open it and hand it to him before scrambling away.

I resist the urge to roll my eyes. Barely.

His right hand comes up to finger the cigarette in his mouth as he takes a drag. Smoke plumes fall aimlessly from his mouth and I can't help but stare at his lips.

Somehow, the movement feels sexual.

His lips curl up into a smirk.

When I meet his gaze again, I can tell he caught me looking at them.

That's why he smirked.

Bastard.

"You think this is about a shirt?"

Before I can even process the question, he grinds his still lit cigarette into the middle of the shirt, burning a hole through it.

I falter back a step. "What the hell are you doing?" I cry out, stunned. He doesn't answer, just taps another cigarette out of the pack and places it between his lips.

"There's something very wrong with you. You have no idea what I had to do to get that shirt."

"That's exactly why you don't belong here, asking for handouts like a beggar. Go back to whatever shithole you came from."

Insinuating I got here any other way but through hard work sends heat flaming through my body. It's the height of irony for a nepotism baby to question my success.

"Unlike you, I didn't get any handouts, asshole. I put in the work to get to where I am."

His eye twitches and I know I'm not going to like what comes out of his mouth next. "Only a slut would refer to sucking dick for a scholarship as 'work'." He says as a cruel smirk comes to curve his lips.

Everyone around us bursts into laughter and humiliation washes over me.

It's like that dream you have of being in a room and everyone points at you and laughs but you don't know why they're laughing.

Except in this case, I know why they're laughing and it's not true.

“That's-that's a lie.”

The blood rushing in my ears and the heartbeat thumping in my throat make the words come out with a stutter.

“Can I get a blowie if I put in a good word with Professor Fletcher. Or does that get me only as far as a hand job?” A man with golden hair jeers at me.

“Why are you doing this?” I ask Rogue.

I don't let my voice waver this time.

“I told you. You don't belong here.”

I walk away wordlessly, not understanding how I've somehow made it worse. I take measured steps so I don't look like I'm fleeing, but all I want to do is run away.

6.

Rogue

She turns and walks away, giving me a look at her ass.

I resist the urge to groan.

Fuck, her ass is glorious. Even her jeans can't stop the bounce as her angry steps take her towards the main building.

Her whole body is a fucking weapon. Curves in the right places and breasts that I know would fit perfectly in my hands.

She flushes when she's angry.

I wonder if she'd flush if I licked her nipples, then blew on them.

Or if I bit them harshly.

A growl vibrates in my chest at the thought.

"Those thick lips wrapped around my cock would look so hot."

I turn a steely look towards Devlin. He's the one who made the comment about a handjob.

He flinches, not understanding why I'm not applauding him for piling on. He's a follower like the rest of them, someone I only tolerate because it'd be more work to get rid of him.

Like the others, he knows his place and awaits my orders.

"I want her gone. Tell everyone."

Phoenix and I walk into our English Lit class with five minutes to spare.

She's sitting in a two seater in the second row. Her head is down and she's focused on organizing her desk. Book to the left, opened to the correct page. Notebook to the right. Pens at the top.

Excellent.

I usually sit in the back row, all the way to the side. But the urge to mess with her, to ruin her is a physical one.

It crawls under my skin and begs to be let out.

I'm like an addict needing a quick fix, but my drug of choice is seeing the pulse jump in her throat when she's afraid.

Phoenix sees my unflinching stare. "What are you going to do?"

"Play with my toy." I say with an ugly smile.

I walk up to her and stop next to her seat.

She doesn't notice me, her back turned as she digs through her backpack. Her hair is swept up in a ponytail that exposes the back of her neck to me.

You don't turn your back when the enemy is nearby. Unlucky for her, she doesn't seem to realize I'm the worst kind of villain there is.

Her delicate neck is laid bare before me. She's so fragile.

So vulnerable.

I could snap it without much effort if I wanted to.

I look down at the desk and something about the neatness sets me off. The order in her life is in direct contrast to the chaos in mine, and I want to defile it.

With a flick of my wrist, I send the contents of her desk flying to the ground. A gasp leaves her lips as she turns to look at me, setting the bottle in her hand down.

"Seats taken."

“By who?”

“By me.” I counter. “Get up.”

She looks at me for a beat, as if deciding whether to obey or not. Calculating whether this is a battle she can win in a war she’s destined to lose.

Her hesitation is an act of rebellion in itself.

I don’t give out first chances, let alone second ones.

My hand shoots out and purposefully knocks the bottle, spilling it in her lap.

She doesn’t scream or jump out of her seat.

She doesn’t pick up the bottle, stopping the still spilling water.

She just gasps and looks down.

She stays seated.

Slowly, she brings her gaze back up to mine.

“Have you had enough now?”

Lifting my hand, I thread my fingers through her ponytail, playing with the strands of her silky hair as I touch her for the second time.

A tiny shiver courses through her, moving from the top of her head through to the rest of her body.

My cock hardens at the sight.

She’s so reactive.

Her words fight my every attack, while her body submits to my every touch.

The animal inside me wants to exploit it.

To dig into her skin and tear into her soul and find out what makes her tick.

But her words echo the ones my father said in his study, and they have the effect of an ice cold shower on me.

They jar me back to reality.

She shouldn't be here.

I bend at the waist, bringing my face inches from hers as I smile poisonously.

“Not even close, sweetheart. You'll be on your knees, begging before I'm done with you.”

Twisting her hair, I wrap it around my hand and jerk her out of her seat. She gets up with a small cry, half in surprise, half in pain at the sharp tug.

Standing this close to me, I can smell her and it's intoxicating.

A mix of amber and cloves, like the spices you smell around Christmastime. She smells like warmth and home.

Not that I know anything about either of these things.

With her back against my front and her head backwards against my shoulder, I trace my nose from the curve of her neck up through her hair.

I take a deep inhale of her scent, and it's dizzying.

I continue dragging my nose through her hair until I reach her ear.

Bringing my mouth closer so my hot breaths hit her skin, I snarl, “I said, get up.”

I step back and drop into my seat without another word.

“I assume you're Miss Ward.” Fletcher says, walking in at the exact same moment. “Clean up your mess and have a seat. Disrupting my class isn't the best first impression to make, Bellamy.”

Bellamy.

You should know the name of your opponent before you destroy them.

She looks down at me with venom in her eyes and embarrassment coloring her cheeks as she collects her things.

Looking around for a new seat, she walks over to a chair a row in front of mine to the left before dropping into it

miserably. I make note of Jeremy, a second-string striker on the football team, giving her a quick smile.

“Find out about her.” I toss at Phoenix.

7.

Bellamy

I make it through the rest of the morning relatively unscathed.

I say ‘relatively’ because students I’ve never met before jeer and taunt me as I walk through the halls to my next classes.

Slut.

Whore.

Nympho.

The insults aren’t very imaginative, but they don’t need to be to be effective. The sight of the wet patch on my pants, courtesy of Rogue, leads to the more creative ‘wet crotch slut’ nickname.

I clutch the strap of my backpack for support and continue about my day, head held high. I refuse to let them see how it affects me.

But inside, I’m in turmoil.

The bullying, I can live with.

Maybe.

But Professor Fletcher calling me out for the bad first impression I made was a blow. I’ve never been admonished by a teacher in that way, and I can’t start letting that happen now when my scholarship depends on my continued success.

It’s all because of that psycho, Rogue.

How dare he interfere in my school life? How *dare* he put it in jeopardy?

His wrath feels unwarranted, just like the intensity of the punishment he’s doling out through his cronies.

It can't all be over a milkshake and a ruined t-shirt.

As pissed as I am with him, I'm equally annoyed with myself and my body for reacting to his touch. His mouth spews sadistic intent that his hands carry out.

And my body yields.

I'd reacted to his ponytail grab like I would to a gentle caress, not an act of aggression.

It must be daddy issues-related, obviously. There's no other reason. But I know I'm not the only one affected.

When I'd leaned against his chest, captive in his hold, his eyes burned with a deep seated rage.

But his heartbeat had been racing.

And I hadn't missed the way he'd smelled my hair.

His body revealed the truth his mouth wouldn't.

I intrigued him as much as he did me.

When I walk out of my last morning class with Thayer, Nera is waiting for us by the door.

"I thought I'd show you guys where the cafeteria is."

"Only food can turn this shitty day around." I say, sullenly.

She gives me a puzzled expression. "What happened?"

"You haven't heard? You might be the only one." I add. "For your information, you're standing next to the biggest slut at RCA." I exclaim, proudly.

Her mouth drops. "What are you talking about?"

I catch her up on the confrontation from this morning; the infamous cigarette burning of the t-shirt, Rogue's insults and the ensuing taunts from his followers.

Before she can say anything, Six skips over to us.

“How’s your first day going?” She asks, happily.

I open the door to the cafeteria, letting a female student walk out first.

“Slut.” She sneers at me without stopping.

Six does a double take, looking back at her in disbelief.

“Did you do something to Chloe? Why’d she just call you a slut.”

“Because she can’t think for herself.”

I catch her up as we get our food.

Nera used the word ‘cafeteria’ loosely. It’s more of a luxury food court. The room is massive, with individual counters for different cuisines spread out on the perimeter.

From what I can see from here, there’s a salad bar, Thai, Italian, Sushi, and French food.

My stomach growls delightedly at the sight.

“He’s terrible, I’m so sorry this is happening to you.”

“You and me both.”

I see her hesitate before speaking.

“What is it?”

“Just don’t provoke him. Do as he says and I’m sure he’ll get bored and move on in a couple of days.”

“And let him win? Absolutely not. I’d rather spend the whole year miserable and an outcast than bow down to him.” I realize how that sounds. “No offense.”

“None taken.” Her gaze trails off, deep in thought. She lifts a shoulder in a shrug. “Sometimes, doing nothing is the best thing.”

I know she’s referring to her situation with Phoenix, and I don’t want her to think I was making a dig at her.

“Totally. And your situation with Phoenix is different. He was your friend.” I set my tray down and take a seat. “I apologized and replaced his shirt, and he’s still acting like an

evil asshole. With the way people bow down to his every whim like he's the king around here, I'm not surprised he thinks he can get away with it where I'm concerned. But I won't let him."

"Preach." Thayer adds, pointing at me with a fry covered in ketchup. Her eyes grow wide as they look over my shoulder. "Oh shit, incoming."

"This seat's taken."

Déjà vu hits me, but I've learned my lesson since this morning. Unlike last time, I don't give him the time of day. I remain seated with my back turned to him.

If I expected him to get violent, I'm mistaken.

His hands come down featherlight on the table, one on either side of my body.

He bends, further trapping me between his body and the table.

He's so close, I can feel his hot breath on my neck. Against my will, goosebumps break out where his breath touches me.

The low hum of satisfaction that falls from his lips is proof that he notices.

He likes what he sees.

He's a predator playing with its prey before he eats it.

A lion playing with a lost gazelle before it rips its throat out.

But I'm no gazelle, no matter what he thinks.

The sudden fire in my veins makes me whip around to face him, ready to meet him blow for blow.

The rush of anger makes me forget his position. He's not standing upright, he's crouched low above my shoulder.

When I spin in my seat, I come face to face with him.

We're so close, our noses touch.

No, they don't. A hair's breadth separates them.

But the electrifying connection between us sparks to life, connecting us with an energy that feels physical.

It's fueled by rage and anger and resentment. I don't know what it means. I don't know if I want to kill him or fuck him.

Definitely the first.

My breath hitches. The sound explodes like a bomb between us. His eyes snap down to look at my lips.

When they slowly come back up to mine, the look in them is unmistakable.

Lust.

"See something you like?" I ask with more confidence than I feel.

All of the emotion seeps from his eyes, replaced by the cold emptiness I'd seen in them before. It's the mask he seems to wear at school. The mask he always has strapped on tight, that lends a distance and an untouchable nature to him.

As if nothing can really penetrate the walls he has built around him to touch the parts of him that are real.

"Yeah." The one word is erotic. Suggestive and hot, he speaks one word but says so many more. I pause, anticipation freezing the blood in my body and the breath in my lungs. His head is slightly tilted, his mouth almost touching mine. "My seat."

I try not to make the release of my breath too visible.

He'd notice it. He seems to notice everything about me.

"Don't you have hobbies? Friends? Anything else you can do to entertain yourself other than harassing me?"

He laughs darkly, a sick gleam in his eye. "You're not a hobby. You're a mission."

His hand grabs my plate of orgasmic looking spaghetti bolognese that I'd been looking forward to eating, and dumps it on my lap.

What the –

The contact is hot, but not burning.

Red sauce goes flying, splattering across my clothes and the table.

“Bellamy! Are you alright?” Thayer stands up on the other side of the table. She turns her irate stare towards Rogue. “Who didn’t love you enough when you were growing up to make you this way, sicko?”

I can physically see the poison fill his eyes.

His shoulders snap together, tension cording his every muscle. A hand claps down on his shoulder, and I see it for what it really is. An effort to contain the seismic force he’s about to unleash.

“I’ve got this one, Rogue.” Rhys says.

“*This one’s* got a name and you don’t have her, Mackley.” Thayer fires back.

He laughs at her use of his last name before giving her a sharp smile. “I could with barely an effort, love.”

“In your dreams.”

He gives her a devilish grin, and unlike his best friend it comes so easily to him. It’s charming and innocent but underneath there’s an animalistic edge to it. And it’s directed at Thayer.

I don’t trust him for a moment.

“You’re right. That’s exactly what my dreams have looked like since I met you.” He says seductively.

She crosses her arms over her chest, an unimpressed look on her face. If he expects a sweet smile and a couple come on lines to win her over, he’s in for a rude awakening.

Boyfriend aside, it’ll take a lot more to impress her. Her bullshit meter runs a country mile long.

“No thanks, that’s more of a nightmare scenario for me really.”

He laughs, a deep, pleasing sound that has an unwitting smile pulling at my lips. “I’m going to enjoy making you regret those words.”

But unlike Rogue, his words aren’t a threat.

They’re a dirty promise.

He speaks them with such confidence, it’s as if they’re fact. And I understand how he’s the captain of the soccer team. That kind of unquestionable confidence in his own abilities must make him a ferocious opponent and an exceptional captain.

Red tinges Thayer’s cheeks in response.

Interesting. She might not be as immune to his charms as I initially thought.

I store that information away for later and turn back towards the crime scene on my clothes. Rogue wants a reaction, that’s why he’s doing this. I’ve interacted with him for less than an hour total and I know he goads and pushes and enrages you until you react.

He gets off on the chaos he creates.

I pick a strand of spaghetti from my lap and put one end between my lips. Staring back at Rogue unflinchingly, I make a show of sensuously sucking it up until it disappears between my lips.

His eyes never leave my mouth as I do so.

The heat in them burns hotter than the sauce on my lap.

I can’t resist goading him back. I run my tongue the length of my upper lip and my finger traces the corner of my mouth as if looking for leftover sauce.

I close my mouth around my finger with a satisfied smack of my lips and groan low in my throat. “Mhmm. Tastes so good.”

“Are you trying to make an enemy of me?” He asks with a menacing growl.

“Aren’t you already?” I question back, flippantly. “I might as well have some fun.”

“This is nothing, sweetheart. You have no idea how painful I can make life for you.” He hisses in my face. He says it with such menace that I have to physically fight against the fear slithering in my veins.

Enough with the intimidation tactics.

I stand up, forcing him to stand to his full height. He towers over me in both size and strength. This close to him, I can make out every detail of his face. The deep green eyes that say everything and nothing all at once. The smattering of beauty marks on the left side of his face. There’s one right above his mouth and it adds to the sensuality of his lips.

For a moment, I imagine what it would feel like to be kissed by him. Would he be gentle, taking his time to explore?

Who am I kidding?

His kiss would be savage and out of control, like the rest of him. He’d take instead of asking, his tongue thrusting between my lips and plundering my mouth like he has every right to it.

We seem stuck in this moment, him looking down at me and me up at him. I can feel the stares of our friends, the stares of dozens of other students boring into my back.

They’re watching this tense exchange, expecting me to bow down before the king like they all do.

Getting on my tip toes, I bring my face closer to his.

His hand comes out to grip my upper arm. It’s a dominant move, a bruising hold meant to control how close I can get to him.

But it’s also possessive, his thumb rubbing tiny circles on my skin.

I don’t think he realizes he’s doing it.

I put my hand on his chest and feel the mad race of his heartbeat as I lean in to whisper against his ear.

“Do your worst.”

I try to shake out of his grasp, but he doesn't let me go. At least not instantly. He just stares, his eyes narrowed on me as he takes me in.

I rip my arm from his grasp, spin on my heel and walk away. Spaghetti falls from my clothing with every step I take.

“Bellamy, wait.” Sixtine says. “We're coming with.”

“Typical, Sixtine. Always the blind follower.”

She whips around to face Phoenix, the movement violent in its speed. “Unlike you, I don't turn my back on my friends.”

“You really want to go there?” He sneers at her.

“No, I think we've said all we have to say to each other.”

She hooks her arm in mine and we walk out with Nera and Thayer in tow, the latter having flicked her middle finger at Rhys on her way out.

I try to hold back but ultimately can't resist a look back as I exit. He's standing where I left him and he hasn't moved.

His gaze is fixed on my retreating form and I don't think he blinks. Not even when a manicured hand comes around his waist to rest on his stomach.

My heartbeat stutter steps as I see that hand rest on him with such casual ownership. My gaze slides to the left to look at the hand's owner. It's a girl with golden blond hair, dressed in what looks like a designer outfit and sporting the snidest smile I've ever seen. She's beautiful and vicious all at once.

Must be his girlfriend.

I don't like the small knot I feel pulling at my stomach at that thought. I make myself look away as we exit.

Nera speaks first. “Let's go to the gym. I have a spare outfit in my bag that you can wear.”

“Thanks. I'm more upset that dickhead ruined my lunch.”

“I have to say, you two have balls of steel.” Six adds, throwing a thumb in my and Thayer's direction. “I don't think

anyone's ever talked back to Rogue like you just did, Bellamy. I'm not going to lie, I got a little turned on."

I laugh. "I'm sure that's not true."

"I promise you it is." She replies, nodding her head vigorously. "I mean, even I don't usually engage when Phoenix messes with me. I just sit there and take it. It's the path of least resistance."

"She's not usually like that." Thayer says, looking at me solemnly. "He brings out a different side to her."

"*He* doesn't. But if he wants a feud, I'll give him one, yeah." I say.

"What kind of different side?" Nera asks her.

"Come on, B. You've got to admit that ballsy display back there isn't how you'd typically have handled that situation. You're more the diplomatic, 'let's talk it out and make nice', not the 'show me yours and I'll show you mine'. mutually assured destruction type of conflict resolver."

"So, what? I shouldn't engage him?"

"No, that's not what I'm saying at all. In fact, who cares about him? I'm focused on the fact that, for the first time in a while, your fire is back. Your anxiety doesn't seem to be hovering over you like a dark cloud."

It takes her bringing up my struggles with anxiety to remember I've had issues with panic attacks. It's like coming back into my body suddenly, jarringly.

My brow furrows as I think about my interactions with Rogue. They've been heated, angry, hinging on the edge of violence. My heart has pumped at new speeds and I've felt every negative emotion known to man, but never the kind of paralyzing anxiety I've felt in the past during other arguments.

Thayer is right. I'm usually very conflict averse, someone who would rather discuss things rationally than ever get physical. So the fact that in a few days he's driven me to the point of getting in his face is insane. It's a testament to the depth of raw piqued emotion he pulls out of me.

She keeps talking as we walk into the locker room. “I’m split between wanting to punch him in the face for bullying and scaring you, and telling him to keep going because you going toe to toe with him is the most alive I’ve seen you in a year.”

“Alright, I see your point.” I say, concedingly. “Apparently all it takes to cure my anxiety is a feud with a European man.”

“A hot European man, and don’t forget the line between love and hate is *very* fine.”

“You can’t seriously think I like anything about that psychopath?” I ask incredulously as I change into Nera’s spare leggings and *Harry Potter* sweater.

Nera jumps in. “Maybe not ‘like’, but you guys definitely have some weird chemistry going. You were pretty locked in on each other during that whole exchange. It didn’t look like you were aware any of us were there.”

“Listen, he can have anyone he wants, whenever he wants at RCA. And probably in most of Switzerland, actually. Every girl here - present company excluded of course” Six says, pointing at Nera and herself. “- would kill for a chance with him. He sleeps around and never more than a couple times with the same girl. He’s a total manwhore but it’s completely transactional and emotionless for him. I’ve never seen him look at anyone the way he just looked at you.” Six adds.

I think back to the possessive hand wrapped around me and the clear message of ownership that hold was meant to convey. Message received.

“He does not look at me in any way.” I reply, rolling my eyes.

“He does.”

Nera nods. “There’s definitely a look.”

“Now, that look is hard to interpret. It’s like he wants to eat you for lunch. At this stage, I can’t confirm if he wants to kill you or fuck you into next week, but I’m strongly leaning towards the second.” Thayer finishes.

“It’s absolutely hate.” My cheeks flame, and I want to deflect. “What about you? Don’t think any of us missed your weird mating dance repartee with Rhys.”

She walks through the open locker room door I’m holding, turning back to flick me a quick glare. “That’s nothing. He’s just playing games.” She says as she walks into a brick wall.

Or Rhys’ hard chest.

His hands come out to grab either of her arms, his smooth English voice washing over us as he speaks with a smile on his lips. “Hello, love.”

She pushes against his chest, walking herself backwards out of his hold.

“What do you want?”

He looks down at her, a smile on his lips at her directness. “Your name.”

A confused look crosses her face. “My name? Why?”

He shrugs. “I figure I should know your name before I fuck you.”

Sixtine is head tilted back, mid-sip from her bottle when he speaks. His words cause her to choke on the water in her throat as she coughs, struggling for breath. “Sorry, ignore me.”

Thayer’s gaze thunders through him, her arms coming to cross over her chest. “That’s *never* going to happen, Mackley.” “Yes, we’ve already been through this. You tell me it’s never going to happen, I tell you I’ll make you regret those words, and we both know you’re wrong.”

“The amount of delusion it takes for you to believe those words is almost impressive.”

“You say delusion, I say dedication. The result is the same.” He says with a casual lift of his shoulder.

“I don’t find you attractive.”

He tuts at her, disbelieving. “Please.”

“I’m not interested.” She tries.

He takes an easygoing step towards her, his hands in his pockets. Dipping his head so he's level with her, he taunts. "Liar."

"I have a boyfriend."

Those words have the effect of freezing him on the spot. Gone is the relaxed, carefree jokester. Tension oozes from him as he slowly rights himself up to his full domineering height.

He's displeased and it's obvious. He looks like someone just took away his new toy before he could unwrap it and play with it. The muscle in his jaw ticks as he looks down at her. "What's the harm in telling me your name then?"

He's got her there and she knows it. Somehow he's twisted it to make it seem like if she doesn't tell him her name it's because she's interested in sleeping with him.

She chews her bottom lip for a second as she thinks it over. His eyes track the movement. "My name's Thayer."

"Thayer." He repeats, clearly enjoying how the word sounds between his lips, before extending his hand. "I'm Rhys."

She doesn't take it. "Mackley's fine, thanks. We're not friends."

"We'll see." He finally looks around to the three of us standing behind Thayer. "When Rogue is through with what he undoubtedly has planned for your pal there, you'll need new friends." He tips his chin in my direction. "He's declared it's open season on you, you know. It'll get worse now."

"Phenomenal." I say dryly.

"Can't you do something to stop him instead of standing there with that grin on your face?" Thayer asks.

"Negative, love. No one can stop him once he's got someone in his sights."

"And you're enjoying this?" I ask.

"I'm enjoying what it means." He says mysteriously.

He doesn't expand, instead looking at me thoughtfully as he leans against the hallway wall.

"For God's sake, it's like you want me to get physical with you Mackley." Thayer says with an eye roll. "What does it mean?"

He comes upright from his position, his hands curling around Thayer's arms and pulling her to him. The touch is technically platonic, but looks seductive the way Rhys does it. "You know I want nothing more than to get physical with you, love." He whispers suggestively.

"Hands. Off" Thayer grits out, removing his hands from her body.

"What does it mean?" I repeat.

"I'm not sure." He answers. "But I do know he's never reacted like this to anyone before. For better or worse, you've got his attention."

My heart jumps to my throat, but I play it off. "Like I said, phenomenal."

He comes up to my side, draping an arm over my shoulder and giving me a sharp squeeze. "Cheer up, darling. I'm going to have a front row seat to this whole event and I need you to put on a show for me."

"Rhys."

The one word command breaks the moment like the crack of a whip, interrupting our conversation before I can answer him.

Rogue stands stiffly in front of us, the fingers of his right hand beating a brisk rhythm on his leg. His fathomless gaze takes me in, racking over me slowly before trailing to where Rhys' hand rests on my arm.

His eyes darken and the temperature around him cools several degrees. His jaw is clenched tight. Rhys releases my arm without a word and removes his from my shoulder.

"Better go Mackley, your master is calling." Thayer jabs at him as he walks by her.

“Lose the boyfriend and I’ll be happy to show you who owns who here.” He throws back easily before stalking off next to a still obviously angry Rogue.

I’m surprised he didn’t start another confrontation. His dark mood is usually a catalyst to our arguments.

“Thayer, what the hell was that about?” Nera asks.

“I have no idea.”

“Rogue hates me. Phoenix hates Six. And Thayer and Rhys are doing whatever it is they’re doing. If there was a fourth one, he’d absolutely be harassing Nera.”

“Don’t worry about me, I’ve got my own issue to handle.”

“Really?” Sixtine asks, and I can tell it’s the first she’s hearing of this. “Who?”

Before Nera can answer, the bell rings signaling the end of lunch.

“Shit, I’m going to be late for practice, coach is going to kill me. I’ll talk to you guys later!” She says with a pained groan before running off.

Thayer, Six and I head to our next class, the one I’d been most looking forward to.

World History.

I’m a sucker for learning more about our collective past and how every decision made by our ancestors contributed was a domino effect that brought us to this version of the present.

Getting a European perspective on subjects I know well from an American history point of view is exciting for a nerd like me.

My smile drops off my face when I walk into class and see Rogue. His eyes are already on me when I notice him. My heart sinks. Why did he have to be in this class as well?

He's sitting next to the blonde haired girl I'd noticed earlier. When she sees me, a hand comes down on his shoulder and stays there. The territorial gesture is so obvious, she might as well have peed on him.

Like before, he doesn't even seem to notice her touch. His black, bottomless gaze is fixed on me, his face giving nothing away. Why is it that the one time I tried to get physically close to him, he immediately grabbed my arm to keep me at bay, but this girl can put her hands all over him with barely a twitch from him?

"Who's the girl sitting next to Rogue?" I ask Six quietly as we sit next to each other in the second row.

Without looking back to check, she leans closer to me and whispers. "That's Lyra Wills-Hyde. She and Rogue have hooked up a couple times. She thinks that makes him her boyfriend." She adds with an eye roll in my direction. "He barely acknowledges her, and only when he wants to, on his terms. It's kind of pathetic seeing her so desperate for whatever meager scraps he's willing to give her."

"Yeah, he doesn't really look all that interested."

Six gives me a pointed look. "Be careful around her. She won't like whatever's going on between you and Rogue. She'll see it as a threat to her thing with him. Even if it's not." She adds, raising a hand to stop my retort before I can say it. "She's really vicious, Bellamy."

"You guys seem to be collecting those types of people over here." I reply jokingly, trying to add levity to the suddenly tense conversation.

"I'm serious." She warns. "Last year, one of her best friends slept with Rogue at a party and she shaved her head in her sleep and got her expelled." She nods vigorously at my shocked expression. "Like I said, stay far away."

“I just got a haircut, so, noted.” I look back discreetly and find his inscrutable gaze still trained on me. “Did he intervene?”

“Nope. He couldn’t care less. If you’re not Rhys or Phoenix, you don’t exist to him.”

“Maybe he should date one of them then”

“Not their style. Although they’ve been known to share sometimes.”

I turn back towards the front of the room with a disgusted sound. My initial analysis of him was correct – he wrecks chaos indiscriminately with no care for the consequences or the others affected.

Since I need another feud about as much as I need a bullet in the brain, I resolve not to look back for the rest of the class. When the bell rings after an interesting first class on colonization, I gather up my things and am the first out the door.

8.

Rogue

My eyes can't help but track her tight ass as I watch her practically run out of class with a smug look on my face. Her earlier bravado in the cafeteria was just that. A facade meant to hide the fact that deep down she knows she's in a war she can't win.

"Who is that?" I turn towards the grating voice. It manages to be both syrupy and shrill at the same time and I'm pretty sure the intended effect is meant to be seduction, but it lands in my ear like nails on a chalkboard.

It stands in stark contrast to a lush American accent I'm getting accustomed to. That's the voice I should hate, but its owner is too alluring to completely disregard.

Disinterestedly, I retort back. "Who?"

Lyra gives me a sharp look. "You know who. The girl you stared at the whole class."

"You seem to be under the mistaken impression that I owe you shit, so let's correct that immediately." I bite out. My voice is measured, bored even, but my tone is a barely concealed threat. Lyra's throat bobs as fear has her swallowing thickly. "What I do, who I look at, who I mess with and who I fuck are none of your fucking business. Remember that before I decide you're more trouble than you're worth and get rid of you. For good."

"Of course, Rogue." She purrs, but I hear the slight tremble in her voice. "I didn't mean anything by it."

Her hand comes towards my shoulder, but I grab it out of the air before she can touch me and yank it backwards. She gives a sharp cry, no longer bothering to hide the fear in her eyes now.

I push on her hand, straining the muscles in her arm. If I press a bit further, I could snap a tendon. “Did I say you could touch me?” My voice drips ire cold enough to give frostbite.

“I-I’m sorry. I won’t touch you anymore.” She whimpers.

I release her hand, tossing it away from me carelessly.

Rhys and I ditch the last two periods of the day and head home instead. He drives as I light a joint and take a hit. The windows are down, my arm hanging out, my fingers aimlessly playing with the wind.

“She’s getting to you.”

I turn an apathetic look his way. “I can’t wait to hear this.”

“You don’t even need to ask who I’m talking about because you know it’s true.”

I laugh at him, stony-faced. Bringing the joint back up to my lips, I take another hit before replying. I savor the feeling of the smoke entering my lungs, holding it there as long as I can. I’m already rotten on the inside, what’s the harm in adding more poison?

I blow out the smoke, enjoying the release as the weed takes immediate effect. It dulls the rage, the bitterness, the loneliness.

“I know who you’re talking about, not what you’re talking about.”

“Admit you find her interesting.” He demands.

I grind my teeth together. “You’re wrong.”

He doesn’t push it any further, instead plucking the joint from my hand and taking a hit of it himself. “What are we doing this afternoon?”

“Müller’s coming over to update me on progress.”

He throws me a look I can't decipher. "Did he give you any inclination if he found something or not?"

"Nope."

François Müller is a private investigator I hired a week ago to find my mother.

When I was nine, she walked out of our house and never came back. She'd left me to take her place as the recipient of my father's beatings. I could understand the act of self-preservation that was leaving him, but not that she'd left me behind.

My fists clenched at the reminder.

I was going to make her pay for all the suffering I'd been put through because of her cowardice. But first, I had to find her. I'd done a cursory search on social media sites and other places on the internet one could expect to find a 45 year old woman, but found nothing.

My father had beat the shit out of me last week and I'd had enough. I'd made the decision as I lay writhing on the floor, refusing to make a sound.

I would find her and drag her back here.

She would pay.

As we pull into the driveway, I spot Müller leaning against his car. I don't know how a PI can afford to drive a Porsche but fuck, I hope it means he's good at his job.

I jump out of Rhys' matte black Jeep and walk up to Müller.

"Royal." He says in greeting.

"No need for the pleasantries. What'd you find?"

He brings his hand to the back of his head, rubbing it apologetically. “Look, either your mom has CIA level disappearing skills or she had help and planned this. I’ve looked everywhere. Planes, trains, cars, buses, taxis, trams even. There is no trace of your mother using any of those modes of transportation to leave Switzerland. This was ten years ago also, so the records aren’t as easy to get your hands on, but the ones I’ve found, she doesn’t appear in. Now, we are in the Schengen Area. She could have gotten into a friend’s car and driven across all of Europe to her heart’s content, but I’d still expect to find a trace of her. Receipts or credit card statements, but there’s nothing. I reached out to my contact in the NYPD and he ran a search of her name in the American system, but she doesn’t appear there. Your dad’s the one who told you she went to America, right? Did he happen to say which coast she might have gone to at least?”

“He didn’t. And you’d have better luck getting him to tell you his bank password than any information about my mom.” I take a step forward, giving him an antagonistic look. “So that’s it? You came over to tell me you have nothing?”

He stammers. “L-listen, it’s just the beginning. I’m going to keep digging, especially on the US side. I’ve only just scratched the surface there. I’m just saying it’s going to take a little longer than I initially thought.”

I roll up the sleeve of my shirt slowly, keeping my eyes on him. “That’s disappointing.” I say calmly, as he takes a scared step back.

When my sleeve is rolled up as high as it’ll go, I turn and punch the left tail light of his car.

Then the right.

His eyes widen but he wisely chooses to remain silent.

“You have a month to give me an update.” I instruct him, before turning on my heel and stalking off towards the house.

That should get me some results. If not, I can always set fire to his Porsche next.

Rhys is waiting for me in the kitchen, eating one of the pastries the chef made this morning. “So?”

“Nothing. No trace of her.” I say, pouring a glass of orange juice and grabbing pasta from the fridge. “He’s not looking hard enough.”

“Maybe if she’s worked this hard to stay hidden, there’s a reason she doesn’t want to be found.” Rhys suggests.

“If I want your opinion, I’ll ask for it.” I snap back.

“Testy.” He says, tsk-tsking.

I say nothing and we stand in silence as we dig into our food. Phoenix walks in a few minutes later, clearly annoyed. He throws his backpack across the room and it skids across and off the other side of the kitchen table, hitting a statue stand and sending it hurtling towards the ground. It hits the floor and shatters into hundreds of pieces.

“Fuck!” He says, a black haze in his eyes.

“You alright?” Rhys asks him between bites, staring at the scene nonchalantly. This is a typical night in our house. It’s a mansion but somehow still not big enough to contain all the rage living in it with the three of us.

“She’s in almost all of my classes. She’s everywhere I look, having the nerve to look all innocent and doe eyed when I know she’s anything but. She’s fooling them all.”

Phoenix has had this obsession with Sixtine since we all met when we were eight. She betrayed him a little over a year later, around the same time my mom disappeared, before she moved to Hong Kong with her parents. He hasn’t been the same since, his heart sounding just as hollow as mine. Except his comes to life when he spars with her.

He’d never admit it though, that’s why it’s a sadistic part of my game to mess with him sometimes. “Mhmm, she did look really hot today. The way her t-shirt was pulled tight against her tits.” I fake groan. “I couldn’t peel my eyes off her.”

He's on me in less than two strides, his fist connecting with my cheek with a loud crack. "Find a way to peel them off her permanently." He threatens, his voice a guarantee. "Or I'll carve your eyes out with a grapefruit spoon and consider it a problem well solved."

"Careful, there." Rhys chimes in. "A casual observer would think you were possessive of her."

"A casual observer could get himself killed for that kind of stupid thinking." He says, his upper lip twitching in anger.

Rhys throws his hands up innocently. "Take it easy on Royal. He just got an update from Müller. Nothing." He says, shaking his head.

Phoenix knows the importance of this search to me, even though we've never openly talked about it. He understands my need for answers. "Sorry, mate. That sucks."

He grabs a couple beers from the fridge and throws one my way. I catch it out of mid air and use my teeth to pry it open, before spitting out the cap and taking a long drag.

"Arsenal vs Crystal Palace tonight. You guys want to watch?" Phoenix asks.

That's how long conflict lasts between us. He punched me five minutes ago and now we're drinking beer and about to put the match on. That's the benefit of knowing each other this long. Truth is, Phoenix and Rhys are the only thing I have that resemble family and I know how fucked that sounds.

They're my brothers, for better or worse. Most days I can't stand the fuckers, but unfortunately I'd also probably take a bullet for either of them.

9.

Bellamy

I'm on the phone with my mom, sitting on my bed when my door slams open and Thayer walks in.

"B— oh hey, Trish!" She says when she sees my mom on FT. "Sorry to interrupt — you look gorgeous by the way — but I need to talk to Bellamy really quickly."

My mom laughs happily. I'm sure she misses her as much as she misses me. "Go right ahead, hon."

"What is it?"

She grasps my arm excitedly. "Okay, don't say no."

"Great start."

"Please, I know you. Listen, there's a party tonight and we're going."

I groan out loud, dropping down on my bed so I'm laying on my back. "Ugh, I don't know. I really need to study."

She grabs my hand and pulls me back up to a sitting position. "I'm not taking no for an answer, unfortunately. You've had a terrible week and you need to go out and have fun, not shove your head deeper into a dusty old book. No disrespect to books of course, they're my first love. But tonight, I'm cheating on them with my second love. Tequila." She says and starts swaying her hips seductively to an imaginary track.

"Wait, who had a horrible week?" My mom chimes in, a frown pulling at her brow. "Bellamy said everything was going really well."

I widen my eyes exaggeratedly at Thayer in a universal sign to shut the fuck up. I hadn't wanted to worry my mother by regaling her with tales of my bullying so I'd just told her we'd made a few friends (true, although they're our

roommates) and were staying out of drama (untrue, but also not our fault). She catches on straight away and immediately begins damage control.

“Sorry, Trish, I misspoke. You know me, always going for the dramatics. Bellamy just got an A- which you know is a level ten catastrophe for her, so I was talking hyperbolically.”

My mom’s brow smooths out, somehow buying that lie. Or that I’d get an A-.

“Thayer’s right, hon. Grades aren’t everything. You’re in one of the best high schools in the world, you can take a night to go out and have fun.”

I groan again. I know that with the two of them teamed up, there’s no getting out of this party for me. “Fine. But I’m not staying long.” I say, trying to compromise.

“Whatever you say.” Thayer singsongs, happy she got her way.

“Alright mom, I’m going to have to go get ready for this party. I’ll call you in a couple days?”

“Sounds good, have fun!”

I hang up and open Spotify. I put on a getting ready playlist as I head to my closet. Thayer sits at my vanity, as she starts to apply her makeup.

“Sorry about that, I didn’t think that you might not want to worry her.”

“It’s all good. Plus, you’re not wrong.” I reach into my closet and pull dresses out one after the other as I search for something to wear. “Where is this party?” I ask.

“Um...”

At that one syllable, I turn my head slowly in her direction. I know that sound. It’s the one she makes when she’s guilty. When my eyes meet hers, they look back at me demurely.

“Oh, fuck. What did you do?” I ask.

“I didn’t *do* anything.” She replies, guiltlessly.

“Thayer.” I warn.

She gives in. “Alright. But I wasn’t lying, I didn’t do anything. I just... omitted something.”

“What?”

“Where the party is located.”

I’m confused. “Are we leaving the country? I hear that’s a very European thing to do on a night out. You go to a bar in Switzerland, you wake up the next morning in Italy. Preferably, with a hot Italian.” I add.

“No, it’s something else, although sign me up for that night out whenever you want.”

I smile at her. “Where’s the party?”

“Rogue house.”

The smile wipes off my face. “I’m not going.” I say, starting to put my clothes back in the closet.

“I told you she’d take it well.” Nera says as she walks in and throws herself on my bed.

“You knew about this too?” I ask. “There’s no way I’m going. I’m sure you agree, right, Sixtine?” I ask her as she walks in.

“I can see where you thought I’d be your best shot, but I’m with them.” She says with an apologetic shrug. “Sorry, I think you should go.”

“Why should I go to his party? That’s not just walking into a lion’s den, that’s paying for admission and sitting right in front of the lion’s open mouth.”

“Great metaphor.” Nera says.

“Thanks.”

“To continue it, if I may.” Thayer jumps in. “I see it more as paying for admission, sitting right in front of the lion and flipping it the double bird.”

“Sure, and then when I’m done with that, the lion can open his mouth and bite both my arms off.”

Nera clears her throat. “I think we’re letting the metaphor take us away from the central point here.” She rolls over onto her stomach and faces me. “Which is that, maybe strength responds to strength like we saw in the cafeteria and standing up to him is a good idea. And showing up to his party is the ultimate chess move. He won’t see it coming.”

I turn towards Thayer. “This is by far the worst idea you’ve ever had, and I was there when you microwaved a cucumber with cheese on it as a drunk midnight snack.”

“Ew.” Sixtine says, making a disgusted face.

“In my defense, I thought it was zucchini. I was trying to eat healthy.” She says with a ‘what can you do’ shrug. “It’s not a bad idea and we were kidding anyway. Six says he lives in a mansion with wings and servant’s quarters and shit. You probably won’t see him anyway.”

“She’s right.” Nera says. “I’ve been to a few of his parties and I’ve never seen him there.”

“Come on.” Thayer pleads. “It’s our first weekend here, we deserve to have fun.”

I could use the break. She wasn’t lying when she told my mom I’d had a terrible week. After Monday’s encounters, I thought maybe he’d pull back, let me settle in a bit. I don’t know why I’d expected anything good from him.

As promised, his efforts and those of his cronies had only intensified in both occurrence and viciousness. On Tuesday, I’d been formally introduced to Lyra. She’d yanked me down to the floor by my ponytail as I’d walked past her, and crouched above me.

I’d tried to get up but she’d pushed a hand onto my chest. “Stay down, bitch.” She’d spat, inches from my face. “Stay away from Rogue or I’ll fucking ruin your life.”

“Gladly.” I responded, flippantly. “I don’t want anything to do with him. Tell your boyfriend to stay away from *me*.”

She’d gone to hit me, but Nera grabbed her arm in the air before she could.

“Leave her alone, Lyra.”

She stood up and faced her. “You don’t want to make an enemy of me.”

Nera stepped up to her. “Trust me, you’re the one who should be worried about making an enemy of me.” She’d said with a thinly veiled warning that I didn’t understand, but that Lyra clearly did.

With a flip of her hair and an angry huff, she walked away. Nera helped me to my feet as I adjusted my sore ponytail. “Six wasn’t kidding when she said she was vicious.” I winced at the dull pain at the base of my skull. “Why did she listen to you?”

“My family could destroy hers.” She’d answered with a casual shrug.

“Of course it could.”

The next day, my clothes had disappeared after gym. Imaginative.

Thursday, Devlin and two other members of the football team had hurled insults and crumpled up pieces of paper at me between classes until Rhys had told them to stop.

I’d had a couple minor run ins with Rogue earlier in the week, but they’d been weirdly subdued. If the entire school wasn’t still harassing me, I’d think our feud was behind us.

The bullying didn’t need to be imaginative to be effective. While I hadn’t had any other violent encounters since my last one with Rogue, the taunts and cruel games of the other students were demoralizing and isolating.

I was thankful I had the girls, especially Nera and Six who’d effectively had to cut off previous friendships to stand by me. While every day at school was rough, every night spent with them was a healer. We often went up to the roof, where we’d installed a few chairs and drank beers, laughing and chatting as the sun fell.

Today, my luck with Rogue had run out. I’d had a brutal run in with him in Calc. He’d grabbed my bag and turned it over out the open window, sending all of my things hurtling

three floors to the concrete. Then, he'd bent me in half, so that my feet were on the ground but the top half of my body was hanging out the window, his hand pressed threateningly on my lower back.

"Don't move. My hold on you might accidentally slip." He'd threatened.

I'd run out of there the moment he'd let me go. There were tears in my eyes that I didn't want anybody to see.

As I'd made my way blindly down the stairs, I'd run into a hard body. Strong hands gripped my arms and steadied me so I didn't fall.

"Are you alright?" He'd asked.

I'd looked up at him through my watery eyes.

Jeremy.

He sat next to me in my English Lit class. I'd barely noticed him in class beforehand. In my defense, I was distracted. I made to move around him. "Excuse me."

One of his hands dropped but the other kept a loose hold on my arm.

"Hey, listen. I was wondering if you tutored?"

"Sorry?" I'd asked, uncomprehending. Thoughts were flying through my brain a mile a minute and I couldn't process what he was asking.

"Do you tutor? As in, could you tutor me? I'm struggling with the English Lit concepts."

"It's the second time we've had class." I'd said dubiously.

He gave an uneasy laugh as he rubbed the back of his neck. I think I made him nervous. I took a moment to look at him. He was attractive in a *Vineyard Vines* kind of way. Very white, upper class, and cookie cutter.

I was drier than the Sahara Desert.

I wasn't sure why but when I thought about what my type was, I visualized rough hands, tattooed arms, and healing

facial cuts.

“Haha, you’re right. I just know it was a hard class for me last year so I want to get ahead of it, you know?”

Before I could respond that I understood, the staircase door to the landing opened and Rogue walked through. He stared down at Jeremy and I, looking specifically at where the former had his hand wrapped around me still.

Nothing in his face or body moved and yet the violence in the air intensified. I wasn’t looking to get tossed out the window so I left before he could go in for round two.

“Listen, we’ll talk later. I-I have to go get my stuff.”

I’d thrown one last look in Rogue’s direction. He’d still been standing frozen on the landing. His venomous gaze slithered from Jeremy to me, spoiling for a fight.

I turned and ran down the stairs.

In retrospect when I looked back at today, I was disappointed I’d let him run me off from both the first confrontation in the classroom and my conversation with Jeremy who’d just wanted my help.

I needed to find him and tell him I’d be happy to tutor him if he needed it.

“Do you think Jeremy will be at this party?” I asked Six.

“Jeremy? Who’s Jeremy?” Thayer asked, looking between the two of us.

“Jeremy Rathford from the football team?” I nodded. “He should be, yeah.”

“Alright, I’m in.” My announcement is met with a cacophony of happy shrieks. “I don’t think I have anything to wear.”

Nera steps forward and puts her hand on my arm. “Finally. It’s my time to shine.”

An hour later, we're ready and getting into a limo Sixtine ordered via a private chauffeur service. It's taking us to the party so we don't need one of us to be a designated driver.

Whose lives are we even living these days? Being chauffeured to a party wearing a five hundred dollar dress. I even had caviar this week and enjoyed it. We're so screwed, the return to reality in a year is going to suck.

I get in the limo last, working hard not to flash anyone from the front *or* the back in Nera's dress. It's beautifully simple, a shiny black slip dress with a built-in corset that makes my waist look small and my ass big.

"Apologies in advance, all three of you are definitely going to see my vag at some point tonight."

"What's new?" Thayer replies flippantly as she reapplies her gloss.

Six laughs. "You look so hot, Bellamy. The guys won't be able to keep their hands off you."

I blush at her compliment. I rarely dress up to go out, but even I can admit I look good tonight. "They won't be able to keep their hands off any of us. The three of you look just as gorgeous."

And they do. Nera's wearing a deep V neck white silk blouse over a lace bra. The blouse is tucked into a leather skirt. Six is wearing a red dress with expertly placed cut outs and Thayer's in a sparkly blue dress that compliments her eyes.

Back home, if we'd gone to a party I'd have thrown on a pair of cut off shorts, a graphic tee, and my air force ones. But Six said this was appropriate for where we're going, so I relented.

I still feel like pinching myself most days.

Fifteen minutes later, we pull up to an open gate. A mansion is visible in the distance. As we approach, I can start to discern the details of the home between the trees. It's a sprawling red brick house with white windows and shutters. Twelve columns of windows decorate the three story property.

“The three of them live here?” I ask and I can hear the incredulity in my own voice.

“Mostly. Rogue’s dad comes back home a few times a year as well. And you know about his mom.”

I remember her telling us she’d left him when he was younger. I couldn’t imagine that pain.

“Come on, let’s go in.” Nera says, hooking her arm through Thayer’s and guiding her through the two large double doors and into a grand foyer with a princess staircase.

“Let’s go to the kitchen and make a drink.”

She ushers us into a gorgeous open planned kitchen with unique colored tiling on the floor and kitchen backsplash. It’s elegant, modern and expensive looking. There are hundreds of people milling around the grounds and house, all dressed in designer clothing and accessories.

Six hands me a glass — no red solo cups in sight — and clinks hers against mine in a cheer. Grabbing my hand, she leads me and the others into another room. It’s a living space with sofas on which people are lounging and a makeshift dancing area that Thayer points to.

“The goal is to own this dancefloor by the end of the night.” She yells over the loud house music.

“Deal!”

I quickly down my drink, trying to loosen the tension in my muscles from this week. I sway my hips as I shake my head to the music. The light buzz from the drink Six gave me is making me giddy. I laugh at a joke Nera makes and accidentally bump into someone behind me. I turn to apologize.

It’s Jeremy. I’d somehow forgotten about him since getting to the party, too focused on having fun with my friends.

“Hey.” He says, giving me an easy grin.

“Hi,” I reply, “I’m sorry about earlier.”

He waves my apology off with a hand. “Don’t worry about it. It looked like you had more pressing matters.”

I think back to how Rogue had lorded over us, glaring at me with a warning look in his eye. My eyes narrow at the memory. “Tell me about it. That asshole is hell bent on ruining every positive experience I have at this school.”

A flirtatious grin paints itself across his face. “So, are you saying our chat was one of those positive experiences you’ve had?”

He’s trying, bless him.

He’s attractive, but I don’t think he’s my type. Our interactions don’t stir up any emotion in me. I know myself and the chances I’ll ever be into this guy are minuscule, if existent at all. I’m not trying to lead him on.

“I’m always trying to make new friends.” His smile falters at my response, and I search for a segue. “Oh, you mentioned you needed tutoring? I’m happy to help with that. What day can you be free?”

His grin is back to full shine. “How about Thursday? But it’ll have to be later in the evening because I have practice. Could you do 7pm ish?”

“Sure, no problem.” I reply helpfully.

“Great. Want to meet at my place? I have an apartment off campus so it’ll be quieter.”

We confirm the details and exchange phone numbers so we can text if anything changes with our schedules. I excuse myself and go to the kitchen to get a second drink.

I’m rinsing my glass in the sink when I look out the window and see Sixtine stomp off out the house, in the direction of the vast garden and even vaster darkness. Phoenix is hot on her heels, his steps angry and determined as he follows her before the black of the night swallows them both.

Looking to my left, I look into a second living room where Thayer is sitting on a couch. Shockingly, she’s talking to Rhys and their conversation seems surprisingly civil. Friendly even,

especially when she laughs at one of his jokes, her head thrown back.

Both of my friends have gotten themselves into situations with guys at this party and Nera is nowhere to be found. I shoot her a quick text asking her where she is, but she doesn't respond.

I take a sip of my drink and enjoy the taste of the liquor on my tongue and the sweet burn as it goes down my throat. Six was right, there's no signs of Rogue at this party. And a part of me is disappointed.

Bored, even.

Especially without my friends to keep me company.

I head towards the downstairs bathroom to refresh my makeup and take a moment to myself. Maybe now's the time to call it a night.

Someone shrieks as I open the unlocked door and I realize I just interrupted a hookup.

"Close the door." The man orders without turning.

I do as I'm told, flushing to the roots of my hair in the process. I look around and spot the staircase. I wonder if I'll have an easier time finding an open bathroom upstairs.

I don't question my decision and quickly climb the stairs. On the landing, I can go left or right. There's a number of doors and winding hallways on either side.

I go right and walk past a couple of doors before picking the third one. It looks like it could be a bathroom.

Putting my hand on the handle, I press down and push the door open. It takes my eyes a couple seconds to adjust to the darkness, but the moonlight helps illuminate the scene before me.

Lyra is sitting on Rogue lap, her left arm wrapped around his neck, her right hand trailing down his chest.

His shirtless chest.

A pair of inky green eyes snap to mine and darken in recognition before he barks out an order.

“Get out.”

10.

Bellamy

For some reason, I don't immediately react.

My eyes are glued to the scene in front of me. The way she's sitting across his lap, the way her hand touches him, the way his arms are on either of the chair's arm rests and not on her.

"Get the fuck out, Bellamy."

It's the first time he's said my name. That's what my foolish brain decides to focus on in that moment.

He knows my name. He says it low and deep in his throat, a heated threat and a promise of retaliation if I don't leave right now.

And that's enough to make me move, finally.

I shut the door as quickly as possible and look for an escape. Once back in the hallway I turn to my left and right, feeling an unexplainably frantic need to hide.

I randomly choose another door, pushing my way through it and turning around to close it immediately and sagging against it. It's not a bathroom, it's another empty bedroom. This house is a crazy maze. They must get lost once a week in this place.

I try not to think about what I just witnessed.

It seems like she has every right to be possessive of him. They're still hooking up. I attribute the uneasy feeling in my stomach to almost interrupting another couple fucking, and not to anything else. I don't have time to investigate the many emotions swirling through me at the visual of the two of them

together. It's because I dislike them both as individuals, that's why I hate seeing them together.

The door pushes open with a brutal shove, sending me falling to my knees in the process. I use my palms to catch myself as I land hard. A sharp pang shoots up both my arms. Still on all fours, I turn my head and see Rogue towering over me.

He's almost incandescent with rage this time. The fading cuts and bruises on his face make him look ferocious, the moonlit room highlighting them against his tanned skin.

I stumble to my feet as I apologize. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt."

He takes slow, measured steps towards me. His eyes track me with the instincts of a predator. I hold my ground as long as I can, but eventually take a step back to stop our chests from touching.

When he speaks, his voice comes out deadly. "Do you enjoy getting in my way?"

I'd been rubbing my palms on my jeans to dull the ache of the fall, but my head snaps up at his words.

"Do I enjoy getting in your way?" I repeat, incredulously.

"You heard me. Everywhere I turn, there you are. Did you want to watch me fuck her? Is that why you didn't leave?" His smile is mean. "If you wanted a show sweetheart, all you had to do was ask."

"There's no amount of money in this world that could get me to willingly come near you or your disease ridden dick." I'm irate now. "And last time I checked, you're the one who has a girl ready and willing to fuck you over there, one that you left behind so ut *you* could run after *me*. Not the other way around." I shove him back to add emphasis to my declaration.

That move backfires because the moment I put my hands on him, I hesitate. My palms come into contact with the defined muscles of his torso and my brain misfires. My hands

want to explore the hard ridges of his chest, running my fingers along the ridges of his muscles.

He looks down at my hands on his chest and quirks a dark brow. "Is that so? Because it's your hands that are feeling me up, not mine."

I shove him for real this time. "You disgust me."

Somehow, that has his eyes darkening even further. They're completely black now and spitting venom in my direction.

His hand shoots out, his long fingers wrapping around my throat.

I freeze. He steps closer, bending my neck completely backwards in the process. The position forces me to look into his eyes. I feel his hot breath on my face.

"So submissive. You're not even fighting me back." He says, the approval clear in his husky voice.

Logically, I know I should do something but I'm trapped in his gaze. His head dips and he runs his lips up the side of my face. I shudder.

"I'm going to punish you." He says, before dropping to a sitting position on the bed. His arms wrap around my waist, bringing me with him as he moves, before he bends me over his lap.

"What are you doing?" I ask, frantic. I try to look back, but he pins me down with an arm across my back so I can't move.

His other hand grips my dress and yanks it to my hips, revealing my bare ass in a black thong.

"Rogue, stop." I beg, but he doesn't hear me.

His eyes are locked on my ass, the look on his face savage with lust as his hand comes down to gently caress the curve of my cheek.

The tender touch lasts a split second before he roughly fists his fingers around a handful of my ass. My breath hitches, the sound exploding in the silence as my eyes go wide.

His resounding groan comes out painful. “You’ve got such a hot ass. I could spend hours just playing with your cheeks.” His mouth comes down to whisper in my ear as his hand grips my ass, releases it, then mercilessly grabs another section. “It’s fucking distracting. The way you sway your hips and shake your ass as you walk by.” His words are harsh against my ear. “Are you doing it for me, sweetheart? Is it to get my attention?”

I fight through the fog of physical sensations to bite out a response. “It’s-It’s not for you.”

His dark gaze is devoid of any emotion as he pulls back, and for the first time since he walked in, fear fills my lungs and suffocates the oxygen in my body.

“What– Oh!” A strangled cry falls from my lips as his hand makes contact with my ass in a hard slap. He rubs the tender area once, disarmingly, before his hand comes down again.

I squeal. He brings his hand down another time, the blows coming in quick succession and rooting me to the spot in shock. The contact sends pain, followed by bolts of unexpected, inexplicable pleasure shooting through my skin.

He bends over my back, whispering cruelly into my ear. “Who the fuck is it for then?”

It feels so filthy to be like this; bent over his lap, with my dress up and my ass on display. The door is unlocked and someone could walk in at any moment.

Smack!

His hand comes down again, with the hardest strike yet. “Answer me.”

I say the first name that comes to my mind.

“Jeremy.”

Three brutal slaps come down on my cheeks, one after the other in a rapid flurry. His hand comes around my front and wraps around my neck.

“What would he say if he saw you bent over my lap, moaning for me like a good girl?” He tightens his hold on my throat. “Should I have him come up and see for himself?” He demands.

“No.” I whimper. “Please.”

His answering tone is triumphant. “That’s right. Just for me.” His hand feels possessive around my throat as he issues a warning in my ear. “He doesn’t see you like this, Bellamy.”

I nod wordlessly. I’d do and say anything to end the torment he’s inflicting on my body.

His hand comes down again on my right cheek. “Not so mouthy now are you?”

“Rogue,” I moan.

He turns my face so he can look into my eyes. “You’re enjoying this.” It’s an observation, not a question. “If I run my finger through your slit, is your pussy going to be wet for me?”

Another slap falls and I cry out. The combination of his words and his hands is too much. My body and my mind are swirling with too many feelings, physical and emotional and I can’t make sense of anything.

I feel something building in my body, going from nothing to feeling like I’m about to go over a cliff in seconds. Moisture tinges the corner of my eyes.

“I can smell your arousal from here, Bellamy.” He says and, fuck, the way he says my name alone might make me come. It’s possessive and self-satisfied and completely cocky.

All of a sudden, the spanking is over. But that means so is the building orgasm within me. He flips me up so that I’m straddling him, with the skirt of my dress bunched around my waist.

Looking into my eyes, his tongue reaches out and licks a tear cresting past my eyelashes.

“Stop your theatrics, I know you loved it. I can feel your hot cunt from here.” He says, before cupping my center.

He keeps his eyes on mine and never looks down at where he touches me. My eyes roll into the back of my head at the sensation and his eyes track my every reaction; every twitch and flutter in my face.

Instead of arching out of his touch like a sane person, I tilt my hips into his hand, scrambling to hold on to the cliff of my rapidly receding orgasm.

He hisses and removes his hand.

Dejectedly, I rub myself against the zipper of his jeans. My eyes pop open when I feel his hardness press against my core, the only separation between us the material of his jeans and my thong.

He's huge. Thick and pulsing, his cock is pressed tight against his jeans as I rock back and forth, tracing his length. I'm getting closer to release when he grabs my ponytail from the back and tugs on it. He's holding me at an awkward angle, my bottom half rubbing against his while my torso is bent backwards to follow his hold.

He growls menacingly. "Watch what you're doing or I'll fuck you right here."

His words have an immediate sobering effect on me and I fall out of his grasp and to the floor, scrambling to stand up. Once on my feet, I turn back to him and see he hasn't moved. He's still sitting in his chair with a smug, victorious look on his face.

I'm mortified. How did I let that happen? How did I ride him, dry humping him wantonly until I nearly came after he spanked me repeatedly? I have the door open and am ready to run out when he calls my name.

"Bellamy."

I turn around.

"You're gagging for my cock, you can't deny it. I don't blame you, who wouldn't." Smug bastard. "Difference is, there's absolutely nothing about you that I want." he sneers.

I run out before he can say another hateful thing.

I wake up the next morning with a throbbing headache. On my way back downstairs, I'd run into Thayer who'd been looking for me.

I didn't tell her anything at the time. This one would take a sleepless night to process.

If I let myself.

Instead, I rounded the girls and made us take rounds of shots, hoping it'd make me forget.

Unfortunately it's the morning and I'm lying here memory intact and pride in tatters as I think back on yesterday. I don't know what came over me or why I let it happen. Or even why I enjoyed it. It'd felt both like the most insane encounter of my life - what with him spanking me and all - and the most natural one. There'd been no awkwardness between us as we'd gone seamlessly from fighting to fucking.

Just lingering sexual frustration for me when I woke up this morning. Still now, not having been able to finish yesterday has me feeling irritated and unsatisfied.

I need to get the girls' perspective on this whole thing.

Throwing my duvet off me, I hop out of bed and go to the kitchen where I find the other girls in various stages of hangover decomp.

"Morning." Sixtine says groggily, handing me a cup of coffee.

Warm steam peels off the top of the cup as the fragrant aroma hits my nose. "Bless you."

She raises her mug at me in a silent cheers.

I drop into the open seat at the table, exhaustion pulling at my muscles. Thayer's hair is doing its best bird's nest impression this morning. She looks at me through bleary eyes.

“How was your night, B? Where did you disappear off to? I was looking for you for like twenty minutes.”

“Ugh.” I get up and pour a glass of orange juice as the three of them turn towards me. The hint of a good story has them perked up all of a sudden.

“Are you going to expand on that?” Nera asks.

“I think I need an intervention.” I say. “In fact, no, I know I need one. Please save me from myself, I beg you.”

“You are so Type A. You can’t call an intervention on yourself.”

“Oh, trust me. I can.”

Six jumps in. “Why do you need an intervention?”

“Grab the champagne, I’m going to need it.”

“That bad?” She asks with a small grimace.

Sixtine pours everyone a mimosa and the three of them look at me expectantly. I clear my throat.

“Ahem, I—” I pause, trying to find the words. Ultimately, there’s no sugarcoating possible for this news. “I let Rogue spank me last night.” I finish, the words coming out in a garbled rush.

I’m met with silence so loud, the Chinese could hear a pin drop you could hear a pin drop in that room. Nera pushes back from the table and goes to her room. She’s back before I can question where she’s going and slaps a twenty euro note in Thayer’s palm.

“Thanks!” The latter crows happily.

I lift a questioning brow in Nera’s direction. “I bet Thayer that something would happen between the two of you within the month.” She points in Thayer’s direction. “She said it’d happen within two weeks.”

“Nothing happened ‘between us’.” I retort, emphasizing the last two words sarcastically.

“Sure, because nothing says platonic like spanking you at a party.” Thayer says sardonically. “Come on, I told you there were some serious vibes between you two. Now we have confirmation that they’re the sexual kind.” She says, wagging her eyebrows.

“No, he was angry. It wasn’t like a hot spanking or anything.”

I don’t know why I lie. I don’t like the fact that something about my... relationship with Rogue is so transparently obvious to my friends, but I can’t see it.

But Thayer sees straight through me. “Let me ask you this then.” She crosses her arms over her chest, casually. “Did he spank you over your dress?”

Nera and Six turn back towards me with interest in their eyes.

I blush and don’t respond.

“Bellamy!” Six shrieks, a smile across her face.

“Oh my god, that’s the hottest thing I’ve ever heard.” Nera says, taking a long sip of her mimosa. “I didn’t even know you guys had kissed.”

“We hadn’t.” I say, before adding. “We haven’t.”

She chokes on her mimosa as Thayer laughs delightedly. “You kinky bitch, who are you? I didn’t know you had it in you.”

“This isn’t a good story.” I say, glumly. “He was an asshole.”

Six brings a fresh bottle of champagne from the fridge and sets it on the center of the table.

“Tell us everything.” She demands.

“What a dickhead!” Nera says, disgustedly.

Fifteen minutes later, I’ve relayed the events of last night, wrapping up my story with his parting jab to me.

“I’m not even surprised,” Six says, “That’s what he does. He plays with girls then tosses them aside like they’re nothing. No offense.” She adds, realizing what she said.

“None taken. Believe me, I’m fully aware that I temporarily lost my mind last night.”

“Too bad he’s Satan’s offspring and we have to hate him for all eternity because he’s seriously hot.” Thayer adds wistfully. “I mean what a waste of a good gene pool. It should be illegal to be that attractive.”

“I hadn’t noticed.” I reply, primly.

“Bellamy, please. Don’t lie to your elders.”

“You’re literally 3 weeks older than me.”

“You can hate him for being the asshole he is, but objectively the man is attractive. And the angry, toxic vibe? It works.”

“There’s something wrong with you.”

“Thank you.” she replies cheerfully.

I grin into my glass, but I agree. There’s something about him that pulls me in. That makes me want to get closer to the flame, even as it burns me.

Obviously. Because if someone had told me I’d let my arch enemy spank my bare ass at a party before I lost my virginity, I’d have laughed in their face.

“Hopefully both of you got whatever’s been going on between you out of your systems and you can move on now.” Six says, and even though she doesn’t phrase it as a question, it comes out as one.

“Definitely.” I reply.

And I don't know if I say those words for her benefit or to convince myself.

11.

Rogue

I'd purposefully avoided her after Rhys made the comment that he thought she was getting to me. I didn't need to interact with her myself to ruin her life, there were dozens if not hundreds of desperate people at RCA dying to do what I asked.

Then as we settled into Math class, waiting for the professor to arrive, she'd bent over to pick up her dropped calculator, and shoving her ass in Devlin's direction in the process. He'd done a double take before taking a good, long look at it.

Irritation had poured through my veins, the need to claw his eyes out a physical itch in my body. So I'd retaliated against her instead, mocking and tormenting her until she'd run out of the room.

The monster in me wasn't satisfied and I'd followed her out, thirsting for another face-off. I'd found her in the stairwell with Jeremy. His hand was wrapped around her upper arm where I'd held her not five minutes earlier.

My left eyelid twitched as I watched them.

She'd had the good sense to run away from me, because god knows what I'd have done if I'd gotten my hands on her just then.

She hadn't come back to Math and I'd felt a sick thrill knowing I'd sent the teacher's pet running from class.

I couldn't help but wonder if Jeremy had run after her.

Ignoring the blood pounding in my ears at the thought, I'd checked my phone and seen a text from Müller.

Müller: No news. Will update if I find something.

Fresh annoyance coursed through me at the message. This motherfucker really had a death wish.

Me: You have three weeks.

Back at home, my blood was still running hot. A sparring session with Rhys had done nothing to calm me down. If fighting wasn't providing the release I needed, fucking would.

"Party tonight. Get the word out." I'd said, wiping the sweat from the back of my neck with a hand towel.

"Fuck yes, mate, it's been a minute." Rhys replied, pumping a fist in the air.

Hours later, the house is filled with RCA students and I'm sitting in the dark upstairs, shirtless and smoking a joint. I rarely make an appearance at one of my parties, but I enjoy the sounds of the crowd, the chaos of the party, the desperation of people texting asking if they can come.

She didn't ask if she could come. Just showed up at my home like she wasn't in enemy territory. I'd seen her briefly from the second floor when I'd come out to get a bottle of bourbon.

She'd looked like my every fucking fantasy. Her legs on display in a short dress that accentuated the flare of her hips

and the curve of her ass. She had on light makeup, mascara and gloss, and her arm was intertwined with Sixtine's as they marched through the house.

The sight of her hand on Sixtine's arm reminded me how Jeremy had held hers and I'd walked away, furious. Before I could second guess my next step, I'd texted Lyra. She always made herself available for a quick fuck.

Me: Third door on your right upstairs.

I didn't say anything else. She knew the only times I texted were when I needed her on her back or on her knees. I waited for her in one of the upstairs living rooms. I never allowed her in my room, a subtle reminder that, like the others, I didn't give a shit about her.

She'd walked in with a huge grin on her face and I'd immediately regretted it. She wasn't what I wanted.

Who I wanted.

But I wouldn't have the one my dick wanted, not when her presence at RCA revolted me. Sexual attraction or not, she needed to go back to whatever piece of shit town she'd come from.

So I'd let Lyra sit on my lap and wrap her reedy arms around me as she whined in my ear and stroked my chest.

I couldn't bring myself to touch her back.

This was a fucking waste of time. The only thing I wanted to do was sit alone in the dark and ruminate about what I could do to Bellamy next.

I was about to push Lyra off my lap when the woman herself burst through the door.

Her eyes widened, her mouth dropping into a small 'o' as she'd stood frozen staring at me. Her gaze slid across to Lyra. I thought I saw anger flash in her eyes, but it was gone just as quickly.

Fury had licked through my veins at her interruption. Everywhere I turned, there she was. She'd been at RCA less

than two weeks and yet it felt like I'd suffered through a lifetime of her presence.

Seeing her walking down the hall, head thrown back in laughter as Nera told her a joke. Or bent over a book, a small frown on her face giving way to raised eyebrows as she read something interesting.

I wasn't actively looking, she was just... there.

Everywhere.

Calling her by her name had been like bringing a lit match to a fuse. She'd reacted, running out of the room like she knew she had seconds to get out of the blast radius.

I'd shoved Lyra off my lap with a violent push, stepping over her legs on my way out.

Like an animal on the hunt, I'd tracked my prey. Finding her on her knees as I loomed over her had sent a sadistic bolt of pleasure coursing through my body, thickening my already semi hard dick.

I'd grabbed her throat and spanked her ass, my hits getting substantially more vicious when she'd uttered Jeremy's name.

The thought of him seeing her like this, or even of him simply talking to her had made me want to gouge his eyes out and feed him his own tongue.

I saved that idea for later.

I screwed my eyes shut, my head tilted back against the couch as I thought back to the noises she'd made. The cries, the mewling, the fucking moaning.

I'd spanked her because the beast in me had hungered for it. Craved it with a visceral need.

I hadn't expected her to enjoy it.

To arch into my every stroke.

Fuck.

I bring my hand up to rub my face, trying to erase the memories in the same movement.

Rhys saunters into the living room, Phoenix right behind him.

“I saw Lyra slithering out of the upstairs living room yesterday.” Rhys says, dislike clear in his voice. “Did you fuck her again?”

“No.”

“Thank fuck.”

I slide a glance his way. “Not a fan?”

“Fuck no. She’s always watching, hoping you’ll make it official with her one day. She’s a leech desperate for a bit of power, it’s pathetic.” He says, disgustedly.

He’s not wrong. She’s been getting a little too comfortable with me lately. What started out as a convenient arrangement is now turning into more of a nuisance than I have time for.

I have no interest in her or anyone else when it comes to anything longer term than a few fucks. I’ve never given her any mixed signals that this is more than what it is.

Casual.

Uncomplicated.

Not exclusive.

Phoenix lights a cigarette and takes a deep drag, exhaling the smoke out in progressively smaller rings. For a moment, we watch the smoke quietly, the way it billows and expands before dissipating into nothingness.

“When’s Robert due back?”

My back stiffens. He’d mentioned he’d be in town more often to oversee the scholarship, but my father was hardly the type of parent who warned before he showed up.

I’m sure the next time he returns will be no different than all the last – I’ll come home one day and find the door to his study open, the sounds of his conversation trickling out into the hall.

He’ll find some pretense to call me into his office.

Focus on some imagined mistake I made that would bring shame to the family.

Beat the shit out of me.

Rinse.

Repeat.

You'd think your wife abandoning her kid in her desperation to get away from you would be the biggest kind of scandal, but he'd even managed to spin that. As the CEO of Crowned King Industries, a global securities company, my father had access to a robust PR department who'd spun the story into one of paternal heroism.

The dad who stayed behind when the mother would not.

What a load of bullshit.

As the head of a global securities company, my father could also extend his limitless resources to help find my mother and drag her back here. If he wanted to. He'd allegedly searched for a couple years when she first left, eventually giving up when he couldn't find anything.

I'd asked if he could start looking again once, when I was fourteen.

He'd broken my arm so violently, I still had the metal plate in my radius to prove it. Message received loud and fucking clear.

I hadn't asked again.

"Should be any day now."

Phoenix gives me a long look. I see him hesitate, unsure whether he wants to speak. Of the three of us, Phoenix is the quietness. When he chooses to speak, there's no hesitation. "Spit it out."

"It's getting worse."

Both he and Rhys have had to bandage me up after my father's visits. Those visits used to be few and far between, with only one or two incidents at first. In the few years though,

the number of blows had increased dramatically, with every visit of his featuring at least a few sessions.

I'd never addressed it directly with the guys. They'd silently provided ice packs and vodka, understanding that none of us had the right words for this situation.

But as he grew more violent, I knew they wouldn't sit by idly.

I let my neck drop back so that my head was resting against the couch as I stared at the ceiling. "I know."

"He's escalating."

I grind my teeth as I speak. "I'm aware."

"Why?"

"It's all a fucking power trip. That's why he went above my head on the scholarship. Just a pathetic display of him trying to establish his dominance over me."

The reminder of the fight we'd had about the scholarship has my jaw clenching tightly.

Rhys sits forward so his arms rest on his knees. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing." I say, taking a hit of a joint Rhys hands me. "I'm going to graduate, get my money, get the fuck out of here and never see that asshole again."

12.

Bellamy

I make it through the following Monday with no incidents. Maybe my encounter with Rogue got him to back off.

I see him in the classes we share and he meets my gaze when I look at him, but gives no sign of recognition let alone acknowledgement of what happened on Friday.

If I hadn't told the girls about it the morning after it happened, I might have believed I dreamed it.

When I'm left alone on Tuesday, I start to have hope that maybe our conflict is behind us. I allow that blind belief to lull me into such a false sense of security that when Lyra marches up to me during Wednesday's lunch hour, it takes me until I hit the cold water beneath me to understand she's just shoved me in the pond.

I'd been sitting with the girls, taking advantage of the beautiful September day and eating outside. We packed sandwiches and are sitting with our legs dangling off the pontoon when I spot her approaching. She looks distressed, arms pumping furiously with each step, so I stand to ask her what's wrong.

I blink and my body hits the water. I go under.

What the fuck?

That's the only thought I have as I sink further under. Summers spent swimming in Lake Michigan have my instincts kicking in immediately. My legs push and my arms pull at the water as I emerge with a large breath.

Immediately, my eyes find his. He's sitting right there, slightly on higher ground than the rest of the group. Sitting like a king with his fawning court.

A frown pulls at his brow like he's unsure what's happening, but I don't buy the innocence act. This has his name written all over it. He even got his little girlfriend to do his dirty work again.

Anger builds from zero within me, extending across my entire body and growing like a snowball rolling downhill. It's picking up bitterness, resentment, and hurt on its way down until it forms a tight ball of fury in my gut.

Nera is bent over, extending a hand to help me get out as Six holds back Thayer who's screaming after Lyra's retreating form.

Darkness clouds my vision so that all I can see is him.

My enemy.

Ignoring Nera's outstretched hand, I hoist myself onto the pontoon and stalk hotly towards him. I'm panting, the anger in my chest making it impossible to take anything but short, choppy breaths.

I consider my options. Will the school let me strangle their precious king in public?

"What's next, pig's blood?" I fume, coming to a stop in front of him as I put my arms out to display my wet clothes. "You could at least have the balls to carry these stunts out yourself."

I swallow a gasp as our eyes clash. The look in his gaze is downright feral. I'm suddenly aware of the chilly breeze as a shiver courses through me.

His eyes are bottomless inky pools of desire trained on me. He's not looking at my face. I drop my gaze, taking in my soaking wet white blouse. Water is falling off me in rivulets that pin my shirt to my chest like a second skin.

My white silk bra is also drenched and does nothing to hide the hard peaks of my dusty pink nipples as they strain

against the fabric.

I'm accidentally giving Rogue and all of his friends a free show. If the movement of his chest is anything to go by, his breathing is just as erratic as mine. Sharp breaths rip from him as he stares at me, his nostrils flaring, his tattooed arms flexing. The danger around him is a physical thing.

Lust and anger permeate the air, sparking the connection between us like a tripwire.

He stands, grabbing his sweater by the neck and ripping it off as he eats the space between us in two giant strides.

“Put this on.” He demands, thrusting it at me.

“Why? Isn't this exactly what you wanted, me humiliated in every way?” I say, crossing my arms angrily over my chest.

The movement only serves to push my breasts up towards him. His gaze drops and hunger etches itself across his face again.

I take a step back.

His hand grabs my waist, wrenching me back against him.

“Don't. Move.” He warns dangerously.

His fingers dig into my hip, his hold on me controlling. My hands are splayed against his chest, my front pressed to his. I feel the hardness of his cock against my lower belly.

My thighs clench and my fingers curl into his shirt as arousal slams into me. Damn him for looking so beautiful, even as he torments me. I go to move away again, but he keeps me firmly anchored against him.

“What are you doing?”

“There's ten guys behind me waiting for you to step back so they can get another look at your tits, so don't fucking move.” He grits out through clenched teeth. He pushes the sweater at me once more. “And put this on.”

I take hold of it, but make no move to put it on. “What makes you think I'm ever going to do anything you ask me to do?”

His eyes spark in his stupidly handsome face. “Because by now you know what happens if you don’t.”

A shudder runs through my body at the reminder of how he spanked me. For a split second, part of me considers not doing what he wants so he can punish me again.

“Aren’t you the one who said I sucked dick for my scholarship? What’s showing my tits to a few more people when apparently I got on my knees to get ahead?” I ask flippantly, taunting him with his words.

His hand shoots out and grips my jaw, yanking my face to his.

“Is that what you are?” He asks darkly. His voice is taut, strained tight around the edges of his temper. “Are you a slut?”

Still in his hold, I close the gap between our faces until there’s mere millimeters separating us. His eyes drop to my mouth a couple times before coming back up to meet mine.

I’m so close to him, my lips brush against his when I speak. “Wouldn’t you like to know.”

The bell rings.

I rip my face out of his hand and stalk off.

I hurl my things at the floor and drop into my seat with a huff. I’m in such a foul mood, even Greek mythology isn’t going to make a dent in my anger. I’m still clutching Rogue’s stupid sweater in my hand.

It’s an RCA Running t-shirt. I didn’t know he ran track. On the back, the name ‘Royal’ is spelled over a giant ‘1’.

Of fucking course.

“Cocky asshole.” I mutter as I turn it inside out and put it on. I want my tits out in World History about as much as I want to be associated with his name.

“What’s that?”

I peek my head out through the hoodie of the sweatshirt and see Jeremy lounging casually on my desk.

“Sorry, ignore me.” I say, putting my arms through the sleeves and shaking my hair out of the hood. “Just talking to myself.”

“No worries. I wanted to check if we were still on for Thursday?”

I pause mid-way through rolling up one of the sweater’s sleeves. Rogue is a foot taller than me and I’m swimming in his shirt. “Thursday?”

“You know, tut—”

“Tutoring! That’s right. Sorry, it momentarily slipped my mind.”

“That’s alright. So, 8pm? I’ll pick you up?”

“You’re in my way, Rathford.” A deadly voice snaps from behind him.

Rogue towers over Jeremy’s shoulder as he glares down at us.

“No you’re not, Jeremy. Ignore him.” I say, placing a hand on his thigh.

The muscle in Rogue jaw twitches furiously. His glare looks down to burn the hand that touches Jeremy with a heated glare.

His eyes come back up to meet mine. Without looking away from me, he barks out an order. “Get lost, Rathford.”

Jeremy walks away, the fucking coward. There’s another life lesson from my mom right there; never trust a man in boat shoes on dry land.

“Is that who you’re getting on your knees for next?” Rogue hisses at me savagely. “Good luck getting him hard when he sees it’s you holding his limp dick.”

My hand flies out before I can stop it and cracks against his cheek. His face snaps to the right and stays there for a beat.

He side eyes me before turning back to face me. I go to slap him again but this time he snatches my wrist out of mid air before it can connect with his cheek.

“Fuck you.” I snarl at him, chest heaving laboriously.

“Miss Ward! Mr Royal!” I turn towards the interruption. It’s Professor Duncan, our History teacher. By the stricken look on his face, I know he witnessed at least part of our argument and the physical altercation that followed

“Principal’s office. Now.”

13.

Rogue

If I thought Bellamy looked pale when Duncan originally caught us, it's nothing compared to the white sheen of her skin as we sit in Principal Thornton's office.

Her clothes are still drenched and I wonder if that's what's making her look so sick.

She looks like she might faint at any moment.

I keep a wary eye on her as Thornton sits down in his chair.

"Yelling. Cursing. A physical altercation in Professor Duncan's class. And apparently this isn't the first incident between you two. I've got half a dozen different teachers here complaining of bickering and fighting in their classes." He rattles off, reading from a file on his desk. "Explain yourselves."

I stay silent.

Bellamy is in the chair next to mine, shrinking into the seat as if doing her best to try and disappear. She looks worse as time goes on, her color having turned completely ashen before my eyes. There's none of the usual fire or witty banter that she usually displays when we fight. Like when she taunted me after emerging soaking wet from the pond.

Her hair dripping, her mouth firing off.

She'd looked so fucking stunning.

And now she sits quietly, curled into herself.

I don't like it.

"Very well." Thornton says, organizing the pages on his desk. "Royal, don't think you're getting out of this one because of your last name. Six weeks of detention for the both of you, and an official admonishment in your permanent school records."

At his words, Bellamy folds in half over her knees, her head in her hands. Her whole body is shaking.

Thornton keeps talking, unseeing to her reaction. "The Mackley Library is meant to open soon, but I'll admit we're behind on shelving the books. You'll spend the next six weeks cleaning and organizing the library ahead of the grand reopening."

"Bathroom." She croaks suddenly, the first word she's uttered since Duncan caught us. "Can I use the bathroom?"

He waves her off and she runs out of the room. Unease crawls in my stomach when she doesn't immediately return.

"I'm going to the bathroom as well, I'll be back."

"Did you hear what I said?" Thornton asks me.

"Loud and clear, Phil." I reply, not so subtly reminding him who really has the power here. He may sit behind the desk but only because I let him.

I'm by the door when he answers. "It's Principal Thornton, Royal."

"Whatever you say, Phil." I say, letting the door slam loudly behind me.

In the hallway, I consider which bathroom she'd have gone to. Most likely the one at the top of the stairwell in front of Thornton's office and not the one down the hall. There's a fencing tournament happening this afternoon and she wouldn't risk being seen.

I take the stairs two steps at a time to the next floor. The hallway is empty.

I push open the door to the girl's bathroom and walk in.

Bellamy is bent over the sink, her entire body shaking, her hands desperately searching for something to hold on to. My sweater lies discarded under a toilet stall door where she's thrown it. She's ripped her blouse open, the buttons lying scattered at her feet on the floor. Her chest heaves as she unsuccessfully tries to swallow huge lungfuls of air.

She looks terrified.

Seeing her struggle to breathe is terrifying.

"Bellamy."

She whips around at the sound of my voice before stumbling back a step. "Stay the hell...away from me." She churns out laboriously.

I take two steps into the room and crouch so I'm level with her. "What's happening?"

Her hands are on her knees as she fights to breathe. A sob breaks free from her throat, but no tears follow. "Leave me... alone."

"Tell me what's happening and I will."

She manages to shoot me a glare even as sweat dots her brow. "I'm having...a panic attack...asshole. What does it... look like?"

The corner of my mouth twitches.

"Was that...a smile? Of course...your first real smile comes at...my pain, I don't know what...I was expecting." She grits out through hacked breaths.

I ignore her jokes. "How do you know it's a panic attack?"

"Had them...before. I'm here on a scholarship...genius. I can't get a... permanent admonishment... on my record." She gasps out.

Straightening to my full height, I push upwards on her shoulder. “Stand up.”

“Now you want...to gloat? Please... just leave me... alone.” She manages. “You said...you would.”

I push harder on her shoulders, forcing her to stand upright. “Shoulders back, keep your chest open like this.” I demonstrate. “When you bend over like before, you’re closing your lungs and making it harder to breathe.”

She does as I say, managing to take a couple deeper breaths. Grabbing her hand in my right, I hook my thumb around hers. I squeeze hard, and she yelps. “Focus on my touch. Don’t think about anything else, just zone in on my hand.” She gives my hand a hard squeeze back. “Good girl.”

My left hand closes around her throat gently. My grip is light, barely there.

She’s staring at me. Her gaze is inscrutable, her chest still moving up and down erratically. My thumb rubs against her pulse point as I track the settling beat.

“Focus on your breathing. You’re not dying, everything is fine.”

I can reach my thumb up to her mouth from where my hand rests around her throat. As I speak, I softly caress her plump bottom lip, the color still as blood red as the first time I lay eyes on her.

Her mouth parts slightly in reaction and I take the opportunity to close the distance between us and suck her upper lip into my mouth. It’s not a kiss, it’s a taste. I need to see if her lips taste as good as they look. Suctioning it into my mouth, I run the tip of my tongue along her lip before biting it sharply.

When I release it, she whimpers. The sound shoots straight to my cock.

Fuck *me*.

I look at Bellamy. She’s frozen still, her eyes wide and her fingers pressed against her lips in disbelief. A satisfied smile

stretches across my face when I notice her top lip is bleeding.

Three loud raps on the door force us apart.

“Miss Ward, are you in there?” Thornton’s voice calls from outside the door. “You have thirty seconds to get out here before I add another two weeks of detention to your bill.”

I exit before her, leaving her to gather her belongings with shaky hands.

Thornton gives us the world’s most useless tour, wasting half an hour of my life in the process. It’s an empty room with shelves that need to be stacked.

Pretty self-explanatory if you ask me.

Bellamy doesn’t say a word during the entire tour, her arms crossed defensively around her middle as she trails behind Thornton wordlessly.

“You’ll be here every weekday at 5pm without fail for the next six weeks. I want biweekly updates on your progress. And Miss Ward,” She looks up at him when he says her name. “It goes without saying that we’ll have to formally review the status of your scholarship in the context of these new developments.”

She nods her head almost imperceptibly, whispering a defeated “Yes, sir.”

“You’re dismissed.”

She doesn’t wait to be told a second time, grabbing her things and leaving before he can change his mind.

Thornton claps a hand on my shoulder. “No hard feelings, son. You know I can’t show any favoritism in these moments.”

He goes to move past me but I grab him by the lapel of his suit jacket and hold him in place.

“You’re not going to review anything.”

“Pardon me?”

“I don’t like repeating myself.” I tell him. “You won’t review anything to do with Bellamy’s scholarship and you won’t add a permanent admonishment to her file.”

She can’t leave now. This is just getting interesting.

He puffs out his chest, a small, unimportant nobody trying to make himself look bigger in front of a beast much higher up in the food chain. “I’ll have to see with your father—”

Wrapping my hand around his tie, I use it to yank him to his knees before me. My foot pushes down on the prone hand he’d used to catch himself, adding just enough weight to almost break fingers.

I press down harshly, hearing the satisfying crunch beneath my foot. I definitely got his pinky with that one.

He screams helplessly, the pussy. I’m not even adding much pressure.

“You’ll say nothing to my father. In fact, you’ll tell him she’s exceeding expectations and you’re absofuckinglutely thrilled. I want you to tell him what a great choice he’s made. Otherwise I’ll let the lovely Mrs. Thornton know about the special one on one staff meetings you have with Professor Stevens. Understood?”

Another perk of being at the top of the food chain? The endless amount of useful information filtered back to me to be used for my blackmailing discretion.

It comes in handy for moments like these.

“Alright, alright!” He promises. “Let go of my hand.”

Magnanimous, I do as requested. He cups his hurt hand in the other, rubbing it gingerly as he does so. “I imagine you want me to revoke the detention as well?”

I hadn’t even considered it. I’d been looking forward to inflicting a new kind of torment on Bellamy.

“No. Keep the detention.”

“Where have you been?” Phoenix asks as I walk into the TV room an hour later. Rhys is sitting next to him, typing away on his phone. He puts it down when he sees me, a mischievous grin spreading across his face.

There’s a bottle of bourbon sitting between them.

“Phoenix hasn’t heard about your little dust up. Why don’t you bring him up to speed?”

I flip him the finger as I drop onto the couch beside him. Grabbing the bourbon, I take a swig straight from the bottle as I settle in.

“Duncan sent him to Thornton’s office during World History.”

“Jesus. What did you do?”

I didn’t think it was possible, but Rhys’ grin gets even bigger. “Go ahead, tell him who you got into it with.”

“Fuck off.”

“Fiiiiine,” He says, elongating the one syllable dramatically. “He had another domestic with Bellamy.”

Phoenix laughs out loud. “What is your issue with her?”

“It wasn’t a domestic, fucker, and she was in my way.”

“It was and she wasn’t. Admit you got territorial when you saw Jeremy talking to her.”

Something ugly unfurls inside of me as I recall seeing him sitting on her desk, leering down at her when I’d walked into class.

My fists clench at the memory. I hadn’t been lying when I told him he was in my way. He was.

She and I had unfinished business, it had nothing to do with me being territorial or not. Seeing her sitting there, still

wet, flush, red lips parted as she listened to him, I'd tensed up.

Then I'd heard him say he'd pick her up for something and I'd snapped, spewing vitriolic words at her that I knew would make her react.

"You're wrong."

"So she's fair game then?" Phoenix asks with a taunting smile. "Because Bellamy's fucking hot, mate. If you're not interested, I might see if I can get a little taste for myself."

He licks his lip in a clear provocation. He's goading me into reacting. All I can think about is him sucking her top lip like I did today. My already black mood darkens to Vanta Black when I think about him potentially kissing her before I do.

My grip on the neck of the bourbon bottle is so tight, it's seconds away from accidentally being crushed to pieces in my hand. He should know better than to fucking play with me. If he wants a war, I'll give him one.

"Do what you want." I say with a dismissive flick of my hand. "You already know that Sixtine's more my type anyway. Maybe I'll shoot my shot if you're no longer going to be hovering over her."

The sight of his grin wiping off his face abruptly has complete satisfaction coursing through me. It's followed quickly by violence erupting in his gaze at my words.

"Fuck you, Rogue." He hisses, grabbing me by my collar. "Stay away from her."

Snatching his hand, I twist it off of me, holding it at an awkward angle away from his body.

"Likewise."

The warning clear in my voice.

I shove his hand away and he sits back in his chair with a glare in my direction.

"Since we're all calling dibs," Rhys says, jumping in good naturedly, "Thayer's mine."

“She’s already someone else’s.”

His gaze snaps to me. “Would you let that stop you?”

Fair enough.

His voice brooks no discussion. I know that look in his eye, the one he gets when faced with an impossible challenge. If there’s someone who’s more competitive than me, it’s Rhys. That’s why he’s the captain of our football team. Beneath that disarming *laissez faire* attitude, there’s a cobra waiting to strike.

He lies in wait, a charming smile on his face, biding his time until the perfect opening presents itself.

If he’s decided he wants Thayer, she doesn’t stand a chance.

“And you can’t get out of detention?” Rhys asks circling back to today’s events, his tone dubious.

If I tell him my plan to use detention as a new way to get under Bellamy’s skin, he’ll start again with his territorial bullshit. So I keep that quiet. For now.

“Apparently, he’s making an example out of me.” I say with a careless shrug. “I’m quoting him directly here.”

“Wanker.”

I’m in my room scrolling aimlessly on my phone when it pings. I read the notification banner for IG at the top of the screen.

@RhysMackley: sent you a post by reaslut.

Another ping, this time a message from him.

@RhysMackley: thought you’d want to see this.

I click on the notification and go to my chat with Rhys.

It's a photo posted to a public feed, so I can see it even though I don't follow the account.

The photo is of Bellamy and I, clearly taken right after Lyra pushed her in the pond. Anger twists my facial expression as I think back to that moment. I hadn't given Lyra the order to do that, she'd done it of her own volition fueled by misguided possessiveness over me.

In the picture, I'm stalking fiercely towards Bellamy, tension pulling my shoulders together tightly. She's standing defiantly before me, arms spread wide in the universal 'come and get it' pose. Her shirt sticks to her skin, her hair to her body. She looks untamed and wild and so fucking stunning it takes my breath away for a second, just like it did in the moment.

Savage protectiveness had raged through me, the need to hide her away from the world almost suffocating.

Her gorgeous tits are obscured, hidden behind her left arm at the angle the picture is taken. Thank fuck for that. If a picture of her hard nipples had been plastered on Instagram, I'd have had to take down the entire app. It'd have been a challenge but one that I'd have taken much pleasure in demolishing if crossed this way.

My mood turns murderous thinking of anyone else seeing her like that. Angry and gloriously unashamed of her semi nakedness. The memory of her hard nipples has my dick straining against the fabric of my trousers. Flicking the button of my jeans, I yank the zipper down and fist my hard cock. I stare at the photo of her as I pump my hand up and down viciously.

Closing my eyes, I think about how her nipples had strained against the fabric of her t-shirt, how they'd hardened when she'd realized I was looking at them.

I come in less than five minutes, the image of Bellamy's plump, red lips parted in surprise enough to send me over the edge.

I open the messages app on my phone and text Six.

Me: Text me Bellamy's phone number.

Sixtine: Hello to you too. I'm doing well, thanks for asking.

Me: Hello, how are you, give me Bellamy's fucking phone number.

Sixtine: In your dreams.

My teeth grind together at her text. Bellamy's resistance to my taunts has lulled her friends into a false sense of security. It's pissing me off.

Me: Think very carefully about what you're doing.

Sixtine: Why do you even want it?

Me: I need to tell her something.

Sixtine: So you want me to give you her number so you can abuse her a little more? Pass.

Me: It's about detention.

Sixtine: Detention?

Me: She hasn't told you?

Sixtine: She hasn't come home yet.

My brow furrows at that. She should have been home hours ago.

Me: Just give me her fucking number.

Sixtine: Promise you won't bully her?

Me: ...

Sixtine: shared Bellamy Ward's contact.

Sixtine: Don't make me regret this.

I close out of my conversation with Six and start a new one with Bellamy.

Me: Where are you?

14.

Bellamy

Unknown number: Where are you?

I'm about to reply asking who the number belongs to when I receive another message, this time from Six.

Six: Hey, I gave Rogue your number. He's probably going to text you.

Six: Sorry, he was pretty insistent. You know how he is. He promised he wouldn't use his powers for evil though. Let me know if he does, I'll give him *un coup dans les boules* as we say.

Six: Translation: I'll kick him in the balls.

Six: Also, where are you? Everything okay?

I darken the screen and toss my phone to the ground next to me. My legs dangle off the side of the pontoon. I've been sitting here for the past two hours, wracking my brain trying to find a solution to my current predicament.

I don't know how I got here.

No, that's not right. I know exactly how I got here. I'm aware of all the decisions I've made in the past two weeks that have brought me to this point. What I'm still trying to figure out is how I let it happen.

How I put everything on the line, my future, my mom's future, just to stand up to Rogue. In retrospect, it wasn't even worth it. There is no sense of victory from having slapped him,

just disappointment that I let him goad me to that point. Six was right, I should have taken the path of least resistance. There's no winning with someone who's determined to destroy you, no matter the collateral damage. He probably doesn't even know what collateral damage is. A permanent mark on his record is nothing to him, daddy will just fix it.

Tears crest past my water line and fall down my cheeks. I bat them away with the back of my hand. I don't get to cry about fucking up my own life.

The lump in my throat remains as I think about the upcoming consequences of my actions. Six weeks of detention starting tomorrow. Six weeks in a closed space with Rogue. I feel the stirrings of anxiety in my body and work to cool myself down before I have another panic attack.

I lie down on my back, keeping my chest as wide as possible.

I focus on the feeling of my hands intertwined together.

I take deep, steadying breaths.

My heart rate comes back down to a stable tempo. How had Rogue known exactly what to do to calm me down? He doesn't strike me as someone who's anything but overly confident in all aspects of his life, let alone someone who struggles with anxiety. I don't think there's much if anything that can really get past the titanium walls he has built around him to hurt him in that way.

But I'd seen something in his eyes when he'd found me in that bathroom, something I knew he wouldn't easily admit to.

Concern.

Then he'd calmed me down and sucked my lip. It should have been an awkward thing to do, but it was erotic in its unexpectedness. I'd leaned in and had only cried out when he'd bit me. The pleasure followed by the hint of pain had me almost panting before him.

My phone pings again, this time with a single word.

Unknown number: Bellamy.

I can hear the growling tone of his voice as he texts my name in a one word command. There's a barely veiled warning there.

Answer or else.

I resist the almost physical urge to reply with the middle finger emoji and darken my screen again. Figures he'd terrorize me for merely existing around him then torment me about my whereabouts when I'm far from him and see no issue with either of those things.

He's the one who had me pushed me in the pond, unprovoked. The one who then came looking for a second confrontation in World History. He's the reason my scholarship is at risk now.

Fuck it. I'm sending the middle finger emoji.

The satisfaction is temporary. Here I go again, provoking him. I bring a hand to my forehead with a groan.

What the hell are you doing, Bellamy?

My phone dings and anticipation flutters in my stomach.

Unknown number: Don't make me come find you. I promise you'll like our interaction when I do even less than our previous ones.

Bellamy: What part of leave me alone do you not understand? And why do you care where I am, anyway?

I save his number in my phone while I await his response.

Asshole: You should have been back at the pen two hours ago.

My mouth gapes at his message.

Bellamy: Where I go, what I do and who I do it with has nothing to do with you.

On the side, I message Six.

Bellamy: Did you tell Rogue I haven't come home yet?

Six: Oops, sorry. It slipped out when he mentioned needing to talk to you about detention. Speaking of which...

detention???

Bellamy: I'll explain when I'm back. On my way now.

I stand up, brushing dirt off the back of my jeans. I pack my things and head down the pontoon when my phone dings. I open my message and see a one word reply from Rogue.

Asshole: Wrong.

I ignore his text and turn off my phone, my revived determination to ignore him powering my steps home.

Mercifully, I only have one class Thursday morning and it goes by uneventfully.

I keep my distance from Rogue at all times, even going so far as avoiding eye contact with him. I feel his stare burn into my back but stand firm and never look back at him.

“Rogue looks like he’s trying to light you on fire with the power of his gaze alone, B.”

I’m in the cafeteria with Thayer and the other girls, listlessly pushing vegetables around my plate. She doesn’t need to tell me, I feel his eyes on my back like a physical weight. I can tell his annoyance is growing the more I refuse to engage with him.

“Ignore him. He’ll hate it.” I tell her.

Now Nera turns around to look for herself.

“Jesus, he’s glowering at you. Do you think it’s because you didn’t answer his text yesterday?”

When I’d gotten home last night, I’d headed straight for the shower. Standing naked in front of the mirror, I’d found myself looking like a drowned rat, courtesy of my impromptu swim in the pond.

I'd washed the muck and stress of the day away and wrapped myself in fluffy towels before telling the girls about what happened yesterday.

They'd been horrified, immediately wanting to intervene with Principal Thornton in my favor, but I'd refused. I'd gotten myself into this situation, I'd get myself out of it.

My phone vibrates with a text and I know, I just know, it's him. He won't be ignored, especially not by me.

I grab my phone and open up the text.

Asshole: Keep ignoring me and you'll pay.

A shiver of anticipation courses through me before I metaphorically strangle it to death. It's not anticipation, it's loathing.

It has to be.

I drop my phone in my bag without replying, in full view of his gaze.

"Was that...?" Six asks me.

"Yup."

"And you're not...?" Nera asks.

"Nope."

Six laughs. "Like I said." She says, taking a sip of her water. "Balls of steel."

When I walk through the doors of the Mackley Library at 5pm sharp, the dominating emotion I'm feeling is dread.

I finished the rest of my classes without incident, careful to avoid Rogue's gaze when he tried to meet mine.

He also didn't go looking for a physical confrontation with me and kept his distance instead, so we've had no interactions today.

That's what worries me. He's not the type to shy away from conflict, especially not with me.

I spot him lounging on the couch in the lounge section of the library. His position is so dominantly male. Tattooed, muscular arms outstretched on the back of the couch, head thrown back so his Adam's apple is bared, legs splayed open. He commands the space like he owns it and in some way, he does.

He's deceptively relaxed, his half-lidded eyes stalking me lazily as I walk across the room, but I can tell from the clench of his jaw he's ready to pounce at any sign of weakness. There's a slight smirk pulling at the corner of his mouth when I meet his eyes for the first time today.

I look away quickly, but of course he's seen me.

It's not my fault, it's really not. The way he's sitting exudes so much raw power and masculinity and his gaze is so intense, it's hard not to look. Looking at him is like looking at the sun. There's a pull to stare at such obvious beauty, but you know it's not good for you, that it'll hurt you if you look for too long.

A better woman wouldn't look at all and I am not her.

Without a word, I drop my bag on the table and head into a random row of shelves. There's a vintage shelf on either side of me and at the end of the row, a small table rests against the wall. Under the table there's an array of brown boxes. The books have been pre-sorted into those boxes by section so all we need to do is alphabetize and shelve them. Mindless busywork that'll take us the full six weeks if not more. And that's if Rogue helps. The fact that he hasn't moved from the couch doesn't give me much confidence that he'll do anything but use the time to organize his next hookup.

I rip into one of the boxes angrily, pulling out the books and stacking them on the table. I figure I'll start placing them on the shelves randomly and alphabetize as I go.

"Is ignoring me your new plan?"

I smother the shriek in my throat as I whirl around to face Rogue. He's standing a couple feet away from me. He's lethally quiet in his movements, I didn't even hear him get up.

His arms are crossed on his chest as he stares at me with a menacing glint in his eye. As always, the threat of violence hangs around him, like he's forever ready for a fight. There's never a moment of true peace within him. His body is tight, his muscles corded no matter the conversation.

I turn my back to him, taking two books in my hands and placing them on the shelf.

"I'm not ignoring you. I'm just not interested."

I busy myself with books, grabbing some from the table, setting them on the shelf and repeating the action. I get up on my tiptoes to reach the highest shelf on which I need to set a book by an author named Arnold. Before I can stretch to reach, a hand plucks the book out of mine and comes above me to place it on the top shelf.

Rogue is behind me now, his body pressed against mine. My back is glued to his front. If I'm not mistaken, I can feel the outline of his erection against my lower back.

"Not interested in what?" He growls out above me.

I whirl around. "Not interested in anything to do with you! I've had enough of the fights and the arguments and the hate. I give up, alright? You win, just like you wanted. Just like you always do."

I go to turn back around but his hand shoots out to grip mine, keeping me anchored in place. "Because of a little detention? I thought you'd be tougher to break than that." He taunts evilly.

"*Not* just because of detention, although I certainly don't take it as casually as you do, you reprobate." I fight back. "Because not everyone feels the need to go through life fighting everybody. Because I'm tired. Because my scholarship is at risk. Because some of us have more at stake than just a few weeks of detention and no rich daddy waiting in the wings ready to make all our mistakes disappear."

His hand shoots out before I can blink and wraps around my throat in a death grip. The bottomless pools of his eyes spark with equal measures of boundless fury and desire. He shoves me against the bookshelf, using his wrist to push my head backwards against one of the racks until I meet his glare.

“Anyone ever tell you that your mouth is going to get you in trouble one day?” He grounds out, anger and lust making his deep voice vibrate as he speaks.

“My mom, every single day of my life.” I spit out flippantly.

“Maybe someone should shut you up then.”

The thumb of the hand he has wrapped around my throat parts my lips and shoves into my mouth. I choke as Rogue thrusts his thick digit in and out in a repetitive movement.

“Suck it, Bellamy.”

I clench my thighs at his rough command, arousal pooling into my lower stomach. I shake my head back and forth, saying no. The look in his eye is downright evil as he shoves his thumb deeper into my throat, making me gag again.

“I said, suck.”

I do as he says. His pleased groan echoes in the air as I bob my head back and forth.

“Fuck, look at you. So desperate for it.”

My heart stops beating as I hear the sound of the library door opening, followed by Principal Thornton’s voice.

“This is the Mackley Library. We’ve just finished a complete renovation in honor of Richard and Lorraine Mackley – I’m sure you’ve heard, of course – and now we’re prepping for the grand opening at the end of October.”

He keeps talking, clearly giving a guided tour of the grounds to a prospective student and their family.

I release Rogue’s thumb and try to distance myself from him but can’t because he has me stuck between him and the shelf.

“Let me go.” I whisper hiss at him.

He does the opposite. He shoves my skirt up around my hips before gripping the fabric of my tights above my center.

“Rogue, don’t—”

The sound of him ripping my tights off me thunders loud as a gunshot in the otherwise quiet library.

I’m like a deer in the headlights, frozen in shock. Even my breathing stops as I wait to see if Principal Thornton hears the noise and will discover us.

But he keeps talking.

And Rogue works the fingers of his right hand under my panties, caressing my clit.

My eyes roll into the back of my head at the touch.

“What are you doing?”

One touch and he has me on the brink, my right arm shooting out to hold onto the shelf separator next to me as my left arm comes up to fist his shirt, grasping for purchase.

A pleased rumble sounds in his chest. I can feel it against mine as we stand pressed against one another.

“You like that?” He purrs.

His fingers dip down into my slit, drawing a repeated path from my opening back up to my clit that has me shaking in his brutal hold.

“W-what are you doing?” I repeat desperately.

My mouth parts, my eyelids droop, my breaths hitch. His gaze roams over every inch of my face, taking in each miniscule reaction. His eyes take it all in without blinking, like if he closed his eyes for even a second he might miss something. There’s wonder on his face mixed with fierce possession.

“Teaching you a lesson.”

He pinches my clit and I yelp, the sound swallowed by the hand he brings to cover my mouth.

His touch is the only thing I can see or feel or think about. I have no idea what I've done, what this lesson could be for. I search my brain desperately. "For ignoring you?"

"For being a filthy little liar." He runs his fingers through my slit a couple of times before raising them between us. They glisten with my arousal. "You're fucking drenched for me, sweetheart. Your body wants me even when your mouth claims to hate me."

I avert my eyes, embarrassed. The hand on my mouth moves to grip my jaw, forcing my face forward.

"Don't be embarrassed by how badly your body wants me, Bellamy." He says as he presses his thick erection into my stomach. "I'm not."

He puts both fingers in his mouth, a groan vibrating deep in his chest as he licks them clean. The sight of him sucking my arousal off his fingers while Thornton continues the tour is the hottest fucking thing I've ever seen. There's delight etched on his face as he feasts on my juices like they're the best thing he's ever tasted.

His eyes blacken with desire when he sees the look on my face. "If you keep looking at me like that, I'll fuck you against this bookshelf."

He laughs quietly when I flush and look away. "No, you're not ready for that." He says, his hand coming back down between my legs. I gasp as his fingers find my center again. "I'll settle on making you come on my hand. For now."

His middle finger traces down my folds and enters me in one go. My mouth drops open in a silent scream as pleasure like I've never felt before slams into me.

His finger thrusts into me mercilessly, and I can't do anything except hold on to him for dear life. I feel like Thornton's voice gets closer and the combination of the physical sensations and the thrill of being caught has a fireball of heat tearing through me, building and building until it crests.

Rogue mouth comes down to the side of my face as he grunts against my ear. “Shh, you need to be very fucking quiet now. No one hears your screams but me.”

He slams a second finger into me as his thumb flicks my clit and time stops.

There’s a rip in the space-time continuum as the orgasm hits me with the force of a tsunami, making me freeze for an excruciating moment before sending me crashing over the edge.

His hand covers my mouth and muffles the scream trying to break free. I fall forward, boneless, into his chest. His arms wrap around my waist and he holds me as I catch my breath. His dick throbs against me, searching for its own release. I tilt my head back to look at him. His eyes are feral with desire as they bore into mine. It does something to me to know I affect him this way.

Principal Thornton’s voice shatters the moment. My eyes widen in panic when I realize how close he sounds. Pulling my skirt back down over my ripped tights without a word, I duck under Rogue arm and grab a book. I’m just in time as he rounds the corner to the row we’re in.

“Rogue. Miss Ward?” He asks, clearly surprised. “I didn’t know you two were in here.”

Rogue throws him a rude look over his shoulder. “You assigned us to detention here for the next six weeks.”

“Yes, well. That momentarily escaped my mind. Carry on, we’ll leave you to it.” He pauses before leaving. “And Rogue, Miss Ward here is the only one I see working. I expect you to contribute and not leave her to complete this task by herself.”

“Don’t worry, Phil. I’ve been giving Bellamy a helping hand.” He says with a smug smile in my direction.

I give him a sharp look and say nothing.

Principal Thornton leaves with his company in tow, and Rogue and I are alone once more.

“You call him Phil?” I ask, incredulously, trying to set some distance between us after what just happened. “Do you ever think about how much of an unfair advantage nepotism gives you?”

“Never.” He replies drolly, and I roll my eyes. “What I will be thinking about though is how your tight cunt squeezed my fingers before you came all over my hand.”

I stab a book into the shelf. “We’re not talking about that.”

“Why not?”

“Because it was a mistake and it’s not happening again.”

He has the gall to laugh at that. “If you say so.”

“I do.” I say it fiercely, hoping it’ll lend truth to the statement.

He says nothing. He grabs a stack of ‘A’ books I’d left to the side for later when I’d grab a chair to help me reach the top shelf. He starts stacking them into the library, taking care to alphabetize them within the letter ‘A’ as he goes. For a few minutes, we don’t speak, working quietly next to each other.

“What if I told you I could get the permanent note expunged from your records?” He asks. “There’d be no trace of it or the detention in your file.”

I freeze, a book clutched in my hand as it’s raised halfway to a shelf. “How?”

He grins at me and it’s almost playful. “Those nepotism perks aren’t looking so bad now, are they?”

I resist the urge to throw my book at him and narrow my eyes skeptically. “Why would you do that?”

“Because I’d get something in return.”

And there it is. Nothing is ever free with him. An eye for an eye and a favor for a favor, clearly.

I return to angrily stacking books. “Of course, my mistake. Why would you do something nice when you can be a dick about it?”

He towers over me, suddenly in front of me. I look up at him. “I’m not nice, Bellamy. Don’t make the mistake of thinking I’d ever be the hero in your story. I’m the villain.”

I don’t know how anyone can be so hot and cold at the same time. One moment touching me with ravenous hunger, the next cold and detached, like a stranger standing before me.

“What do you want?”

“Total obedience for the next six weeks.”

My brow draws downwards in confusion. “What?”

His hand comes up to gently push a lock of hair out of my face. It’s not a lover’s gentle caress, it’s a reminder that he thinks he can do what he wants with me, whenever he wants. I shake him off and cross my arms.

“For the duration of our time spent together in detention, you’ll be at my beck and call to do what I want, whenever I want.” It’s as if he pulls the word right out of my brain. “If I want you to write my English Lit paper, you’ll do it. If I want you to come clean my house at 2am, you’ll show up with a broom and a mop and ask me what room I want you to start with.”

It’s my turn to laugh. “You’re crazy if you think I’m going to agree to that.”

He shrugs. “That’s up to you. But that’s my offer.”

I hate that I’m even considering it. Realistically, I’m absolutely getting the short end of the stick in this deal. Knowing him, he’ll have me scrubbing his toilet bowl with a toothbrush while he watches. And that’s the best case scenario assuming he doesn’t make me do something batshit crazy. His wealth and power might protect him, but I have no safety net if I’m caught doing anything illegal.

“How long do I have to decide?”

He looks down at his watch. “Five minutes.”

Entitled asshole.

“I won’t do anything illegal.” It’s a demand, not a question.

“Fine.”

Another thought springs to mind, remembering the way I just fell apart after a few touches. “And nothing sexual.”

This time, his smirk is downright cocky. “I haven’t had to force you to do anything sexual, Bellamy. I don’t intend to start needing to now.”

Ignoring that last comment, I make my final request. “And we call a truce. No more bullying, no more threats, no more attacks. Not from you or any of your blind followers. There’s no use getting my record expunged only for me to get expelled two weeks later because I tried to murder you.” I extend my hand towards him. “We’re not friends, we just stay out of each other’s way. If you can agree to that, then I’ll shake on it.”

He looks at me stoically for a long moment, giving nothing away. Then, he takes a step forward and puts his hand in mine.

The now familiar spark that ignites when he touches me shoots up my arm.

“Deal.” He says.

“Deal.” I reply.

He drops my hand and takes a step back. “I’m going to have fun.”

I don’t doubt it. I know he’s going to make me regret my decision. “So when does this start?”

He pulls out his phone and types out a message. “It’s done. Your record is clean.” Putting his phone away, he waves a hand towards the open boxes on the table. “Now what you do and who you do it with is absolutely my business.” He says with a victorious smile. “You can start by finishing to organize the books in those boxes. I’m going home.”

He turns on his heel to leave when I interrupt him. “I can’t,” I splutter as he looks at me over his shoulder. I’m struck again by how attractive he is. His golden face and dark

lashes lending a fragile beauty to the savagery in his gaze. “I have to leave in thirty minutes. I’m tutoring Jeremy.”

His gaze doesn’t change, but something in the air shifts. “Too fucking bad. You made a deal.” He storms off, stopping at the door before stalking out. “You know what, finish the entire row before you leave this room.”

That’s going to take another four hours at least. I’ll be here well into the night. Clearly, the 2.0 version of Rogue’s reign of terror just went into effect. But if it means a clean record, I can live with the consequences of my decision.

I think.

15.

Rogue

The library door slams behind me as I stomp off. Fuck her tutoring session with that limp dick prick. I'm itching to go back in there and order her to never speak to him again.

I stop in my tracks, contemplating it.

Knowing her, if I used our deal in that way she'd flip me off before running into that fucker's waiting open arms. The move would backfire and I'd just end up pushing her in his direction. That's out of the question.

My fixation with her has evolved from wanting to get rid of her to wanting to own her. She was mine to play with and I didn't like Jeremy sniffing around.

I clench my fists and keep walking.

After getting in my Aston Martin, I drive home, playback of this afternoon occupying my thoughts the entire way home. I hadn't planned to her school record over her head or use it as a way to bribe her, the idea had sprung on the spot as a way to exert control over her for the foreseeable future.

I have no plan, no idea what to do with this newfound power. Just raw satisfaction knowing she's mine for the next six weeks.

Rhys' Jeep pulls into the driveway of the house as I exit my car. "Aren't you supposed to be in detention right now?" He asks, checking his watch.

"Got out of it."

He raises a disbelieving brow in my direction. “How? Wasn’t Thornton hellbent on making an example out of you?”

I tell him about the deal with Bellamy, omitting the part where I fingered her until she came.

He laughs raucously. “When are you going to admit you’ve got an unhealthy obsession with this girl?”

If only he knew how she’d come apart around me, how her plump red lips had opened to let out mewls of pleasure.

“What I think about Bellamy is none of your business.”

He laughs again and my fist itches to plant itself in his smug face. “What is Thornton even having you two do? Wipe down the tables in the cafeteria?”

I throw him a cautious look, hesitating before speaking. “We have to prep the library ahead of the grand opening.”

His face falls, the smile slowly sliding down until his lips settle into a straight line.

I clap a hand on his shoulder in support. “You good?”

“Yeah.” He shakes me off, not one to be comforted or pitied. Not that I am, but that’s how he perceives it.

Two years ago, Rhys’ parents, Richard and Lorraine Mackley, died in a tragic car accident. They were midway through a European road trip starting in England where they lived and on their way to see him at RCA, when their car spun out of control and hit a tree. They’d been killed on impact.

I knew them most of my life and the only thing they loved more than each other was their son. I’m no psychologist and I’m even less qualified when it comes to understanding my own emotions, but even I can tell that the grief and guilt have changed him. Where he was a good-natured jokester before, he now uses humor as a shield to deflect and distance himself. That’s an assessment, not a judgment.

They left Rhys a sizable inheritance, one he couldn’t spend in a lifetime even if he tried to. He’d used some of that money to fund the new library in their honor.

But he's yet to set foot in there.

As usual, he steers the conversation away from the topic of his parents. "So what are you going to make her do?"

"No clue. I'll let you know when inspiration strikes."

"I want you to sleep in my bed."

"Excuse me?" She asks, incredulous. "I don't think I heard you correctly." She makes a show of unclogging her ears.

"You heard me perfectly well."

"I was being polite. You know politeness, what normal people use when they don't want to be rude as they try to reason with someone who is clearly out of his mind."

I'd had the idea last night when I'd said goodnight to Rhys and Phoenix before heading to bed. What better way to put our deal to good use than to use it to torment her 24/7?

When I don't answer, she continues. "Why do you even want this? You hate me."

"Because I can."

She huffs angrily. "Well it's a no. We said nothing sexual."

I'd expected resistance at the suggestion so I drop it. For now.

I change the subject. "I'm bored, Yank. In the absence of valid distractions, you'll have to do. Entertain me."

It's Friday afternoon and we're in the library shelving books in the historical fiction section. Bellamy completed the first row as I instructed. Satisfaction coils through me seeing how well she obeys. I don't what I prefer - when she obeys or when she defies me and fights me every step of the way.

She's bent over a box of books, giving me a prime view of her round ass in her jeans. I resist the urge to grab it, my hand

craving contact with her again. She rights herself, turning towards me with books in hand. Her hair is slightly disheveled, her eyes cautious as she looks at me.

I want to ruin her.

To open her up and look at her insides and what makes her, her.

It's different from how I wanted to tear her apart before. My fixation with her is morphing, taking a different shape as I spend more time with her. I want her writhing below me, unable to keep up with the pleasure I'm inflicting on her. The thing in my chest when I look at her is dark and corrupt and insatiable.

“How do you want me to entertain you?”

I pause before answering her. I know exactly what I want. “Tell me about your panic attack. Was that the first time you've had one?”

She turns her back to me, reaching a book up onto a shelf. “Pass.”

Less than twenty four hours after we made our deal, she defies me. So much for her obedience.

My cock is straining against my zipper. Maybe her fight does turn me on more. “Do I need to remind you about the deal we made?” I ask in a deceptively soft voice.

She sighs, turning back towards me. “Why do you even care?”

“I don't. Like I said, I'm bored.”

She gives me a long look, clearly weighing whether to obey or not. With a deep exhale, she makes the right decision. “There's not much to tell. They're a recent development; I've had fewer than half a dozen, all in the last year. This week was the first one I've had since I got here.”

“What triggers it?”

“Stress, mostly. I've been hyper focused on my studies in the past year. College applications are exceedingly competitive

these days and I don't have a lot of unique extracurricular activities so my application will rely primarily on my grades. And I have a lot riding on getting into a good university, so I've been perpetually anxious about anything school related. You can understand now why I'd take your objectively shitty deal. Whatever pain you'll inflict on me will be worth it if it means keeping my academic record clean."

"If stress provokes a reaction, it's interesting that none of our previous arguments have prompted one. Don't you think?"

She doesn't reply.

"Do you take medication for it?"

"No, I probably should. I just..." She pauses, searching for her words. "Taking medication feels like admitting there's something wrong with me." I remain silent, letting her speak. "I know I'm being stupid and it's all in my head. There's nothing wrong with taking medication, I just haven't been able to bring myself to cross that mental barrier."

"I don't think it's stupid." She lifts her head to meet my eyes. I can see in her gaze that she's surprised by my response.

I shrug. "Only you know what's best for you. And if you're unsure about medication and finding other ways to manage it, why force it?"

She looks at me, really looks at me. Like she's trying to decipher a thousand piece puzzle. "Who are you and what have you done with Rogue?"

Something passes between us as we just stare at each other - her holding a book, me with my hands folded under my arms. It sparks in the air and connects us in that moment.

I clear my throat, breaking the spell. "Look what I found." I say coming to stand by her shoulder as I show her the book in my hand.

It's a copy of the Kama Sutra.

"What the hell is that doing here? This is a school for crying out loud."

I finger a strand of her hair between my fingers as I answer. “Only a frigid virgin would say that.”

“I’m not frigid.”

“No you’re right.” I hum in agreement. “You definitely didn’t feel frigid when you came on my fingers.”

She blushes and walks to one of the shelves to set a book down and put space between us. If the way she distances herself from me anytime I approach her is anything to go by, she doesn’t trust her body around me.

“So you are a virgin then?”

“None of your business.”

“We made a deal.” I say, reminding her of the pact she made with me. “I’m asking that you tell me the truth.”

“Yeah. What’s it to you?” She asks defensively as she crosses her arms and faces me. The defiant tilt of her chin echoes the way she’d stood before me after the pond incident.

“Nothing.” I say with a careless lift of my shoulder. “It’s only good to know for when I eventually fuck you.”

She scoffs. “I’m not sleeping with you.”

“Not yet.”

“Not ever.” She retorts.

And there’s my opening. “If you’re so sure you’re not going to fuck me, what’s the harm in sleeping in my bed then? Following your logic, it’ll be totally platonic so it’s covered under our deal. Sleep in my bed or the deal is off.”

16.

16.

Bellamy

Anger unfurls in my stomach, my arms tightening across my chest as I work to control my annoyance. His objectively flawless logic infuriates me almost as much as his need to win at all costs.

“Fine. But if you think you’re getting any sexy lingerie I can’t wait to introduce you to my onesie collection.” I give him a sly grin. “They zip up to the neck.”

I don’t have a onesie collection but I’m about to invest in one if it means having a physical barrier between him and I.

He’s tossing a ball back and forth between his hands, giving himself a couple passes back and forth before replying. “Can’t wait.”

“I told you. I won’t sleep with you as part of the deal.”

“I know,” He says with a cocky smirk, “You’ll fuck me because you want to, not because I forced you. You already let me finger that tight cunt of yours.”

I flush to my hairline at the crudeness of his words. Not just the crudeness but how he talks about sleeping with *me*.

I should be disgusted.

I shouldn’t be turned on.

But my thighs clench and I feel slickness between them at the thought of him putting his fingers inside me again. I shudder as I think of the way his hand had wrapped around my throat.

Damn him.

What is wrong with me? I hate him.

Yes, I *hate* him. He’s made my life hell since I got here. If I repeat it to myself enough times, maybe my body will finally

internalize it.

“You didn’t give me much choice in the matter.” I say with a prim sniff. “As I recall, you had me pinned against the shelf.”

The ball he’s been throwing back and forth lands in one hand and stays there. He stares at me, the look in his eye deadly. “As I recall, you were soaked. My fingers almost drowned in your pussy.”

“That’s not true!” I cry out defensively.

“Let’s find out who’s telling the truth, shall we?”

I don’t have time to reply before he’s got me laying on the table behind me. He grabs my legs and wraps them around his waist.

For a beat he doesn’t move.

He simply looks down at where I’m laying on my back with my hair splayed out around me. His hands grip my thighs. His fingers dig possessively into my flesh. He grunts, liking what he sees, and tugs me towards him so my ass hangs off the edge.

Holding himself upright, he flicks the button of my pants open, pulls the zipper down and yanks my jeans down my legs in one swift movement before tossing them behind him like they’ve personally offended him.

His fingers are confident, cocky like his smile, as they start at my knee and trace up my thigh before dipping beneath my panties. They park at my entrance then lazily drift up my slit to my clit, collecting my wetness along the way.

And he was right. I’m dripping.

I know it. He knows it.

That’s why his smug gaze never leaves mine, his smile turning more and more self-satisfied as he drags his fingers up my pussy.

“What do we have here?” He purrs as he brings his fingers up to the light and inspects them. “Looks like I was right.

Again.”

He lowers his hand and wipes his fingers against my lips before bowing his head and claiming them in a heated kiss. His tongue traces the wetness left behind by his fingers, licking up my arousal before his teeth bite into my lower lip.

I’m frozen. I have been since he caught me off guard and kissed me. It seems stupid now, but given how he’d been careful not to kiss me in our first couple hookups, I hadn’t been expecting it.

I’m still processing it when his mouth comes back down on mine in a carnal attack. His tongue seeks mine out, coaxing me into sparring with him much like we do with our words. I’m so lost in the arousal of the moment, I can’t do anything but moan.

It’s the sound of my moan in the empty library that changes the pace of the entire moment. His hand curls around my nape and uses the hold to deepen the kiss, claiming my lips in a brutal kiss. His hands grab my waist and pull me against him as his tongue thrusts into my mouth. He’s devouring me, the sounds we’re both making animalistic to my own ears. I’m losing my head, desire fogging my brain and making me lean into the kiss.

It’s everything all at once. Rage. Passion. Disdain. Lust. Resentment. It’s all-consuming and terrifying, my brain and body yielding to the onslaught of feeling.

His groan reverberates loudly in my mouth and vibrates in my bones. One of his hands moves to clutch my hip, bringing me closer to him so I’m rubbing against his erection.

Tentatively, I tilt my hips upwards once, stroking up his length and back down.

“Fuck.” His voice sounds desperate. As desperate as his hands gripping me, roaming along my curves before twisting around my body and gripping my ass.

He drops his face into the crook of my neck with a moan, his hands massaging and kneading my flesh.

“You should taste yourself, Bell. You taste so fucking good.” He pants against my neck before sucking my pulse point. “Every single part of you.”

My eyes roll back into my head at the feel of his tongue licking and sucking my neck. He’s going to leave a hickey if he’s not careful.

His fingers wrap around the band of my panties and I know what comes next. I cover his hand with mine, pausing to stare at the contrast. His massive, mine small. His tattooed and veiny, mine tanned but otherwise unblemished.

“What are you doing?” I ask him urgently. “We can’t do this again here.” I say, desperately trying to stop him. “Someone might see.”

His head snaps up, his dark, lust-filled gaze meeting mine as his fingers roam down my legs and back up until they reach my panties. He traces a finger along the seam, teasing me, making me lose my mind. “You think I’d let anyone see you like this?” He growls. “I’d fucking kill them.”

His words are absolute and I know they’re a promise, not a threat. Without another word, he rips my panties off my body in a savage move I’ve come to expect. There’s something about how he is with me. He’s predatory and aggressive in his movements, shredding anything standing in his way, especially something as flimsy as a piece of lacy fabric.

He brings my ripped panties up to his nose and takes a deep inhale, his eyes glazing over with lust. My heart races in my chest as we silently stare at each other. He fists my panties tightly in his hand before shoving them in his back pocket.

His fingers find their way back to my pussy and his index enters me in a decisive thrust. My back bows off the table at the intrusion, my body searching for contact.

I try to sit up, to grab him and bring him closer to me. He pushes me back down mercilessly, pinning both of my wrists in one hand as he fingers me.

“You’re so pretty spread out for me like this. Taking everything I have to give you like a little slut.”

“D-don’t call me that.” I gasp out between waves of pleasure.

“Why not?” His pace increases, his rhythm furious now. “You’re a good little slut for me. Only for me.”

He knows exactly what to say to send my body into overdrive. I have no idea why his cruel words and filthy insults are fuel on the fire building inside me, powering the building climax within me.

Buzzing breaks through the thick fog of lust as I realize my phone is ringing next to me. I turn my head towards the sound and see Jeremy’s name across my screen.

At the same time, Rogue plunges a second then a third finger into me and I scream.

I’m stretched so full.

He pumps into me savagely, giving me no chance to breathe let alone think. I turn back towards him and see his gaze is fixed on the screen. His eyes are completely black and terrifying. It’s the look he gets when he’s about to get violent.

“Answer it.”

To the average person, his voice is nonchalant, friendly almost. But I hear the dark promise of retribution in his tone. The furious pace of his fingers betrays his real reaction.

Anger that hides jealousy.

His fingers continue pistoning into me as his hold on my hip turns bruising.

“No. I-I can’t. He... he probably just wants to reschedule his tutoring lesson.” I say. “Oh, *fuck*.” I cry out when Rogue smacks my pussy.

“I wasn’t asking.”

The next part of his sentence goes unsaid. It’s part of our deal.

He picks up my phone and thrusts it in my hand.

I consider pointing out that we agreed to no sexual requests in the deal but I already know what his retort will be. That there's nothing sexual about answering the phone.

I swipe across the screen as Rogue lowers himself between my legs.

What is he doing?

"Hey!" Jeremy's voice comes through the speaker.

"Oh my god." I say in response because Rogue just licked a straight line from my opening to my clit before biting my nub. "...Hey" I add, trying to salvage this conversation before it's even begun.

He laughs. "I don't think anyone's ever been this happy to hear from me before."

"Mhmm." I reply, distractedly. Rogue is twirling his tongue around my clit in a way that's driving me absolutely wild. He's looking up into my eyes from where he's kneeling between my legs and the dominant look in his gaze adds another layer to the frenzied emotions going through me.

"How are you?" Jeremy asks.

"I'm—" I stop as Rogue nips at my clit again. It's all I can do to keep from moaning into the phone. I put my free hand on his shoulder as I try to shove him off but he just grabs it and pins it next to me. His tongue is tracing the path of a rollercoaster between my folds as he explores every curve and contour of my pussy. "I'm good."

"That's great, so am I. Listen, I wanted to..." I miss the rest of his sentence as Rogue releases my wrist and brings his hand up to cup my breast, flicking my hard nipple through my bra.

"Ah. Sorry what did you say, Jeremy?"

"No worries, I wanted to see when you were free for that tutoring session. And I was thinking maybe after we could go to dinner?"

There's a hopeful pitch to his voice that I can't even process right now. I'm too focused on the angry sound Rogue

just made against my pussy. The vibrations ricochet off my clit and send shivers coursing up my spine. Rogue curls his fingers inside me, hitting a soft spot I didn't know I had and simultaneously sucking my clit into his mouth.

An explosive orgasm, stronger than I've ever had, hits me with full force. I think I go temporarily blind. My back arches off the table. I would have gone flying off if he wasn't gripping me against the surface with his other hand.

Incapable of stopping the sounds escaping from between my lips, I slap a hand over my mouth trying to muffle them as best I can.

Rogue stands and rips it off, keeping my hand pinned to the table, allowing loud moans to escape in the process.

There's a silence on the other end of the line as I come back down. Humiliation washes over me when I realize. I can only imagine what Jeremy is thinking. The sounds I'm making are painfully obvious as to what just happened.

Rogue stands up to his full height between my legs. The visual of him towering over me in such a domineering fashion as I lay on the table is enough to send aftershocks of pleasure coursing through me. His mouth glistens with my arousal. It's on his lips, his nose, his cheeks. He uses the back of his hand to wipe it off his face before licking it off his hand. I nearly come again at the sight.

He rips the phone out of my hand and brings it to his ear, reminding me that Jeremy is still on the line, silent. A satisfied smirk curves Rogue lips as he looks down at me greedily. My top half covered, my bottom half completely naked, my legs spread and my pussy on display for him. I can feel wetness dripping from my opening.

"She's busy." He grunts out.

Then he hangs up without waiting for a reply.

17.

Bellamy

I gape at him. “Why did you do that?”

“Which part?”

Good question. “All of it. And if you say ‘because I can’ again, I’ll strangle you.” I threaten.

He laughs. Not the typical semi-maniacal laugh that I’m used to. The one that he uses to goad or make fun of me. No, this is a real, full belly laugh. His eyes crease, his smile widens to bursting across his face, the sound he makes melodious to my ears.

For a moment, there’s a small crack in his defenses and I get a peek behind the walls. I see a lighter, almost teasing side of him that I don’t think he lets many people see. I really, really wish I hadn’t because a colony of butterflies erupts in my stomach and a pleased smile grows on my face knowing I was the one that made him laugh like that.

In this moment, his raw magnetism is everything. I can understand why every girl at RCA wants him, why they apparently lose their minds over him.

A girl could fall in love with him if she’s not careful.

“I wasn’t kidding.”

“I know you weren’t.” He leans forward, setting a palm down on either side of me. “Your voice was so determined.”

“Answer my question.” I try to create some distance between us and push him back but he resists. “Why did you make him listen to that? That was humiliating. Didn’t you say my screams were only for you or whatever?”

His hand comes up my back and fists a section of my hair as he yanks my head backwards to look up at him. I meet his gaze but he doesn’t meet mine. His eyes are half-lidded and fixed on my parted lips. “You belong to me. He needed to understand that.” His mouth comes down to lick the seam of my lips. “It was a one time thing. He’ll never hear the sounds that come out of your pretty mouth when you come ever again.” He promises darkly.

Trapped in his hold, I can only use my words to defend myself against him. “I don’t belong to you.”

“You do. For the next six weeks, you do.”

He brings his mouth down on mine, claiming me in a controlling kiss. His hand comes to cup my jaw as he sets the pace, first attacking my mouth and then gently, lazily kissing along my jaw and down my throat.

He inhales against the crook of my neck, his breath tickling me and making me giggle.

He takes an almost drunken step back in response.

“Fuck. I’m going to come in my trousers like a prepubescent tween if you make that noise again.”

Him distancing himself from me makes me realize I’m still naked from the waist down, sitting legs spread open in the library. I scramble off of the table as I search for my jeans and underwear.

“Give me my underwear.” I tell him as I reach for my jeans, remembering he stuffed them in his pockets after ripping them off me.

“Not a chance.”

I look up at him, startled. “Why not?”

“They’re mine now.”

“Do you always keep the panties of the girls you hook up with?” I immediately want to smack myself for asking.

The right side of his mouth curves upwards. “Wouldn’t you like to know.”

His answer is a well timed reality check of who I’m dealing with here. A hateful, psycho manwhore who’ll be on his knees for someone else tomorrow. “I don’t actually.”

Annoyed, I turn my back to him and put my jeans on, jumping up and down a couple times to get them over my hips and past my ass. A strangled groan sounds behind me and I look at him over my shoulder as I button my pants. “Are you trying to get fucked on that table?” He asks, tipping his chin towards the table I was just laying on.

I give him a disinterested look. “Like I said, I’m not sleeping with you.”

I go to walk past him but his arm snakes out and grabs mine, stopping me in my tracks. “Where the hell do you think you’re going?”

“Home.”

His smile is gloating when he replies. “Home is with me, sweetheart, or have you forgotten?”

“You were serious about that?” I ask with a weary sigh.

“I’m going to get as much out of my six weeks as I can.”

“Fine, but I need to go home and grab a few things. And somehow find a way to tell my roommates that I’m going to spend the next six weeks sleeping somewhere else because my arch enemy wants 24/7 access to my services as his personal slave.”

I tried to tell him I’d meet him at his place, but Rogue insisted on driving me to my apartment. I exit his car and head

towards the door before turning around when I hear a door slam.

“Um, where the hell do you think you’re going?”

“Upstairs. I want to see where you live.”

“No.”

He sighs. “It’ll be much easier for the two of us if you just do what I ask instead of fighting me every step of the way.”

“Maybe. But I never promised I’d make this easy for you.”

“I’m coming up.” His tone brooks no argument.

“Good talk.” I say sarcastically before turning on my heel and stalking away. I run into the elevator and flip him off as the doors close in his face. In my war with Rogue, that feels like winning a major battle.

My victory is short lived however when the doors open on my floor and I find him leaning lazily against the wall opposite the elevator. There are no signs that he just ran up three flights of stairs. He’s not disheveled or out of breath in any way, he looks as gorgeous and put together as he always does. It’s infuriating.

He spreads his arms out wide in a mocking gesture. “Forgot something?”

I stalk past him down the hall. “Nope.”

Seconds later, I walk into the apartment with Rogue hot on my heels. Thayer is in the kitchen humming along to a Justin Bieber song as she whips something in a large bowl with her back to me.

“Hope you’re hungry B, I’m making breakfast for dinn—what the fuck?” She turns around as she speaks and comes face to face with me... and Rogue, who’s standing behind my left shoulder.

I can only imagine what she’s thinking and she’s not one to hold back just because he could destroy her with barely the lift of a finger. “Are you aware the antichrist is standing behind

you or did he sneak in here like an evil version of Santa Claus?”

“It’s a long story. Basically he’s blackmailing me.”

“Correction, we made a deal. One that you willingly agreed to.”

“And one that you’re already abusing so I’ll call it blackmail to my friends if I want to.” I counter before turning back towards Thayer. “Remember how I told you about the deal we made yesterday?” She nods wordlessly. “Well now he wants me to sleep with him for the next six weeks.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Just sleep, nothing else.” I add hurriedly, throwing him a glare. “It’s so he’ll have constant access to me for all the evil crap he’s got planned for me.”

Thayer grabs my arm, pulling me with her to a corner of the room. “B, that man will have you naked under him within the week if you do this.” She whispers.

“No, he won’t.” I say, a little affronted. “Give me a little credit, please.”

“You give me a little credit.” She counters, crossing her arms at me and raising a questioning brow. “Are you telling me nothing’s happened between you two? Before you answer, you should know you’ve got a hickey on your neck.”

“What?” I run into the bathroom behind us and look in the mirror. There’s a few bruises along the column of my throat. “I look like I got mauled by a wild animal.”

“Didn’t you?” She asks with a smirk. “You could have told me.”

“There’s nothing to tell. Really.” I add when she gives me a skeptical look. “We’ve only kissed a couple of times and done...some other stuff.” I say, my flush deepening. “But we haven’t slept together and we won’t.”

She snorts at that. “You can’t actually believe that. I told you from the beginning that this would end in you killing or fucking each other. Luckily for the both of us, it looks like

arguing is your guys' version of foreplay." She gives me a concerned look before continuing. "Just... be careful alright? Don't get your feelings involved in whatever it is you're doing because it won't end well."

"I'm not" I say with slight indignation in my voice. "We still despise each other, that hasn't changed."

"Well okay then." She leans in and gives me a hug. "I just want you to remember what Six said. 'Serious' isn't a word that exists in his dictionary."

"Listen, I don't know what's going on, I really don't. And frankly at this point, I don't care. We have a truce, even if it's temporary. I can go back to focusing on school and making sure I graduate as valedictorian. That's all that matters to me right now."

When we come back into the kitchen, Rogue isn't there. The door to my room is open though.

"Ever heard of boundaries?" I ask him as I lean against the doorframe of my bedroom, my arms crossed against my chest. He's in my room, holding a framed photo of my friend Keira and I that usually lives on my bookshelf.

He looks up at the sound of my voice. "I have."

"And? Did you just decide you were above them?"

"Basically." He replies with an amused smile.

The change in his mood gives me whiplash. One minute he's angry, the next he's cold and aloof, and sometimes, rarely but sometimes, he's less guarded and banter with me, something that I would have sworn he was incapable of doing three days ago.

"You're impossible." I say, snatching the frame and setting it back down on the shelf.

“Who’s the girl next to you?” His voice is back to its usual detached tone.

“My friend Keira, from back home. I can give you her number if you want to move on to your next bullying victim.”

Why do I say that? I don’t know why I said that.

I ignore the twist in my gut.

“I’m only interested in bullying one person.”

My body’s insane reaction to that statement is to send warmth flooding in my belly. Remembering the conversation I had with Thayer less than five minutes ago, I drown out those feelings with reminders that this is all a game to him.

“What an honor.” I reply sarcastically.

I feel his presence rather than hear his movements as he comes up to stand behind me. I’m leaning over my dresser as I select a few outfits and shove them into an overnight bag. This close, he absolutely dwarfs me, his tall frame towering over me as the top of my head barely meets his chin. He bends over me so his hot breaths tease my neck as his hand snakes between my legs and presses up the length of my inner thigh.

He doesn’t touch my pussy over my jeans but somehow his touch is hotter. It stays at the top of my inner leg, wrapped in a heated grip around my thigh. His breath tickles the spot behind my ear and has goosebumps erupting across my flesh. There’s nothing inherently sexual about his touch, but it’s the most erotic way he’s held me yet. He bites along the shell of my ear as his hand moves up to grab my ass. He gives it a sharp slap that makes me gasp.

“Watch your smart mouth. Next time, I’ll fuck it even with Thayer in the next room.” He grounds out against my ear.

When we get to his house, I’m once again struck by the size of it. Without hundreds of students milling about, the

foyer looks even bigger than I remember.

“I forgot your parents don’t live with you in this ginormous McMansion. Doesn’t your dad ever come home?”

The room temp drops by approximately a hundred degrees as the words leave my mouth. His anger whips through me and I’m momentarily frozen by it. Since we struck a truce, his temper has taken... a passenger seat. It’s not quite in the backseat yet, but at least we’ve gotten it out of the driver’s seat of his decision making.

I know his mom left but I didn’t expect his dad to be such a trigger for him. Fear glides through my veins as I see him struggle to control his anger. He throws me a glare that chills my bones.

“Don’t speak for the rest of the night.”

“Wha—”

His hand chokes me before I can finish the word. He’s crushing my throat.

“I said,” He growls an inch from my face. “Don’t fucking speak.”

“Rogue.”

The harsh voice comes from my left. It’s Rhys.

Phoenix is with him. He walks up to Rogue’s side. “Let’s go for a walk.”

His hand grips his shoulder in a gesture that’s friendly on the surface, but has a not so subtle warning underneath.

Rogue releases me. His eyes shoot back and forth between mine a couple times before he stalks up the stairs.

I knew this was a spectacularly bad idea. We didn’t even make it past the entrance of his home before it all fell apart.

“Are you alright?” Rhys stands next to me, concern marring his beautiful face. I nod.

“Fuck, did he hurt you?” He asks, his hand tilting my head back slightly to inspect the bruises on my neck that I know are

the hickeys Rogue gave me earlier.

“Don’t fucking touch her.” Rogue stands frozen at the bottom of the stairs, his deadly eyes fixed on us.

Rhys drops his hand without a word, watching silently as Phoenix grabs Rogue and physically pushes him out the door. His eyes never leave us before he disappears through the main entrance.

“He didn’t. That’s, uh, something else.” I say, stuttering as I fail to find the words to explain the hickey.

He gives me a small smile before turning serious. “What happened?” He’s asking what provoked him.

I’m not sure I want to tell him. Based on Rogue reaction, it’s not something he wants to talk about. I don’t want to make it worse by repeating it to his friend, even his best friend.

Rhys can sense my hesitation. “It’s alright, you don’t have to tell me. I can guess.” He states in a way that clearly says he knows a lot more about this than I do.

I grab the shoulder bag I’d dropped to the floor. “Listen I really should stop talking now. Can you show me to his room and I’ll get out of your way?”

“His room?” He asks, confused.

I take out my phone and type out a message in the Notes app.

He wants me to sleep here for the duration of our deal.

Rhys laughs raucously. “And you said yes?”

I arch a sardonic brow at him.

You think he took no for an answer?

“Fair enough. Why are you listening to him about the no talking thing? He’s not even here.”

I shrug. **A deal’s a deal. Plus I don’t want to piss him off any more than he already is.**

He grimaces. “Fair enough. I don’t want to piss him off any more either so it’s best if we’re not together when he

comes home.” He grabs my overnight bag and tilts his head towards the stairs. “Come on, I’ll show you upstairs.”

I internally blush as I remember the last time I was in this hallway. This time, Rhys directs me to a bedroom on the left. The decor is impersonal and the space doesn’t feel like it’s lived in.

“Rogue doesn’t let anyone stay in his bedroom so this is one of the guest rooms.”

At least there are constant reminders of my place to help me keep my head screwed on. I smile at him in thanks and he leaves with a goodnight.



Several hours later, I’m lying awake in bed. I’ve tossed and turned endlessly searching for sleep that escapes me. I can’t get my brain to stop swirling with anxious thoughts and shut off for the night.

He still hasn’t come back.

I’m angry at him. Not for how he grabbed me, but for how he used our deal to silence me. Maybe in his world it’s natural to tell a woman to shut up, but not in mine. Doing as he asked was purely an act of good sportsmanship and a healthy dose of self-preservation, but I’m irate.

The knot in my stomach has another name though. Concern. Because regardless of his reaction or the way he lashed out, I’d said something that had gotten through his walls and struck true.

Hurt usually disguises itself as this same type of explosive anger. I also don’t want to psychoanalyze him and give him more credit than he’s due.

He’s probably just an asshole for no good reason.

I’m glad Phoenix is with him. Not that I know him at all, but at least Rogue isn’t alone. I wonder what he’s up to and if

anyone else is with them.

I find myself hoping they're alone.

I want to suffocate myself with my pillow for being so stupid. I'm quickly spiraling. I can't stay in bed like this for a second longer. I throw the covers off me and pause when I hear a noise in the hall.

Rogue. He's back.

From the noises I can make out, it sounds like he opens a door and peers inside. It closes, I assume behind him, until I hear his footsteps getting closer.

I throw myself back down on the mattress, yanking the duvet over me as I pretend to be asleep.

I'm just in time.

Seconds later, the door to my room opens. I work to keep my breathing even and the muscles in my face relaxed as I hear him approach.

He's standing on my side of the bed, above me as he stares down at me silently. I wish I could open my eyes and see his face, but I don't want another confrontation.

I hear the clinking of a belt, followed by the sound of fabric hitting the floor. He walks around to the other side of the bed. I wasn't sure if he was sleeping in here with me or in his bedroom, but assuming he'd join me I'd used the decorative throw pillows and lined them up to create a wall that separates my side of the bed from his.

He snorts loudly. It's followed by the sound of something hitting the floor.

He's throwing all the pillows off the bed.

He gets under the covers and lies on his side before wrapping an arm around my middle and yanking me against his hard body. Immediately, his body heat overwhelms me, the warmth enveloping me in a comfortable cocoon. I can feel the defined planes of his washboard abs against my back, his strong arm curled around me in a protective hold that ironically makes me feel safe.

He smells of bourbon and cigarettes. It's such a rugged man smell and fits him completely. Discreetly, I inhale more deeply.

I don't question why relief is the dominant emotion I feel when I don't detect any unknown scents on him.

I can feel his heartbeat steady against my back as he sets his head down next to mine, his breaths weaving through my hair.

“Are you awake?”

I don't answer, making sure my breathing is steady and my body remains weightless. He lowers his head to kiss my bare right shoulder as he mumbles what I assume is his version of an apology against my skin.

“My bad.”

18.

Rogue

When I wake the next morning, she's gone.

The amber scent she's left behind wafts up from her pillow and I resist the urge to bury my face in it and inhale deeply.

I scrub my eyes viciously instead, trying to get the look on her face from when I'd lashed out last night out of my head. She should be used to me losing my shit but if the fear in her eyes was anything to go by, it had caught her off guard and scared her.

It's her fault. She shouldn't have brought up my parents. It'd provoked a physical reaction in my body that had me almost blacking out. Phoenix physically dragging my ass out the door was the best move he could have made at that moment. We'd sat at a bar, silently drinking until it closed and I calmed down.

I'd headed to my bedroom when I got home, fully intending to sleep in there alone. But I'd thought about her asleep in the next room, hopefully not in a onesie, and I hadn't been able to resist. The makeshift pillow barrier gave me a good chuckle.

As if anything, let alone something as flimsy as a pillow, could keep me from what I wanted.

I amble into the kitchen.

“Where’s your girl?” Phoenix asks, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

“I’m not her keeper. And she’s not my girl.”

“Does that mean you’re done and she’s fair game now?” This time the question comes from Rhys and I remember the way he’d touched her yesterday. Touched the mark I’d left on her like he had any right to put his hands on her.

“You must have a death wish.”

He laughs at that, but wisely chooses to stay quiet.

“What did she tell you about last night?” I ask him.

“Nothing, she wouldn’t tell me.” He gives me a contemplative look. “She seems protective over you. I’m not sure why after the way you treated her.”

“She’s fine.”

“You need to learn to control your anger. You can’t let it get out of hand like that.” He gives me a cautious look and I hear the unsaid subtext.

You can’t let it turn you into your father.

I give an almost imperceptible nod as acknowledgement that I heard him and he visibly relaxes as tension leaves his body.

My phone dings and I see it’s a text from Müller.

Müller: Can I drop by? I need to get something from you.

Me: Be here in 30.

Twenty minutes later, our housekeeper, Claire, lets him in and he walks into the kitchen.

“What do you have for me?” I ask him before he can speak and waste my time with pleasantries. I want to hear any updates he has but I also need to find Bellamy.

He reaches into his bag and pulls out a clear plastic bag and cotton swab.

“I need to collect your DNA.”

My back stiffens and I stand up from where I was leaning against the kitchen counter.

“Why?”

“Just routine.” He says, noncommittally. “When I find her, I want to be able to confirm it’s her if she’s refusing to admit her true identity.”

“You think she wouldn’t admit I’m her son?” I ask, my tone low and threatening. Anger makes my muscles shake at the thought that even once found, she’d have to be dragged kicking and screaming back here. Was I such a terrible son that she’d have to be forced to Aubonne just to acknowledge me?

He shrugs. “I just want to be prepared.”

Ripping the swab out of his extended hand, I put it in my mouth and scrape both inside cheeks before handing it back to him.

“So you have no updates for me?”

“Nothing concrete yet.”

“Don’t come back here until you do.”

He nods and leaves, the entire exchange having taken five than ten minutes.

I pound on the door so hard, I think it’ll crack.

Seconds later, Nera cracks it open and peaks out nervously. Her frown deepens when she sees me standing there.

“What do you want?” She asks, crossing her arms over chest and blocking entry into the apartment.

“You know what I want.” I growl out, annoyed. How does Bellamy already have such protective pitbulls for roommates when she’s been here less than a month?

“She’s not here.”

“Don’t mind if I take a look for myself.” I say, pushing past her and into the apartment.

I barge into her room and find Bellamy sitting on her bed, phone to her ear. She’s in a pink loungewear set with wet hair, clearly fresh out the shower. There’s nothing overtly sexy about her outfit and yet lust flames to life in my body as I take her in.

She looks so fucking innocent, so corruptible. I want to put my mark all over her and dirty her up.

Her gaze flies to mine and her eyes widen as she takes me in. “Mom, sorry I have to go. Something just came up.” She looks away as she answers a question I didn’t hear. “No, don’t worry. It’s nothing important.”

I ignore the growling in my chest at that and stalk up to where she’s sitting. She hangs up the phone, her hand dropping to her lap as she tilts her head to look up at me. With our different positions, I tower over her even more than I usually do.

“Are you going to be alright, Bellamy?” Nera asks from behind me, bringing me back to reality. I’d hyper focused on Bellamy when I walked in and had forgotten where I was or that Nera was here.

“Yeah, thanks for checking.” She answers, giving her a small smile.

“Just scream if you need me. I’ll bring my épée.”

I hear Nera close the door behind her as she leaves. I’m still rooted to the spot, having not moved a muscle. I wait to see what she’ll say.

When I stay silent, she gives an annoyed huff. “Well, what do you want? You’re the one who came to find me.”

“Why did you leave?”

“Why would I stay?” Her tone is both frustrated and vulnerable. She’s asking me to give her a reason.

I don’t have an answer. I don’t know what I’m doing here.

Rubbing the back of my neck with my palm, I consider what to say next. “What time are you coming tonight?”

“Is that really what you came here to ask?”

“Yeah.”

“You could have texted.”

“Would you have answered?”

“Probably not. But since you came all the way here, I guess I don’t have a choice. I’ll be at yours roughly thirty to forty five minutes after never.”

A growl vibrates in my chest, my temper threatening to make a reappearance. “I’m getting tired of having to remind you of the terms of our deal.”

She gives me a blasé smile. “And I’m getting tired of being mistreated by you. I say we call it even and move on with our respective lives.”

It’s my turn to smile at her, but it’s not blasé or friendly. It’s predatory, my upper lip curling over my teeth. “There’s no moving on from me sweetheart.”

“You’ll have a front row seat when I do.”

The sentence has barely gotten past her lips before I slam mine on hers, claiming her mouth in a ravaging kiss. My hand twists in her hair, yanking it back with a severe pull as I take her mouth. Our teeth clash, our tongues battling out, neither one of us refusing to give in. I bite her lip, hard, and lick up the metallic taste of blood before pulling my head back.

“I like kissing you.”

“You’re an animal.” She says, her breath ragged as she wipes her mouth.

“The next time you provoke me I’ll fuck you so hard you won’t walk for a week. Do you understand me?”

She glares at me, refusing to answer, so I use my grip on her hair to move her head up and down in a 'yes' motion.

"I know you're upset about the way I grabbed you last n—"

She cuts me off, annoyance clear in her voice. "I'm not upset about that, I'm very used to you grabbing me like a ragdoll."

She grabs my wrist and pulls it back, removing my hold from her hair to emphasize her point.

I'm not good at this communication shit and I have no idea why she's mad if it's not about that. "Then what is it?"

She stands on her knees on the bed so that she's less disadvantaged height wise. "Don't ever tell me not to speak again. Maybe it's normal in your rich person circles to silence women but I promise you that where I'm from it's not. I can put up with a lot of your shit, Rogue, but I won't stand for that kind of disrespect. If you ever tell me to stop talking, you'll get your wish because I'll never speak to you again. Do you understand *me*?"

I work my jaw back and forth, considering her. She's fucking hot when she's irate. Her eyes spark, her chest heaves with every enraged breath, her lips redden even further. I don't like her giving me orders, but I like the thought of her not speaking even less.

If I'd stayed last night, I'd have commanded her to speak. Her voice and her fire are what interest me most. "Fine."

She gives me a skeptical look, her eyes narrowed on me. "You won't use our deal to shut me up again?"

"No."

She sits back down on her haunches, the fight leaving her entirely. She looks back up at me. "Promise?"

I extend a pinky towards her. "Pinky promise." I say sarcastically, echoing our earlier agreement.

She laughs and a mix of feelings I'm not familiar with fill my chest.

Happiness. Satisfaction.
Affection.



19.

Bellamy

In the week that follows our first post-truce argument, I sleep at Rogue's house every night. We stay in the guest bedroom and I never see the inside of his room.

Time passes in a blur of studying, classes, detention and spending time with the girls. Rogue and I are civil during the day in that he no longer attacks me, but we mostly don't acknowledge each other until detention when he corners me against a shelf and punishes me for some perceived slight earlier in the day.

In the evenings, we spend time together alone or with his friends. I'm slowly getting to know him and getting to peek behind the titanium walls he has built around him. He's more relaxed when he's with Phoenix and Rhys and I see a different side to him.

At night, he fingers me for mouthing off at him in detention, goes down on me when I laugh at one of Rhys' jokes during dinner, and kisses me like a starving man until my lips are painful and swollen.

But he never goes any further.

Once he's pulled two, three orgasms out of me, he curls around my boneless body, his erection digging into my ass, and goes to sleep.

He never asks for anything in return, his hunger focused completely and greedily on me. When he's between my legs, he groans like he's just had a taste of the finest dessert in the world. It's almost enough to make me come again.

Every time I expect him to fuck me, he doesn't. It feels like he's punishing me for saying it would never happen.

That this is his way of torturing me into begging for it. Embarrassingly, I'm getting close to that point. My physical reaction to him is uncontrollable, like an F5 tornado rolling through me everytime he touches me. Whether it's his grip digging into my hip when he walks past me in the library, the way his lips trace my jaw, or how he plunges his fingers and tongue into me, I'm lost to it.

I sleep at his house every night and we see each other every day at school or sometimes when he forces me to hang out on the weekends, but he remains a closed book. He knows about my panic attacks, my mom, my favorite place to get tacos back home, hell he even knows where I get my nails done when I have an extremely bad day, because who doesn't love having fresh nails when they're feeling down? It's a rare non-essential expense but one my mom and I love to do, so when he demands I tell him about something that makes me happy, I do.

He doesn't divulge anything in return.

He's lying on the bed, a tattooed arm bent behind his head as he watches me inspect the hickeys on my neck. Satisfaction gleams in his face as he looks at me. There's three large marks this time, sprawled from my chest and up the column of my neck.

"I like seeing my marks on you." He says softly, his voice raw with heat. The possessive look in his eye burns through me, leaving goosebumps behind in its wake.

"Leave them somewhere else." I say, rubbing at them as if that could make them go away. "I can't go to class looking like this."

He shrugs. "You should've listened to me then."

Last night, he'd asked – no, he'd commanded – that I strip for him. When I'd refused, he'd put me on the kitchen island and fingered me until I shattered around him, his mouth suctioned on my neck the entire time.

“You don’t always get what you want.”

“For the next four and a half weeks, I do.”

“What about what I want?”

He looks at me steadily, his face giving nothing away. Finally, he asks, “What do you want?”

“Tell me about your mom.”

I thought his face gave nothing away before, but something slams completely shut in his gaze as I speak. The muscles of his stomach ripple as he first sits, then stands up.

“No.”

He’s got the door of the room open, ready to stalk off before I can even blink. “Where are you going?”

He throws an uninterested glance at me over his shoulder. He’s not angry like last time, he’s almost apathetic. It’s so much worse. I’d prefer his anger than his eyes looking right through me like I’m not standing in front of him. This is the same way he looked at me when we first met. The same indifferent way he looks at everyone.

I hate it.

“Out. Be back here tonight, we’re having people over.” He commands. Without waiting for an answer, he leaves.

I look back at myself in the mirror, seeing the disappointed expression on my face. It’s two steps forward, fifteen back with him.

“I’m back!” I yell as I cross the threshold into our suite.

I hear a shriek to my left before Thayer tackles me to the floor. “I’ve simply been dying without you.”

“You saw me yesterday.”

“In Spanish. That hardly counts, *flaca*.”

It's true I haven't been back to the pen since Rogue came to get me last week.

"Oh my god." I turn my head in the direction of the voice as Thayer helps me up. Six and Nera are standing in the kitchen, the former staring at my neck. "Are those hickeys? Did he do that to you?" She asks incredulously.

Thayer turns my head towards her so she can have a look. "Wow, he really is an animal with you."

"Are you guys dating?" Nera asks, clearly a little confused.

Join the club, I want to tell her.

I shake my head vigorously. "Definitely not. This is a power thing for him. The hickeys are just another way to prove he owns me. For now."

"But," Six pauses before finishing her question. "Have you guys slept together?"

Thayer jumps in before I can answer. "No, she would have told us. Right?" She finishes, giving me a questioning glance.

I nod. "We haven't slept together."

"Let me get this straight." Nera pauses. "You guys go to detention together every afternoon, you have dinner and you sleep in the same bed together, and you fool around every night, but you're not dating."

"That's right."

"So what are you doing?" Thayer asks.

"I don't know. He's just playing with me."

"I think you're wrong. I told you he's never done this. He would never move someone in like he has with you, let alone sleep with you every night." Six says, adamantly.

I shake my head cheerlessly. "He sleeps with me every night, but in a guest bedroom, not his bedroom which I've never even seen. And when I ask him a personal question, he'd literally rather run out of his house than give me an answer. He's been very clear about the boundaries, I'm the one who

isn't listening to them. I can't let myself think this is anything more than it is, Six."

She gives me a strong, fortifying hug. "Alright, we won't talk about it anymore. What should we do this afternoon?"

"I'm really down for a gossip catch up sesh. Oh, and I have to be back at Rogue for a party tonight. You guys are coming with."

"You know I never say no to a night out." Nera says with a mischievous grin as her and Six grab snacks and drinks from the kitchen.

I look at Thayer and catch her watching me contemplatively. "What?" I ask her.

"How are your feelings doing in all this?"

"I'm fine." I say.

She gives me a disbelieving look.

"I'm fine. I promise." I repeat, this time more confidently. "But I'm probably going to have to wear a turtleneck tonight." I add, changing the subject.

"Don't worry about that." Six says, throwing a piece of popcorn into her mouth. "I'm a pro at makeup. I'll take care of those."

"You're an angel."

It's surreal to walk through the door of Rogue's house and have to bustle my way through a crowd. I'm like every one of them, a student at RCA going to a party at the popular guy's house except my clothes are upstairs and my toothbrush is in a cup in the bathroom. Not his bathroom of course, but one in his house.

No one beyond his friends and mine know about the extent of our arrangement. They've seen him order me about at

school, have seen me comply, they've seen our truce, but they don't know that when classes end I go home to this house. That I've cooked in the kitchen, watched movies with the guys in the cinema room, and played pool with Rogue in the library.

In reality, I'm as much an outsider looking into his life as the rest of them.

Thayer comes shimmying towards me, two shots held above her head. Nera's behind her with the other two, some limes, and salt.

"*D'accord*. So we're having that kind of night then?" Six says with a laugh as she takes a glass from Nera and hands it to me.

"Damn right." Thayer replies. She raises her glass and tips her head in a cheers to me, before her eyes move above my shoulder. "Look who's decided to make an appearance this time."

I look over my shoulder and see Rogue, Phoenix, and Rhys standing in the doorway. Rogue is off to the right slightly, his gaze roaming across every face in the room as he scans it meticulously. I wonder who he's looking for. Whoever it is, they've got to be here. Everyone is tonight.

A slight frown pulls at this perfect face before his eyes find me. He doesn't smile but something visibly relaxes in his gaze when they land on me.

My heart's in my throat as I watch him approach. He's dressed in all black, slacks and a linen shirt that proudly display the tattoos on his arms and chest, the combination making him look absolutely lethal as he cuts through the crowd. A simple gold chain and small hoop in his right ear do nothing to soften him, instead adding a menacing aura to his whole look.

His eyes never leave me as he closes in. They take in the way my tongue peeks out to lick up the salt on my hand, then shift to track the movement of my throat as I down the tequila shot, and land on my mouth when I bring the lime to my lips and suck.

His eyes darken dramatically as they rake down my body slowly, taking in the emerald green two piece set I'm wearing. I may or may not have thought it matched his eyes when I decided to wear it tonight. Lust and possession etch themselves on his face as his eyes trace the bared and smooth pane of my stomach.

“Hey.”

He's standing in front of me, his eyes downcast as they finish taking me in.

Anxiety has me shaking before him.

It's not the kind that precedes my panic attacks. No, this is the feeling of hundreds of wings starting to flap as a kaleidoscope of butterflies emerges in my belly.

I can only stare at the line of thick, dark eyelashes framing inquisitive eyes.

My brain is fighting my helpless body, reminding it that I decided I was going to play it cool since he refused to talk to me and ran out earlier. I can't keep letting the way he touches me blind me to the reality that, whatever it is we're doing, he and I aren't on the same page.

“Hi.” I answer, trying to keep my tone clipped. I'm annoyed at myself when it comes out slightly breathy.

His finger traces the hem of my top. It's the first time he's touched me like this in public. I feel a pull in my stomach to lean into his touch, to give in to him. He moves to my collarbone before his hand grasps my hair and moves it to behind my shoulder.

His eyes fall to my neck and he pauses.

I watch as the look of desire in his eyes transforms into one of fury. He's looking at the hickeys, or at least the spot where the hickeys should be but are hidden behind the makeup Six spent nearly an hour applying.

There's barely a trace of them there.

Gone is the relaxed man I thought I'd glimpsed earlier. In his place stands a detached villain who has cold anger

comping off him in waves.

Instead of gripping my throat or shoving me against a wall, he takes a step back. I feel the loss of his warm body immediately.

“Is that how it’s going to be?” He asks, his voice managing to somehow be both mean and completely removed from the present. He feels a thousand miles away from me.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I say, playing dumb.

I’ve come to know Rogue by now. I knew this would piss him off. That even though for all intents and purposes he’s keeping this a secret, keeping me at a safe distance away from him, that I’m playing with fire by covering up his marks.

Like a true villain, I knew he’d want to see constant reminders of the proof of his possession.

But if he won’t tell me what I want to know, then I’m going to take something away from him as well.

He nods slowly a couple times, his mouth clamped shut in a tight line. I don’t know why I expected anything different, that’s his go to move when he’s confronted with something he doesn’t want to deal with or talk about.

The moment feels interminable and I don’t know where we go from here. I’m about to say something else — what, I’m not sure — when my eyes snap down to a hand curling around his stomach.

It takes me a couple seconds to understand what’s going on. It wasn’t there moments ago. It’s a woman’s hand, with expensive jewelry and a fresh manicure and it rests on his stomach like it has every right to be there.

Rogue hasn’t acknowledged it, hasn’t even looked away from me. The hand moves, slowly slithering up the expanse of his stomach and I feel nauseous. Lyra appears, her head ducking beneath his arm from behind until it comes to rest around her shoulders.

He still hasn't moved, I don't think he's even blinked. His eyes are fixed on me with the rudest expression on his face.

Don't let her touch you, I want to say.

"Rogue," Lyra whines, the sound painful to my ears. "Come take a shot with me." She pleads pathetically, doing nothing to advance the feminist agenda.

"Sure."

Sure?

I realize I'm staring at her, likely with dislike etched across my face if my thoughts are anything to go by, because my eyes fly back to him at his words. What does he mean 'sure'?

He takes a couple steps back, still with his arm around her, still with his eyes on me, before cutting off the contact and turning towards the kitchen with her in tow.

Am I supposed to feel like I just got sucker punched in the stomach?

I can barely swallow past the lump in my throat as I turn back towards the girls, refusing to look at that car crash any longer.

"Are you okay?" Thayer asks.

I nod wordlessly. I think if I speak, I might cry.

I don't know why.

I don't want to think about why. Because if I'm at the point where the thought of him hooking up with someone else makes me want to cry, then I'm already in too deep.

Mercifully, they seem to pick up on that because Six exclaims, "We need more shots!" before running off.

Nera wraps her arm around me as Thayer says. "The good news here is at least you don't like the guy. If you did, that probably would have hurt like a bitch."

Yeah, if the feeling in my stomach is anything to go by, it might be too late to keep my emotions out of this.



“Come dance, B!” Thayer yells at me from the dance floor where she’s moving her hips to the music. She’s an incredible dancer, her natural athleticism lending her an easy grace and sensuality.

Behind her, Rhys leans against the wall as he takes a pull from his beer. His eyes are fixated on her, tracking her as she moves around the dancefloor and narrowing when she gets too close to other guys.

I’d danced with her earlier, trying to drown my racing thoughts by swaying to the pounding music, also hoping that Rogue’s gaze would be pulled over to me on the dancefloor.

Pathetic, I know. I never said I was contributing anything to the feminist agenda either.

When I snuck a glance at him in the next room a couple minutes ago, he was still with her. He’d been looking at her. Talking to her. The corner of his mouth had even lifted a fraction. Not much, but with Rogue every fraction of an emotion is a victory.

That’d been enough to wipe the smile off my face, my mood turning sour. I’d made him laugh but she’d made him smile.

My plan to be this coolly distant stranger towards him had backfired somehow.

Emotion clawed at my throat. I’d initially thought he’d entertained her as retaliation for covering up his marks, but now I wasn’t sure. He might be interested in her, after all they’ve hooked up before.

We haven’t.

Stupid, naive tears prick at the corner of my eyes. I close them, willing them to stay under my lids. The task feels Herculean but necessary.

No seeing me cry over him, in fact no seeing me, period.

I set off towards the stairs, taking them two at a time as I head for the second floor bathroom where I'll be able to freshen up in peace. I'm also going to grab my things. There's no way I'm sleeping here tonight, or ever again, if he intends to fuck her in the next room.

If me asking one question is enough to send him running back to that whack job, then he doesn't deserve my time or my tears. That's a level of disrespect I'm not going to tolerate, fuck you very much.

As my hand closes around the handle of the bathroom door, it flies open, making me jump into the path of the man who walks through it. We collide, his momentum sending me stumbling back a couple steps.

His hand wraps around my waist to keep me steady so I don't fall to the ground. The hand is cold on my skin, it's not the touch I'm craving even as it holds me the same way Rogue most recently did.

"Fuck, sorry. Are you alright?" I look up into Jeremy's concerned eyes. They're open and sweet and do absolutely nothing for me because obviously, I'm fucked in the head. If I'm not being grabbed, controlled, and forced to submit I don't get turned on apparently.

"I'm fine, it's my fault. I was in your way." I answer, distractedly. He's still holding me, pressing me closer than necessary now that we've both found our balance.

"I know how you can make it up to me." He says, giving me a suggestive smile. "How about we get out of—"

At the same time a brutal hand grips my arm and yanks me against a hard body, a fist comes flying above my shoulder and cracks against Jeremy's jaw, sending him sprawling to the floor.

I don't need to turn around to know who's hands are on me because the one touch is enough to send flames of desire coursing through my body and heat pooling in my lower belly.

There's only one person who has my body reacting that way.

20.

20.

Bellamy

Rogue lets me go the second I'm out of Jeremy's grasp and stalks over to where he's now laying prone on the floor.

Rogue's body is shaking with rage as he looms over him. The position is domineering and insulting, a not so subtle reminder of who's got the power between the two of them. Bending over him, he clutches Jeremy's collar and uses the leverage to punch him again.

Jeremy's face snaps to the side with a terrifying sound.

"Rogue!" I scream. He doesn't or won't hear me.

His fist comes down a third time, the sound of knuckles on bone sickening. He's completely out of control, the fury corroding through his other emotions and taking over. I'm afraid he's really going to hurt him. "Stop!"

He grabs the lapels of Jeremy's jacket and yanks him up so he's inches from his face. "If you ever touch her again," He pauses, a frightening laugh that chills me to my bones leaving his lips. "I'll skin you alive. And I'll make sure you're conscious the entire time I do it."

Jeremy nods frantically. "I-I'm sorry." Rogue punches him again.

"Rogue, stop!" I cry out. "Please, you'll hurt him."

That gets his attention.

His head snaps to the side as he cuts me a murderous glance, his pupils completely dilated. He stills holds Jeremy up by his lapels, the man in question laying stock still so as not to bring any unwarranted attention to himself.

“I absolutely want to hurt him, Bellamy. I might even fucking kill him for putting his hands on you.”

“I’m not yours, Rogue. He can touch me if I want him too.”

“Can he?” Rogue asks with deathly calm, the question seemingly innocent on the surface. But I can hear the lethal subtext. He drops Jeremy to the ground as he turns towards me, his dangerous attention now entirely fixed on me.

It’s like I just whistled to get the beast away from my friend but now it’s about to charge towards me.

“Leave.”

I take a step back, wanting nothing more than to run away, when his voice cuts in again.

“Not you.” He flicks a vicious glare in Jeremy’s direction. “Leave before I change my mind.”

Jeremy doesn’t need to be told again, he scrambles to his feet and runs out. Blood drips from a cut on his face and lands at my feet. My gaze is locked on it.

“Repeat what you said.”

I look up at him, slowly. I’m alone with a deadly predator in a dark hallway.

“You heard me.”

He takes raptorial steps towards me, his body wound tight with clear tension. His muscles ripple below his shirt as he crosses his arm in his approach, the picture of affected nonchalance.

“I want you to say it again.”

I know that he thinks he’s got ownership over me, that for these next few weeks he’s my lord and master and that my life will be a lot easier if I say the words he wants to hear, not the

ones I actually said. But all I can see is manicured fingers on his chest, a hand on his arm, a whiny voice in his ear.

He let him touch her.

If he's not mine, then I'm certainly not his.

"I said," I look at him with as much defiance as I can muster, "I'm not yours."

The words are barely out before he shoves me face first against the hallway wall. I cry out, surprised at the way he so easily handles me.

His body is glued to mine, keeping me prisoner. He's panting, his heaving chest pinning me even tighter against the wall with every angry inhale.

"I was trying to be the good guy." He seethes, his frenzied breaths hitting the column of my throat. He fists my hair and yanks my head to the side.

He spits on me.

He *spits* on me.

His thumb rubs it into my neck back and forth cruelly until he's removed all the makeup. I can't see the bruises but I can see Rogue's face out of the corner of my eye as he stares down at them. His eyes are hungry, fucking starving and so pleased at seeing the hickeys again.

"I was trying to be the good guy. Trying to be patient and wait until you were ready. But first you come to my house, *my house*, with my marks covered and then you let Jeremy touch you."

His hand comes under my crop top and tweaks my nipple painfully. I yelp and he grunts, his hips rubbing his erection into my ass. He pinches my nipple and I cry out loudly.

"You know what seeing his hands on your bare fucking skin did to me, Bell?"

I shake my head as his other hand comes to grip my waist in the exact same spot as Jeremy had held me. His fingers dig

into my skin, his grip is painful. Like he wants to leave permanent scars of his hold.

“Seeing another man put his hands all over you in this hot little outfit before I’ve even had a chance to touch you myself.” With every word, his angry breath hits my cheek menacingly. “Did you want me to kill him?” His voice is curious, like he’s actually asking the question.

“No.” I say on a whimper.

The hand on my waist moves down to flick open the button of my shorts, before diving into my underwear and parting my folds. He pinches my clit and my nipple at the same time and I almost come on the spot before his hands leave me abruptly.

“I tried to be the good guy but that’s not what you want. You want the villain, the guy who’ll pin you against the wall while his fingers strum a tune on your clit and his hand wraps around your throat. The good guy act ends right fucking now. Tonight, I’m taking.”

Grabbing me around the waist from behind, he carries me into the guest bedroom and kicks the door closed behind us. He drops me on the bed and I land on my ass and elbows. I don’t have a chance to look at him. He grabs my ankle and uses it to flip me over.

He rips my still open shorts down my hips and over my feet before tossing them to the floor. My panties are torn off my body and before I can process it, he’s plunged two fingers inside me.

I shriek. It’s too real all of a sudden. His intentions for tonight and his lack of control.

“Rogue, wait.”

“No, no more waiting.” He bites out ruthlessly. “You provoked me, you have to live with the consequences.”

His fingers piston into me at a furious pace, one that powers me forward up the bed with each thrust. I can only grasp the sheets, holding on for dear life and hoping he won’t send me falling over the side of the bed.

“Fuck, your pussy’s always so fucking tight. I can’t wait to feel how you milk my cock.”

I try to squirm away, but his other arm is pressed into my lower back, keeping me in place. I’m screaming into the sheets, trying to muffle the garbled sounds coming out of my mouth.

He doesn’t let me do that for long. Removing his hold on my back, he uses his now free hand to yank my head back by my hair. My back is arched unnaturally as his fingers find a deeper spot within me that has goosebumps breaking out across my flesh.

“If I wanted to gag you, I would. Now scream so I can hear all the noises you make for me.”

The orgasm rolls through me and I shatter around his fingers. He pulls them out and sucks them noisily before flipping me over and taking a couple steps back.

“Take your top off.”

He’s towering over me as he stands next to the bed. I shake my head, incapable of forming words.

“Take your top off or I’ll rip it off.”

He’s just crazy enough to do it and send me back downstairs topless, so I do as he asks. My arms tremble slightly as I grab the hem of my crop top with both hands and pull it over my head.

“Bra too.”

I’ll be fully naked in front of him. Even though we’ve fooled around more times than I can count in the last two weeks, he’s never seen me completely naked.

He’s never asked or made a move to completely undress me, almost like it would have set him over the edge and he wouldn’t have been able to control himself if he had.

My arms go around my back and unhook the clasps of my bra, pausing slightly as I hesitate.

“Show me.” His tone continues to be more menacing than I’ve ever heard it and I know we’re still a razor thin edge away from violence. But his voice is also thick with lust as his eyes drop to my covered chest.

I bring my hands to the front, letting the straps drop down my shoulders before I remove the bra completely and toss it to the side. I’m confident in my body beyond a few basic insecurities, but there’s something about laying naked in front of someone still completely clothed that makes me feel incredibly vulnerable.

His eyes are conflicted looking at me. Like I’m a priceless piece of art that needs to be coveted and treated precious but also like I’m something he wants to ruin and dirty and mess up forever.

“Shit, look at you. Fucking perfect.”

He takes a step towards me as he grabs his shirt by the back of the neck and yanks it off. My mouth goes dry as I take in the toned and tanned planes of his tattooed stomach, the defined six pack and V shape leading down below the waistband of his pants. He looks like he was chiseled out of marble by a great Italian artist.

His hands wrap around my ankles, using them to yank me down to the edge of the bed. He looks down at me, his eyes raking over my prone body.

My heart pounds in my throat as he bends over me, his hands coming to rest on either side of my body. His gaze holds mine as he lowers his head. His tongue flicks over my hard nipple once before his lips close over the tip, sucking it into his mouth.

“Oh my god.”

I’m writhing below him, my fingers weaving into his hair to keep his mouth on me. He licks my nipple, then bites it, before blowing air on it. The combination of sensations has me teetering over the edge. I arch into his touch, trying desperately to chase my release, but he keeps me on the brink.

His mouth moves to my other nipple, lavishing attention on it like he did the first. His fingers find my center and enter me in one swift movement.

“You’re always so fucking wet for me.” He groans approvingly against my flesh.

My orgasm slams into me, my back arching up so far I’d have moved off his fingers if his hand hadn’t wrapped around my neck, using it to press me back down into the mattress. It’s rough and controlling and so fucking hot I feel like I’m going to burst into flames.

“I’ve been thinking about fucking this tight pussy for so long.”

He looks at me intoxicatedly, eyelids half-lidded, pupils blown and his eyes liquid pools of black. I claw at him, grabbing his arms, his shoulders, his neck as I try to get him to touch me again. A tortured cry falls from my lips and I don’t recognize it.

“Would you have gone with him?”

“W-what?” I ask, trying to make sense of his question through the thick haze of lust. I reach for him again.

He stands upright as his hands come to his belt. I swallow thickly, watching him unbuckle it and pull it through the loops slowly, seductively. He holds it in his right hand as his left comes back down to grab my throat.

“That fucker was trying to get you to leave with him. Would you have gone?”

His grip is so tight around my throat, I can’t actually answer him. I run my hand up his arm, feeling him, trying to breach the distance he’s created between us, at least the physical one, but his face is too far away.

Instead, I bring my hand down and cup his cock through his pants as I shake my head ‘no’. He hisses sharply through his teeth, seeming to hold his breath as I move my hand up and down his length twice.

He presses me down violently into the mattress, snarling in my face. “No one sees you like this.”

It’s not phrased like a question and yet he’s poised over me, waiting for confirmation. I shake my head slightly, a refusal to answer.

Anger flashes in his eyes. Out of the corner of my eye, I see the veins popping in his arm as he holds me captive against the mattress.

“No one, Bellamy. Say it.” He demands.

I shake my head again. If she can touch him, then anyone can touch me.

Theoretically.

He laughs cruelly. “I told you you wanted the villain.”

Shaking my hand off, he unzips his pants and pulls out his cock. I hear the crinkling of a condom wrapper. With his grip pinning me to the mattress, I can barely see his cock. But I feel it, feel him, rubbing up and down between my legs.

I squeeze my legs together to try to bring him towards my entrance, but Rogue slaps my inner thigh, forcing them back open. The slap is harsh, almost uncaring, but *fuck* it feels good.

Back and forth and back and forth, he rocks his hips lazily so his cock slides through my lips. He touches my entrance but never presses in. His eyes are fixed on his dick against my flesh, enraptured.

“You have no idea how fucking filthy you look right now. Spread open for me, tilting your hips to feel more of my cock like a greedy little slut.”

A throaty moan escapes my lips. The way he talks makes me so hot, so ready for him.

His fingers dig into my hips as his hands grab me and press me against him even more firmly. Looking down I see his tip peek out above my bare mound. I can see only flashes as he pumps, but he’s thick and engorged and pretty.

I want to put my lips around him, feel him stretch out my mouth as I try to take him deep into my throat. I bite my lip at the thought.

“Don’t fucking look at my dick like that if you want to be able to walk tomorrow.” He warns, his voice so raw it sounds like it might be painful for him to speak.

My eyes snap up to his. He’s barely in control, his muscles coiled tight and trembling as he tries to hold himself back.

“Last chance. Tell me no one sees you like this.” The longer locks at the front of his hair fall on his forehead as he dips his head and grits his teeth. “I can’t help what I do to you if you don’t.”

“Show me.” I rake my nails down his chest, leaving marks behind. If he touches her, she’ll see proof that I had him first. “I want to see the villain.”

He groans ferally and his mouth slams down on mine, his tongue thrusting between my lips. I expect him to power into me in one move, but he doesn’t. Instead, he grabs my ankle and uses it to flip me onto my stomach before he pulls me up roughly by the hips and presses his tip at my entrance.

I freeze, anticipation tensing my body.

“Relax.” He commands, then slaps my ass.

It distracts me and I cry out as he pushes forward, his dick parting my walls as the first couple inches enter me.

“Fuck.” Rogue grits out between clenched teeth. “You’re so fucking tight for me, baby.”

The unexpected term of endearment has a tremor coursing through me and wetness pooling between my legs. It’s different than when he calls me “sweetheart” which he uses as a way to punctuate his threats. This is borderline affectionate.

My muscles relax enough that he pushes in a few more inches.

I’m so full. My walls are stretched so tightly around him, and I feel him everywhere. His hand is on my ass as he spanks

me again, his other hand on my shoulder using it to guide him inside.

He shunts his hips forward, breaching through the barrier of my virgin pussy as he bottoms inside me. I pitch forward with a sharp moan, breathless. He's so deep inside me, there's got to be at least eight thick inches of him.

"That was my first and only kindness. Tell me what I want to hear."

His fingers come around to play with my clit and my eyes roll into the back of my head. There's pain and pleasure and a fullness I can't even describe. His cock is so thick, the fit burns. It's so tight, I can feel him throbbing inside me. But he's holding still, waiting for me to get used to him. And I am. It's like my pussy is molding itself to the shape of the only cock it's ever known.

I shake my head again.

"You asked for it."

He pulls out so only the tip remains inside me and thrusts back in with such power, I nearly topple over the side of the bed again.

He pulls out again and slams back in, just as brutally. His hand comes down on my ass twice before it laces through my hair and grabs it, pulling me upright by that hold alone. He's got me on my hands and knees, my back and head arched back into his vicious hold as he starts to thrust into me, this time setting a furious pace.

He's brutal with me as he promised and I love it. I love every sordid, rough moment. The feel of his angry fingers in my hair and on my hip. The way I stretch around him. The way he pounds into me. I'm going to be so sore tomorrow.

"Rogue." I hear myself moan his name breathily, the experience an out of body one.

His mouth comes up to my ear, his lips and breath hot on my flesh as he grunts out filthy words.

"Do you hear that? You're fucking soaked for me."

My face burns as I realize the only noise in the room other than our moans is the sound of his hips slapping against my wet center.

The realization makes me flex inadvertently, my walls squeezing around him.

“Fuck. Like that.” He tilts my head to the side and bites my neck where his previous hickeys are. I squeal and tighten around him again. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you love it when I treat you like this.”

“I d-do.” There’s a slight tremor in my words. I don’t know if it’s due to emotion or the fact that he’s hammering into me so hard it’s causing a stutter.

“You do, hmm?” His voice is darkly fascinated. Pleased.

“I want you to show me every side of you.” I say on a groan.

He pauses and for a moment I’m afraid I’ve said the wrong thing. But then he flips me so that I’m on my back looking up at him.

I try to touch him again, but he grabs both my wrists and pins them above my head. He reaches for his discarded belt and wraps it around my hands, never faltering in the pounding rhythm of his hips into me as he ties them together.

“Keep your hands above your head.”

I do as he says, and his gaze falls between my legs, his eyes fixed on the place where we’re joined. He pulses into me as his thumb brushes against my clit.

“Yes, like that.” I moan.

“You like that?”

“Yes.” He can feel how I squeeze him, the added wetness pooling around him. He knows my body is loving this.

The moment I speak, he stops. His hips still, his hands falling away from my clit. I try to grind my pussy down on him, but he keeps me pinned away from him, so that I can’t rub my clit against his body.

“What are you doing?” I ask him desperately.

He says nothing, just pulls his hips back excruciatingly slowly until only the crown stays inside me.

“No, stop.” My hands come down to try to grab him, but he pins them back above me, his body hovering over me in the process.

He powers his hips forward until he bottoms out again, and my mouth falls in a small ‘o’. His gaze roams over my face, taking in my lustful expression as his eyes turn black. He slams into me again, his thrust so powerful he shunts me up the mattress.

It hurts so good. He’s torturing me, my orgasm within reach then edging away, approaching and then being ripped away again. I’m losing my mind, shaking my head to the side incoherently. He grips my jaw, his other hand still pinning my wrists above my head.

“Tell me.” He grunts out savagely.

I know he won’t let me come until I give him what he wants. He always wins, even in this. I stare up into his face, our eye contact the most intense it’s been yet. I feel like I can see into his soul, see parts of him I haven’t seen before.

“Say the words.”

It feels like a confession when the words come out. “He won’t touch me.” I lift my head slightly and lick the seam of his lips. “I sleep only in your bed.” I whisper.

Dark, gleaming satisfaction fires into his gaze. His mouth comes down on mine and I suck his tongue between my lips, moaning against him as I do. His hand frees my wrist, grabs one of my legs and throws it over his arm. The angle is impossible, his dick curving and hitting a spot inside me that has me seeing stars. He pinches my nipple with one hand and punishes my clit mercilessly with the other as he drives into me with powerful thrusts.

My bound hands come down around his neck to hold him against me as he kisses me through my explosive release. His thrusts never stop or slow as he extends the wave of my

orgasm for what feels like an endless amount of time before I feel his muscles tense and give way to his own climax.

He falls on top of me, weightless, as he grunts against my throat.

“Mine.”

21.

Rogue

When I get up the next morning, Bellamy is still asleep soundly next to me. She's got to be exhausted.

I woke her up twice during the night to take her roughly, riding her mercilessly until she screamed my name.

She made a mistake letting me fuck her. I thought once I did, it would have scratched the metaphorical itch and my weird fascination with her would be over.

Somehow, it's having the reverse effect.

We've only fucked three times, but my insatiable hunger for her grows with every time I slide in to her tight heat. The way she mewls and whines as she adjusts around me is fucking addictive, those sounds leaving her sweet lips and shooting straight to my dick.

I know she's going to be sore today, but I couldn't stop myself or the way I attacked her. Not after she covered up the proof of my possession and especially not after I caught her in a dark hallway with Jeremy's hands all over her.

My fists clench as I think back to that moment and the poisonous feeling that'd exploded in my chest at the sight.

It was like witnessing someone coveting and attempting to steal something that very much belonged to me.

My teeth grind together so hard at the thought, I'm afraid I'll snap my jaw. That asshole had a lucky escape from his fate last night.

I'm pulling on a pair of trousers when I hear Bellamy moan softly next to me. She's on her stomach, the side of her face buried in the pillow as she sleeps like the dead. Her hair is splayed around her, her lips parted slightly as she breathes softly.

Swift possessiveness grabs me as I take her in. She looks so innocent and vulnerable when she sleeps, like she trusts that nothing can hurt her if I'm right there. As if the most dangerous predator isn't the one who's been sleeping curled around her.

I want you to show me every side of you.

Fuck, those words had done something indescribable to me. I'd unleashed myself on her and as promised, she'd taken it all.

I fucking love knowing I was her first. The beast inside me pounds its chest in shameless victory as I remember the feeling of breaching her walls.

I need to leave before I fuck her again.

I jog down to the kitchen and am shirtless, pouring myself a glass of juice in the kitchen when Nera, Sixtine, and Thayer come thundering in.

"If the mountain won't come to Muhammad, Muhammad will come to the mountain. Or however that goes." Thayer announces with a careless shrug of her shoulder as she takes me in. "Hello shirtless."

"It's the opposite. Why are you here, barging in like you own the place?"

"That's what I like to call my best friend privilege. If you weren't keeping Bellamy here against her will, I wouldn't have to resort to such extreme measures." She says, jabbing a finger in my direction. "But as it is, we want to spend time with her since she Irish exited last night – which I'm sure you had something to do with – so, we brought breakfast."

"She looks like she's really suffering here." I say, looking past Thayer with a smirk.

All three girls turn around to see Bellamy standing in the entryway, wearing one of my t-shirts and nothing else. I can't help the self-satisfied look on my face when I see her.

She looks well fucked.

She's covered in love bites, her lips are swollen and red, her hair mussed like hands spent hours weaving in and out of her thick strands.

They did.

Bellamy rubs her eyes, sleepily. She looks so fucking adorable standing there, so vulnerable and untarnished that I actually feel something move in the general area where a heart should be.

It's a single, strong, emphatic beat. Just the one, but it's so foreign to me, it rings like a shotgun in an empty cathedral to my ears.

"What are you guys doing here?"

"Well, I'm going to want all the juicy details. Later though, when he's not here." Thayer adds tossing a thumb behind her. "But in the meantime we brought breakfast. We wanted to see you."

Bellamy brings her hand up to her chest, her expression morphing into one of delight. Her smile is so excited, you'd have thought she'd just learned she'd won a large sum of money.

I shake my head, trying to clear my thoughts so I don't spend any more time thinking about how I want to be the reason she smiles like that.

"I'd love that." She says, before throwing me a nervous glance.

"Claire squeezed some fresh orange juice. It's in the fridge if you want it for mimosas." I tell her.

"You're okay with them staying for breakfast?" She asks, her tone halfway between disbelief and hope.

"Why not."

A tiny smile starts at the corner of her mouth and blooms across her face until she beams at me. It's blinding. My heart thumps again.

I turn away, ending the moment and our eye contact.

Before I know it, 'breakfast' turns into a whole production.

Eggs are scrambled.

Toasts are buttered.

Mimosas are poured.

And I'm left standing, watching, wondering how I've let this girl have an entire brunch with her friends in my kitchen without so much as batting an eyelid.

With me watching them from across the room like a stalker because I like the sound of her laughter.

I can't keep my head on straight when it comes to her. First I wanted to force her to leave, then I wanted destroy her, and now I'm not sure what I want. All I know is I enjoy fucking her. I even enjoy fighting with her.

I don't remember the last time I felt an emotion other than hate.

"What in the world?" Phoenix is still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes when he walks into the kitchen. "What the fuck is she doing here?" He hisses as his eyes land on Six.

"They just burst in and made themselves at home. I've seen invasive species with more restraint."

"I'm not staying if she's here."

My hand comes down on his shoulder before he can take a step towards the door.

"No need to be so dramatic. Let's just go play *Call of Duty*."

“Alright.” He spits out, fuming.

I grab a couple drinks and head towards the door when Bellamy calls my name. “Rogue, wait.” I turn towards her, watching her bare feet pitter patter against the floor as she runs up to me. “Are you leaving?” She asks, her tone unsure.

“I’m going to play *Call of Duty* with the guys.”

“Oh, cool.” She hesitates, her fingers anxiously playing with the hem of her shirt. Finally, she gets on her tiptoes, leans in and presses her lips to mine in a kiss. “Thank you for breakfast.”

The kiss is chaste, barely a peck. But it’s the first kiss she’s initiated between us and my dick is ready for round four.

I growl deep in my throat and wrap my hand around her waist, yanking her against me as I deepen the kiss. I take her mouth, my lips attacking hers ruthlessly as I claim them. I groan into her mouth before I pull away just as abruptly, leaving her standing there with a haze of lust in her eyes.

“Thank me later.”

She blushes, giving me another small smile. I have to physically resist the urge to pull her into the next room and fuck her raw.

I drop another hard kiss against her lips and join Phoenix in the game room. Taking out my phone, I text Rhys to let him know where we are.

Me: Come play COD.

Rhys: Morning, fucker. Let me grab coffee, I’ll be right there.

Me: Bellamy’s friends crashed breakfast. You’ll run into them in the kitchen, fair warning.

Rhys: Is Thayer there?

Me: Yup

His only response is the purple smiling emoji.

I huff out a laugh, completely unsurprised. Any opportunity Rhys can get to tease or rile her up is one he'll happily take. The only thing keeping him from fucking her is her boyfriend, but if Rhys has anything to do with it, he won't be a problem for much longer.

“Thank you for letting them stay.”

I turn around at the sound of Bellamy's voice. It's late afternoon and the boys and I spent the better part of the day jeering at each other while playing COD. That's our version of sportsmanship.

Rhys went to practice and Phoenix disappeared off somewhere like he often does. Bellamy is standing in the doorway of the game room, looking at me. I'm on the couch, scrolling aimlessly on my phone.

“Remember how I said you'd thank me later?”

She rolls her eyes at me before stepping into the room. Coming to stand in front of me, she crosses her arms as she looks down at me.

“What do you want?”

I extend my leg out to her. “Give me a foot massage.”

“You're joking.” She deadpans.

I toe off my shoes one after the other and extend my arms along the back of the couch. “Nope.”

“I'm not massaging your feet, Rogue.”

I give her a hard look. She doesn't shrink back, doesn't even react. “You don't have a choice.”

“You're an asshole.”

“Never pretended to be anything else.”

With a sigh, she gets down until she's sitting cross legged on the floor between my legs. She pulls off my socks and silently begins to rub my right foot.

Her fingers dig into the muscles, kneading up and down along the ridges of my skin. Concentration marks her face as she focuses on one foot before moving to the other.

I groan low in my throat at the way she touches me and the sight of her between my legs.

“Kiss me.”

“No.” She doesn't even look up as she speaks.

“Deal.”

She alternates between different types of pressure as she continues massaging me. “No, we said nothing sexual.”

“Kissing isn't sexual.”

That gets her attention. She raises her head and looks at me. “Really?”

I nod.

Bellamy stands between my legs before bending over and running a finger slowly down my chest. “You could kiss me without touching me?”

She takes my hands and places them on her ass. Greedy desire explodes inside me, my fingers flexing into her skin as I grab a handful of her ass.

Taking control, I roam my hands up her body, exploring her curves along the way before they come to rest on her tits. I can feel her hard nipples through the cups of her bra. I want to bite them again. Instead, I use my thumb and forefinger to pinch the hard tips harshly.

She moans, arching into my touch. “Doesn't seem like you can resist touching me.” She says cockily.

“Fine. Then kiss me because you want to.”

My words land in the silence between us. I've never asked a girl to kiss me, never had to. They've always thrown

themselves brazenly at me. Bellamy makes me work for it and a part of me fucking hates it.

But a bigger part wants to hunt her, catch her, punish her for playing with me.

It's thrilling.

She pauses, gazing into my eyes for a beat. Her gaze is searching, for what I'm not sure. I'm also not sure if she finds what she's looking for in my dead gaze, but she places a leg on either side of me and sits on my lap. My hands come back around to her ass, pinning her to me in case she's thinking of getting right back up.

Her hand curls around my neck, her fingers playing with the locks of hair on my nape before her lips come down to kiss my jaw. She nips a path down the side of my face, leaving featherlight kisses behind as she moves.

Goosebumps break out on my skin at her soft caress. My lids close slowly as I rock into the sensations.

My fingers flex into her ass and I press her down against my hard cock. I'm egging her on, trying to get her to pick up the pace, but she won't be rushed. She continues exploring the contours of my face with her mouth. Her tongue peeks out and licks the corner of my lips.

"Stop teasing me."

She ignores me, humming against my skin as she kisses down my throat and to the skin above the collar of my shirt.

"Off." She orders, her words coming out muffled against my body.

I growl at her, a reminder that she doesn't give me orders, but yank off my shirt anyway.

She sits back and stares at my hard chest, her eyes taking in the toned muscles of my stomach as they ripple with my every harsh breath. Her hands trace a smooth pattern down my body until her fingers play along the grooves of my six pack and the V that leads into the waistband of my pants.

A savage hiss escapes my lips as her tongue flicks my hard nipple. She gives me a cocky smile, knowing and feeling exactly the effect she's having on me, and then blows on the wet skin. A shudder goes through my body and I have to stop myself from taking over.

Her hands come up to cup my face as she looks deeply into my eyes with the same searching look as before in hers, like she's trying to find the answer to a million questions in them. I look back at her through half-lidded eyes, refusing to reveal anything.

I won't let her in. I've learned time and time again that when you leave yourself open to a sliver of vulnerability, that people will use that opportunity to disappoint and destroy you. Never again will someone get close enough to hurt me like that.

Her eyes are searching and kind. Different shades of brown and green come together to form a beautiful hazel gaze that I stare into.

Despite my efforts, she must see something in my eyes because she gives me a conspiratorial smile before her mouth comes down on mine to claim my lips in a slow, sensual kiss.

Her tongue licks the seam of my lips, asking to be let in. When I part my mouth, she dives in with a dainty moan that has me almost blowing in my jeans. Her arms come around my neck as mine move to her waist.

For a few minutes, all we do is kiss. A rhythmic dance between our lips, tongues, and teeth as we take the time to explore each other. This kiss is the opposite of violent. It's gentle and expressive, and if I'm not careful I might find myself wishing it would go on forever.

Bellamy lifts her head, separating our mouths for an instant before she brings her lips back down on mine, once, twice, three times. Individual hard kisses that are increasingly familiar, like we've been doing this for years.

"I like kissing you." She tells me, her arms still wrapped around my neck and her front pressed to mine. My arms

enclose her possessively against my body.

She's waiting for me to say something, her eyes expectant and a touch guarded as they look at me. All of a sudden, my heart is pumping a furious rhythm in my chest and something like panic claws inside me.

Why is she looking at me like I owe her anything? Anger unfurls unexpectedly and swiftly inside me, and I lash out before I can stop myself.

Like I always do.

"Don't fall in love with me, Bellamy. I won't love you back."

She hides her reaction almost too well. I would think my words hadn't had any effect if I hadn't seen the way she'd almost imperceptibly flinched.

Seeing the flash of hurt on her face is enough to completely extinguish the unexplainable rage that'd run through me seconds before.

I'm searching for words that fail to come as they often do when I'm around her, but she brushes it off before I can say anything.

"Right. We're just fucking aren't we?" She asks, her tone almost flippant.

The anger is back, this time coupled with frustration with myself. For saying the right thing but it feeling like the wrong thing all of a sudden. For having her say we're 'just fucking' when the thought of her fucking someone else makes me physically ill.

Self-destruct.

That's what I just did, that's what I always do.

She sits up and I think she's going to stand and walk away. I should let her, but I don't want to.

Instead, she drops to her knees between my legs. She has her hands on my belt and is unbuckling it before I come to full consciousness.

I grip her jaw and hike her chin up so her eyes meet mine. She's switched off completely and now it's her gaze that gives nothing away.

"Think long and hard before you do what you're about to do." I growl out. "Because once you wrap those lips around my cock, I won't be responsible for my actions."

She'd continued unbuckling my trousers as I spoke. Reaching a hand into my briefs, she fists my cock and pulls it out. She looks at it with something akin to wonder in her eyes and I remember how she'd stared at my dick when I'd fucked her.

There'd been raw hunger in her eyes and it's there in her gaze once again.

"I can handle it." Bellamy replies before placing her tongue at the base of my shaft and licking a straight line up to the head where she swirls her tongue around the tip.

"Fuck." I bite out on a groan.

She continues to lick around the head and down my shaft as she traces the contours of my dick. Her hand pumps up and down in a steady rhythm as she licks me but never takes me in her mouth.

My hand comes down to grab the back of her head and force it towards my cock.

"Suck it like you mean it."

22.

Bellamy

His thighs shake below my forearms as I continue teasing him with my tongue, but avoid sucking him into my wet mouth.

Suck it like you mean it.

The words are like pouring gasoline on an already roaring fire, spreading flames of desire through me. I enjoy having control over him in this way, being able to dangle pleasure in and out of reach as I wish.

Keeping eye contact with him, I let my mouth close in around his head, my cheeks hollowing as my lips suck down the length of him until he hits the back of my throat.

Shit. My mouth is stretched wide around him and I can't breathe. I stay there for a beat, practicing my mental exercises to keep from panicking at the tight fit. I move my tongue back and forth subtly, licking the width of him as he's in my mouth.

I suction my mouth around the base of him and flatten my tongue before I start pulling back. The noise of the suction as I retreat, as my throat releases his cock, is the only sound in the room until his head comes out of my mouth with a pop.

Until he groans and thrusts his dick back into my open mouth.

“Like that, baby. Just like that.”

There it is again. The affectionate name he gives me when we're at our most intimate.

Don't fall in love with me, Bellamy.

I can't fault him for lack of communication, no matter how much those words stung. Not that I'm falling in love with him, but I was certainly... getting used to spending time together.

I shake those thoughts out of my head, focusing instead on trying to give him the best head he's ever received.

I continue sucking and licking him, acting on impulse alone. I've never done this before. I only know that I'm not supposed to use my teeth. I use my fingers instead, my hand fisting and pumping his dick in conjunction with how my mouth is taking him.

I think I'm doing ok, that he's enjoying it. That I'm not coming off as a complete beginner. If the moans and groans he's emitting are any indication, I'm not completely failing.

“You suck dick so good.”

I cup his balls and massage them in my hand, careful to use a gentle touch. My other hand twists up and down his cock a couple times before my mouth comes back down his shaft to take him deep into my throat.

Suddenly, he shunts his hips up sharply and powers his dick further into my throat. I gag and splutter as I try to draw breath.

Looking up at him, I see an evilly satisfied smile stretch across his face. “I love seeing you choke on my cock.”

Running his fingers in my hair, he grasps a handful near the scalp and tugs back. A small cry leaves my lips as my head jerks backwards.

“How many other men have you done this for?” He demands angrily. “How many others do I have to fuck out of your throat?”

One second he's telling me not to fall in love with him, that all we're doing is fucking, the next he acts like a jealous and possessive lover. The mixed signals are making my head spin. I'm not sure what trauma shaped him into this version of himself, but I don't know if I can handle the head fuck that dealing with it is.

I don't have more fight in me at this moment. "None." I mumble.

"What's that?"

"I said, none. I've never done this before."

He stares into my eyes for a beat before bringing his mouth down on mine in an aggressive kiss. He's tasting himself on my lips and it's twisted and I fucking love it.

I wrap my arms around his neck and he uses the leverage to grab my ass and pull me into his lap. I'm sitting against his bare cock and I can feel him pulsing against my center.

Rogue grabs my legging and rips a hole into it along the seam that lines up with his dick. Pushing my panties to the side, he rubs his fingers down my slit until he finds my entrance. He pushes in first with a finger, then a second as I grind into his hand.

I moan wantonly at the friction of his fingers and the material of his jeans against my pussy. His eyes dart over my shoulder and I see him clock the open door behind us. The added danger of getting caught excites me, but he has other ideas.

"Give me a sec. I don't want to have to kill my best friend for walking in on us while your beautiful pussy is on display for me."

He continues plowing into me with his fingers as he speaks to Siri.

"Text Rhys and Phoenix not to come to the game room unless they want to lose their lives." He dictates. "Send."

It's a surreal interruption but I love that he doesn't want anyone to see me this way but him. Stupidly, I want him to be possessive of me, even as his mouth tells me this can't go any further than what we're doing.

He throws his phone on the couch next to me and wraps his hand around my throat. I go taut in his hold as I wait to see what he does next.

“I don’t know what it is about grabbing your throat.” He says as his thumb rubs up and down the side of my neck. “But every time I wrap my hand around your dainty neck, all the fight drains out of you. You turn into a pretty little submissive.”

He pulses his grip around my neck once. His way of reminding me who’s got the power here.

“The minute I touch you, your eyes go wide and innocent, your mouth parts, your breathing slows. I could do whatever I wanted to you and you’d let me.”

He’s not wrong. A sick part of me loves when he manhandles me and makes me do what he wants. The lack of control is so foreign to me but weirdly it’s a relief to be able to let go in this one area of my life.

“I want you to ride me.” He whispers against my skin, his face buried in my neck.

His words make me clench around his fingers in anticipation. He hisses sharply against my throat before pulling them out. I hear the crinkle of a wrapper and watch with something akin to awe as he takes the condom and sheathes it on his hard cock.

Grabbing me by my hips, he positions me above him. Placing a hand on his shoulder, I lower myself slowly on him, relishing the way my body stretches to accommodate him. My body is sore from the rough way he took me last night, but the burn feels excruciatingly good.

Rogue gaze is fixed on where our bodies are joined, his eyes enraptured with what he’s seeing as I take all of him. He’s so deep inside me in this position, I don’t know how I’m ever going to get him out. I let out a shaky breath as I sit on him, my walls stretched around his entire length.

He collars my neck, his voice throaty as he commands me. “Ride me.”

Slowly, using his shoulders for leverage, I lift my hips until only the tip is inside me and then drop back down at a

quicker pace. A tortured groan leaves Rogue lips as I repeat the motion a few times, setting a steady pace.

His head is thrown back on the couch behind him, his throat exposed and his Adam's apple bobbing as he swallows thickly. His eyes are closed and yet rapture is clearly evident on his face. I'm locked in on his every expression, his every facial tic as I pick up the pace, truly riding him now.

His eyes open slowly and they're liquid lust fixed on me, cutting my breath short. I inadvertently clench, my muscles squeezing around his cock.

A sharp hiss sounds through his teeth. "Don't fucking do that."

"This?" I ask, clenching around him again.

Keeping us connected, he flips us so that I'm on my back on the couch as he hovers domineeringly above me.

"If you want to play, we can play. Don't say I didn't warn you." He threatens darkly.

He pins my arms above my head by the wrists with one hand, using the other to position my legs. One over the crook of his bent elbow, the other on his shoulder. The stretch is almost painful, the bite delicious. He powers into me viciously, over and over again.

"I'm going to fuck the disobedience out of you."

The noises we're making are obscene. Skin slaps against skin, moaning echoes in the room, and the sound of my wetness as he thrusts into me is downright pornographic.

"Oh God, oh God." I chant.

"Not God, me."

"Yes, Rogue." I moan brokenly, incapable of coherent thought. He's driving into me at such a furious pace, I'm afraid he might break me. I'm trying to hold on but I feel the wave of my orgasm crest through me. Every muscle in my body tenses as my walls spasm around Rogue, milking every drop of cum from his cock.

Rogue comes with a rough shudder before falling to the floor below the couch, completely spent.

“You good?” I call out from my position above him.

He grunts roughly. “I think you broke my dick.”

“Shut up.” I say with a laugh.

“Swear to you.” He replies, his tone a mix of teasing and seductively gravelly, even now. He gets up, disposing of the used condom in a nearby trash bin as he speaks. “Your cunt’s lethal around my cock. It should be illegal to have such a tight pussy.”

I blush to the roots of my hair at his words. He’s so crass when he talks about me.

So why is my skin heating at the way he’s now looking at me, ownership clear in his gaze as he takes me in still sprawled naked on the couch?

Self consciousness hits me and I grab my clothes, trying to get them on as I ramble anxiously.

“You have to stop ripping my clothes up.” I say, picking up my torn pair of leggings. “You know I’m here on scholarship, right? I don’t have an endless supply of new outfits like your other hookups.” I add the last part carelessly. It’s out before I can stop it, and I can’t take it back.

“I’ll buy you clothes.”

“No.” I snap, more at the fact that he didn’t comment on the other hookups than at him buying me clothes. “I’m not a charity case.”

“Pretty sure that’s exactly what a scholarship is.”

My head snaps up at his words. His face is devoid of any emotion and I can’t read what he’s thinking. This is what he does though. Each time we have a good moment, he needs to ruin it with a mean comment.

“What do you call hooking up with me then?” I ask him, trying to hold back the anger I’m feeling.

He lifts one shoulder offhandedly and the movement alone almost sets me off. “Helping those in need?” He asks insolently.

I have to physically stop my mouth firing off insults I’ll know he’ll make me pay for. Ripping my t-shirt over my head, I grab my things and stand. “Well don’t bother.” I spit out heatedly. “There’s plenty of others ready to take your place who won’t see it as a hardship *or* charity.”

I’m so furious, the edges of my vision are darkening and my head is spinning. The barrage of emotions is intense. I need to get out of this room and away from him so I can clear my thoughts.

He crosses the room in three large steps and rips me out of the doorway before I can walk out. His grip is bruising on my arm and my jaw as he forces me to look at him.

“Don’t threaten me with that shit again.” He growls, inches from my face.

“Don’t do this, don’t do that. What about what I want, Rogue?” I demand, irate. I get up in his face like he does to me, refusing to back down. “What about the fact that I’m getting sick and tired of your hot and cold bullshit?”

“Too fucking bad, you knew what you were signing up for.”

“Well maybe I’m done.”

His eyes narrow dangerously as “You don’t get to be done. We have a deal.”

I scoff humorlessly. “Don’t worry, I won’t back out of your precious deal. I’ll still go to detention and sleep in your bed and do whatever your sadistic little heart desires, but beyond that I’m done.”

I rip my arm out of his hold and shove him back angrily. He doesn’t even budge, the asshole.

He doesn’t say anything, just watches me silently as I walk out.



Rogue and I don't speak the rest of the day. Mostly because I avoid him at all cost, staying in my room and studying for some exams I have that week. I'm still fuming but I'm also agitated. The conversation feels unfinished. So does whatever we had going on between us, whatever it is having failed so catastrophically before it could even get started.

I've read the same sentence five times and I can't remember a word of it. I close my textbook with an angry huff, laying my forehead on the front cover dejectedly. He doesn't deserve this much of my attention or emotion.

That night, I FaceTime with Thayer and tell her all about our first night and everything that came after. She's got some choice curse words for the way he spoke to me, my ultimate defender as ever.

I go to sleep early, avoiding the kitchen and thus dinner for fear of running into him. My mom didn't raise a coward but she also didn't raise someone whose idea of a good time is to run directly into the lion's mouth. He and I are oil and water and the more I can stay out of his way, the quicker these remaining few weeks will go by. I'll be able to move on soon, and hopefully find a way to put Rogue and his damaged soul behind me.

I hope so.

I'm woken up by the mattress shifting as he joins me, but I pretend to be asleep. My back is turned to him so I don't have the temptation of looking at his face between my eyelids.

I stay awake a while listening to his breath, waiting for it to even out so I know he's asleep. But it never does.

And I hate that I ask myself if he's also listening to my breathing.



23.

Rogue

I listen to her even breaths next to me, lulled by the sound. I hadn't realized that my heart rate had been beating at a faster clip since the moment she walked out until now when I feel it settle as I lay beside her.

She's on the very edge of the mattress, sleeping as far away from me as physically possible. Clearly she's still pouting over our earlier spat.

Rolling over to her side of the bed, I curl my body around hers and nuzzle her neck. Her scent is so fucking intoxicating, it hits my nose with the force of a blow and almost stuns me with its potency. Burrowing my face deeper into her neck, I take a deep inhale.

"I know you're awake."

She says nothing. Doesn't move or acknowledge me.

"Bellamy."

I roll her over and she lets me. I expected her to keep pretending to sleep but her eyes are wide and piercing as they glare at me. I can distinguish them even in the darkness.

"What did I tell you?"

"We're not over."

"We are."

"No."

She tries to flip back over, but I hold her locked in place. Dipping my head, I lick her neck and suction it painfully. I

pull her skin between my teeth and bite it sharply. She yelps.
“What are you doing?”

“I licked you so you’re mine.”

She tries to push me off. “Rogue, stop.”

“No.”

I bite down the column of her neck, over her collarbone and to the swell of her breast partially revealed in her tank top. I can feel her body giving way to me, submitting to me like it always does, but her brain is still resisting.

She pushes me again, this time harder. “I’m serious, Rogue, I won’t do this with you anymore.”

Agitation claws at my throat. This is who I am. This is what I do. Fighting is what *we* do. But I hear it in her voice, that she’s serious. Sitting back on my haunches, I swallow thickly, unsure what to do here.

She’s out of her fucking mind if she thinks I’m done with her. I just got my first taste, I’m not about to let her go anytime soon.

I jump off the bed and round it to her side. She yelps as I throw the covers off her body and scoop her into my arms.

“What are you— Rogue, what are you doing?” She asks, frantically. She tries kicking her legs free of my grip, but I hold her tight in my arms and against my chest. I stomp out of the guest room and down the hall until I reach my bedroom.

Kicking the door open, I march in and drop her on the mattress.

She scrambles to a sitting position, looking around her. Taking in the moss green walls, crammed bookshelves, graphic artwork, and gaming station in the far corner.

A frown creases her brow as she looks at me. “What is this place? Why did you bring me here?”

“My room.”

Surprise crosses her face as she looks around again, this time taking it in through a different lens.

“Why am I here?” She repeats.

“This is where you sleep now.”

She stares at me, quietly. I can almost see the wheels turning in her head as she considers my olive branch. I’ve never brought a girl to my room before let alone invite her to sleep in my bed. It’s always been my safe haven, the one place that I know is mine. I’m not opening it up to her easily, although satisfaction does unfurl in my chest at the thought of having her in my actual bed. It feels right.

She still hasn’t moved and I find myself holding my breath waiting to see what she’ll decide. Not that she has a choice. If she tries to leave, I’ll tie her to the bed. Naked.

Slowly, she stretches out her legs and leans back against the pillows behind her, never breaking eye contact.

“Close the door and come to bed then.”

A violent exhale leaves my lips at the same time as a satisfied smirk curls on the corner of my lips.

She made the right decision.

I close the door. I’m about to get in the bed next to her when she stops me.

“Tell me something about your mom.”

I instantly tense up. Not this again. “Why? What are you trying to do?”

“I’m trying to talk. You know, talking? That thing people do when they’re sleeping together and trying to get to know each other? Just tell me one thing, anything. It can be good, bad, funny, or sad. I don’t care, but I want you to tell me something about her.”

“Or what?”

She gives a world weary sigh. “Or nothing, Rogue. I’m not going to keep browbeating you into every miniscule step forward by threatening you. You don’t have to tell me anything.” She says, then pauses. Her voice is small and

sincere when she speaks again. “But I want to know about her. And you.”

“Why?”

“Maybe because I like you?”

“I told you not to.”

“You told me not to fall in love with you, and I won’t. But I have to like you to spend this much time with you. To sleep with you and have sex with you every night. I see you more than I see my best friend, obviously I’m going to develop some feelings for you.”

“I find that hard to believe.” I say with a scoff, looking away from her.

“You find it hard to believe that I’d like you?”

I work my jaw so hard, I’m afraid it’ll snap.

“Whether you believe it or not, I do. Even though you make it really fucking hard sometimes when you treat me like shit. But I think deep down, you’re a good person.”

“You’re delusional.”

“Maybe. But I know you like me too. Otherwise, you would have let me walk out today.”

“Maybe you’re just a really good fuck.”

“I can be both a ‘good fuck’ as you so gallantly put it, and someone you enjoy spending time with.” She replies. “You’re doing it again by the way. Pushing me away the minute I try to have a real conversation with you.”

I hmp in response. She wraps her arms around my waist, placing her chin on my chest as she looks up at me.

“Just tell me one thing.”

“Only one?”

“Pinky promise.” She answers, with a conspiratorial wink.

“She used to cook for me.”

A smile blooms on her face but she works to contain it, clearly afraid it'll scare me off. "What would she make?"

"A bunch of shit. She's Lebanese, she grew up right outside of Beirut, so she used to make me a lot of dishes from home. Tabbouleh, labneh, manaqish, this amazing smoky baba ghanouj that I think about sometimes."

I think about it a lot actually. Cooking for others was her love language and I'd often come home from school to the smell of delicious aromas filling the air.

"I didn't know she was Lebanese. That explains your eyes." She says, tracing my face with a finger. "I'm so jealous of your eyelashes." She adds with a small laugh.

"She used to have me make a wish every time an eyelash fell on my cheek. The wish would only come true if I could correctly guess what cheek it was on."

"Did the wishes come true?" She asks.

I think back to all the times over the years since she'd left where I'd wished on an eyelash for her to come back with no success.

I eventually gave up, letting hope be replaced with bitterness and resentment.

"Sometimes." I answer, my tone cold.

She senses the change in me and knows that I'm done talking about this.

"Thank you for telling me."

Pressing her lips against mine, she gives me a deep but chaste kiss.

That night, I fuck her hard and fast until the sound of her screaming my name reverberates off the walls.

“I’m about to blow your mind.”

“You already did last night.”

“I’m about to blow your mind *culinarily*.” Bellamy clarifies, pushing eggs around in a pan with a spatula as she speaks.

When I woke up, she was gone. I was afraid she’d run off again and rushed downstairs, tripping over the bottom step as I struggled to put on my jeans.

But I found her in the kitchen, wearing another one of my t-shirts and humming quietly as she cooked.

“Is that right?”

“Yup.”

“With eggs?”

“Not just any eggs. A Chinese omelet. One of my mom’s old cleaning jobs was for a Chinese food startup. She got really close with one of the chefs who often stayed late to test recipes. He showed her how to make it and she taught me.”

She plates the omelet and puts it on the island between us, pushing it towards me.

“Oh, one finishing touch.” She says, opening the fridge and pulling out a crispy chili oil I didn’t know we had. “I add some of this on top. It’s not part of the OG recipe, but I like a bit of spice.”

She watches as I fork a piece and put it in my mouth.

Fuck, it’s good. I’ve never had this particular flavor profile before but it’s delicious. I moan in praise.

She claps happily. “You like it?”

“Yeah, it’s really good.” I say, going back for another big bite. “Did you find all this stuff here?”

“Yeah, it was all in the kitchen and pantry. It’s fully stocked with things I’ve never even seen before. I think Claire realized I’ve been cooking lately and bought a few things for us. Please thank her for me if you see her.”

Her politeness is an inexplicable turn on. I want to fuck it out of her. “Will do.”

I scoop another bite and hold it up between us. “Try some of this.” I say.

She comes around to stand next to me and opens her mouth. I feed her the omelet and she groans and nods repeatedly. “Even better than usual.” She says, smiling at me.

I can’t resist. The fork hits the plate with a clang as I stand, grab her by the hips and flip her so she’s pushed against the counter. My mouth comes down on hers and her fingers dig into my hair as she kisses me back with equal fervor.

A throat clearing breaks the moment. I toss a look over my shoulder towards the doorway, expecting to see Rhys or Phoenix standing there like the cockblocks they are.

I freeze when I see who it is.

Robert.

Dread joins hatred in my chest as I realize that Bellamy’s here. That he caught us in this position and now he knows of her existence. I’m usually so careful to keep him far away from anything he can use against me. His eyes are already locked on her, appraising her with clear interest.

This was sloppy on my part and now I have to divert his attention away. If I make it clear to him that she doesn’t mean anything, he won’t be able to hold her over me.

“Well what are you doing, Rogue? Introduce me to your friend, son.” He says, his tone genial and so fucking insincere I want to choke him.

Bellamy freezes in my hold and blanches as his words register.

“Is that your dad?” She hisses so low that only I can hear her.

I nod almost imperceptibly. She pushes me off and puts space between the two of us.

“I’m so sorry, sir. I’m mortified to be meeting you right now.” She gasps when he raises an eyebrow. “No! Not in general, I just mean in this moment. I’m Bellamy.” She says with a small, pathetic wave. “Please excuse me, I’ll be right back.”

She tugs my shirt down her body, trying to hide her legs a bit more. With a quick nod in his direction, she passes him and runs out of the room.

The fucker turns back to look at her as she walks past him, knowing that he’ll be able to see her thighs and potentially more. The thought turns me murderous in the blink of an eye.

“Don’t fucking look at her.” I snap.

I regret the outburst immediately. I’m doing exactly opposite of what I should do in this moment and revealing too much. He turns slowly back to me, taking me in as he looks deep in thought.

“She’s one of the scholarship girls.” A statement, not a question.

“She’s nobody. Just a quick fuck.”

He continues to look at me with a calculated stare. I don’t want him to know she exists.

She walks back in, wearing a blue dress with daisies on it, looking fucking breathtaking.

“I’m sorry again that you had to see that. I’m Bellamy.”

“It’s lovely to meet you, Bellamy.” He says, his voice sickly sweet as he shakes her outstretched hand. “I remember your name from the scholarship process. I didn’t realize you were dating my son.”

“I—”

“She’s not.” I interrupt.

She throws me a hurt look.

“We’re... just friends.” She says with a polite smile in his direction.

“We were just leaving.” I throw in his direction, grabbing her by the elbow and nearly dragging her behind me as I march towards the door.

“I hope to see more of you while I’m in town, Bellamy.” He says, and I know he’s goading me, trying to get me to react again.

“Likewise.” She quips, before I’ve got us in the hallway.

She rips her arm out of my grip, furious. “You were just unforgivably rude.” She exclaims. “Maybe you can talk to your dad like that and it might not seem like a big deal to you, but he’s the executor of my scholarship. You know he’s in charge of my future here. He could take it all away tomorrow if he wanted to.”

“He won’t.” I say, my tone sure.

She gives me a disgusted look. “You made me look like a slut. I know we’re not dating and that’s fine, but you don’t get to make me look like a cheap fling when he finds me wrapped around his son half-naked in his kitchen. He’s your father and the man in charge of my scholarship. Have a bit more respect for me.”

“That wasn’t my intention. But I want you to stay away from him.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.”

“Sorry, let me elaborate on my question. *Excuse me*, who do you think you are to tell me what I can and cannot do?”

“I’m serious, Bellamy. I don’t want you around him.”

“I can understand why you wouldn’t. After all, you don’t want every ‘quick fuck’ to meet your dad.”

Fuck. She’d overheard that.

I run my hand through my hair, frustratedly. Why can’t she just listen and not give me a hard time for once?

“Don’t you dare look frustrated. I’m the injured party here.” She says, tying her laces with hands that tremble with

anger. "I'm trying to be patient with you and get to know the real you, Rogue, but you make it really hard."

She loops her second lace with a violent tug and stands up. I grab her arm as she tries to shove past me.

"Where are you going?"

"For a walk. I need to clear my head." She says. "Like I said, he oversees my scholarship so if he wants to meet with me, I'll happily agree. And frankly I don't give a damn whether you have an issue with that or not."

I march back into the kitchen, fists clenched and temper violent.

"Why are you back here? Don't you have a new plaything whose life you can ruin in America?" I ask, my anger a noose around my neck. My breaths are hacking and shallow.

He likes them young, my father. I've caught him fucking girls my age since before I was legal. Disgust roils in my stomach as I think of the things he's done.

"Thornton told me you had her record expunged."

He's still focused on Bellamy. Any interest he shows her is dangerous. He's a shark in the water smelling blood and he'll attack the both of us if I don't play this right.

I walk around him and to the fridge, forcing him to turn around and face me. Pulling a bottle out of the fridge, I uncap it and take a nonchalant sip.

"Why do you care?"

"It's not every day my son shows interest in anything, let alone a girl. What is she to you?"

"Nothing. I was bored and decided she'd be good entertainment. That's all."

He takes a menacing towards me. I cross my arms and stand firm, used to his intimidation tactics.

“Don’t lie to me.”

“My life is none of your fucking business. What I do or don’t do with Bellamy has nothing to do with you. I won’t be subjected to whatever this interrogation is just so you can get your rocks off on whatever information I give you. Go back to America, you’re not needed or wanted here.”

It’s a testament to the speed of sound that I hear the crack of his fist on my jaw before I feel it. I’d been expecting it, lately this is how every interaction ends with him, but I’m hardly prepared for the force of the blow.

Water flies everywhere as the bottle leaves my hand and drops to the floor.

“Show a little respect.” He booms.

Funny that Bellamy asked for the same.

I turn my face away as I see his fist come down again. I brace for impact.

24.

Bellamy

It's a gorgeous September day outside. The sun is out and shining, the temperature is warm but not unbearably hot, the air crisp and fresh. A perfect day for a picnic.

Instead, I'm stomping down the steps of Rogue mansion, the gravel crunching loudly under my angry footsteps. He really has the unique ability of making me go from zero to a hundred in a second. It's almost impressive, really.

Clearly there's something going on between him and his dad and the last thing I want to do is get in the middle of it.

That being said, I will be reaching out to his father and setting time for a coffee. My road has been incredibly rocky since I got here – mostly due to his son – and I want to get to know him so he understands the kind of person I really am.

I pat my dress, looking for my phone so I can tell the girls to meet up, but realize I forgot it back at the house.

Fuck.

I could use some space from him for the afternoon. I wanted to text the girls and see if they'd meet me for a picnic.

I didn't get far, I could just run back to the house and get my phone. Now that I realize I don't have it, I feel it's absence.

Turning on my heels, I head back towards the house with a big sigh. I'm going to sneak in so I don't have to face him again. I'm not particularly looking forward to another round in the ring with Rogue.

I close the door softly behind me and am about to head up the stairs when I hear voices coming from the kitchen. It sounds like an argument.

I'm about to ignore it when I make out Mr. Royal's voice.

"Show a little respect."

He's furious.

His voice is terrifying. It sounds nothing like when he spoke to me.

It sends a chill crawling down my back.

He can only be talking to Rogue that way. He was the only person here when I left.

Everything in my body is telling me to run away. To go upstairs, get my phone and leave the house like I intended.

But if it is Rogue, I can't leave him.

Our previous argument is forgotten, I won't leave until I'm sure he's okay.

I tip toe quietly towards the kitchen until I'm just outside the doorway. Anxiety has my muscles corded in anticipation as I lean against the wall and psych myself up to look around the corner.

The decision is made for me when I hear the very recognizable sound of skin on skin contact, followed by a grunt. I whip around the corner and my jaw drops in horror at the scene.

Rogue has one knee on the ground. Blood drips from multiple cuts on his face and his eye is starting to swell shut. He staggers back, clearly reeling from the force of the blow.

His father stands above him, fists clenched at his side.

My blood is frozen in my veins. Shock has me locked rigidly in the doorway, my fingertips stiff against the doorframe. There's ringing in my ears and all I can hear is the sound of my heart beating furiously.

My brain is misfiring, pinballing between sending disbelief, anger, concern, and fear rushing through me.

"Don't have anything to say, you fucking coward?" His father spits out at him.

Rogue gaze travels up to meet his father's, widening a fraction as they notice me in the process. He doesn't pause to look at me, doesn't acknowledge or call attention to the fact I'm there.

But he sees me. I know he does.

He shoots his father a venomous glare and gets a punch to the stomach in answer.

"Ask me to stop." His father crows, the sadistic glee clear in his tone. "Beg me to stop."

He's getting off on this.

Rogue drops his head and grips his stomach in pain, but says nothing. His eyes meet mine briefly and fuck, I've never seen pain like the one clear in his gaze before. It physically hurts to look at.

It calls to me and jolts me out of my frozen state. The sight of his dad's arm pulling back, rearing for another blow, pushes me into action.

I take a step forward.

"Stop!"

At first, I think I'm the one who speaks. But I'm not the one who utters those words, Rogue is.

"Please, stop."

His father's fist pauses in the air and I stop mid step.

Rogue spoke those words to him, but they were meant for me.

They warn me to stay put.

His eyes drop to mine and beg me to not reveal my presence.

It's only because of the way he looks at me that I listen.

"Interesting. You've never begged before." If I thought his tone was gleeful before, it's downright delighted now. It feels like he's won a battle I don't know about.

I turn my gaze away so I don't look when he releases his punch and it connects with Rogue cheekbone, sending him sprawling to the floor.

“That one feels extra sweet.”

I take a step back around the corner, into the darkness of the hallway.

I'm just in time. Seconds later, his father storms out with one final parting blow.

“You were always a disappointment.”

I'm physically shaking.

It takes everything in me to stay hidden.

The moment he's past me, I run into the kitchen. Rogue is standing upright, barely, gripping a chair tightly to help support his weight. His other hand rubs his jaw gingerly.

“Rogue! Are you alright? What hurts?” I'm frantic. My hands are over his cheeks, his neck, his chest, wildly checking him. “Ice! You need ice. I'll get you some.”

I grab an ice pack from the fridge and wrap it in a kitchen towel before placing it against his cheek. His gaze lingers off to the side, completely dead.

“Rogue.” I say his name softly, lifting his shirt to check for injuries. “I'm so, so sorry.”

His hand snaps out and grabs my wrist, stopping me. He still doesn't look at me.

“Go.”

“What?”

“Go home. I don't want to see you right now.”

I cup his cheek gently, turning his head towards me and forcing him to meet my gaze.

“No.” I say, dropping the ice pack and wrapping my arms tightly around his neck. “I'm not letting you push me away this time.”

He tenses and I think he's going to push me off. I hold on, trying to communicate the depth of my emotion in this hug. He releases a breath and it's like the weight of the world rolls off his shoulders as he sags into me.

I hold him for a long time. No words are spoken, but we rock back and forth slightly.

When I pull back from him, his eyes soften. He stares at my face wordlessly for a couple seconds before his thumb comes up and collects a falling tear, tracing it back up to my eye before veering off my cheekbones. It's only then that I realize I'm sobbing.

I'm crying for a boy with no parents and a man built from those consequences.

"Your dad just abused you and I'm the one crying, I'm so sorry."

His gaze is fixed on the tear on his thumb, his eyes shining in wonder.

"You really do care about me?" He asks and there's surprise in his voice.

No wonder he didn't believe me when I told him I had feelings for him. Why would he believe me when that's how his own father treats him.

I nod wordlessly.

He pulls me into his body and wraps his arms around me. One hand comes down to palm my ass as his lips claim mine in a violent kiss. The metallic taste of blood on my tongue brings me back to reality.

"Wait, stop." I say, wrenching my lips away from his. He lets me go reluctantly. "I need to take care of these cuts so they don't scar."

I grab the first aid kit from the walk-in pantry and a chair from the kitchen table and come back to stand in front of him.

"Sit." I order, pointing at the chair. Surprisingly, he obeys without argument.

I find and take out all the materials I'll need to help clean him up and set them on the table before sitting in a chair in front of him.

Dousing a cotton swab in hydrogen peroxide, I dab it slightly against the cuts on his left cheek. He doesn't flinch. Doesn't react in any way.

I know he won't want to talk about it, but I can't pretend that didn't happen and I didn't just witness it.

"Why did you tell me to hide?" I ask. "You didn't say the words with your mouth, but I heard them loud and clear."

"He would have hurt you too."

I swallow around the emotion in my throat at his answer. Part of me hopes that's the real reason he called me a quick fuck. Because he was worried about my safety and not because that's all I am to him.

"So, he's done this before?" I ask, my voice small.

He doesn't answer. Like before, his eyes say it all.

Another tear drops down my cheek as I apply wound seal cream to two cuts before covering them in a bandaid.

"He's rarely here so it's not often."

"We need to go to the police."

He laughs humorlessly. "The police in Switzerland are not like the ones in America. And he's in all their pockets so they won't do anything. I just need to graduate. Once I do, I'll get access to a trust fund from my grandfather and I'll use it to get the fuck out of here. He'll never see me again."

I cup his unharmed cheek in my hand. His voice hardens as he pulls away from me and tries to distance himself. "I don't need your pity."

I crawl onto his lap and wrap my arms around him. His size dwarfs me when I sit pressed against his chest like this. I turn my head and kiss his throat.

"It's not pity. It's empathy."

Burrowing my face deeper into his neck, I whisper against his skin. "I'm so sorry I slapped you."

I hated myself the moment I got physical after our confrontation at the pond, but the added broader context of Rogue life puts the horror of my action in sharp focus. He acted horribly, but I unknowingly crossed an unforgivable line.

"I deserved it."

"You deserved the verbal lashing of the century, but I should never have put my hands on you. I'm sorry."

His Adam's apple bobs as he swallows. He looks at me quietly before he answers. "I'm sorry too. For the things I did."

I move my lips up to his ear. "You're forgiven." I say, kissing his cheek.

He groans, his body shivering at the contact. "Promise?"

I pull away, laughing. "Pinky promise." I say, extending my pinky at him.

Looking at me through heavy lidded eyes, he wraps his own around it.

"You're not a quick fuck."

My heart is racing so loudly in my chest, I'm afraid he can hear it. "What am I then?"

"I don't know." He answers, grabbing my hand and bringing it to his temple. "But you're in here." He leans into the touch, partially resting the weight of his head in my hand. His voice is almost irritated when he speaks again. "You're in here and I can't fucking get you out."

"Good." I smile, stroking the hair back and off his forehead. "Rogue, we can't stay here. He's going to come back later."

"We'll be fine. He won't do anything with you here. He'd rather die than do anything that might harm his precious image."

"You think so?" My voice betrays how unsure I am.

“Yeah, it’ll be fine. He’ll probably leave after his Monday meeting.”

“Alright.” I reply.

“Don’t worry. I wouldn’t let anything happen to you.”

25.

Bellamy

Rogue refuses to talk about the kitchen incident after that. We spend the rest of the weekend watching movies and heatedly debating them as we cook meals.

It feels incredibly domestic.

Except when his mood shifts and he takes me roughly against the nearest surface. He's insatiable, I can hardly keep up. He fucks me on the table, against the kitchen, and on the counter. On the carpet and in one of the chairs. Every time I disagree with him and refuse to back down, he spansks me until I do.

He alternates between calling me every dirty name in the book and lavishing me with possessive praise. It's intoxicating and potentially a little toxic and I'm drunk on it.

On Tuesday, I grab an early dinner at *Bella's* with the girls after I dip out of détention ahead of schedule. Away from prying ears, we fully debrief on the last couple of weeks. I don't tell them about Rogue's dad. I don't want them to worry about me and I don't want to reveal his secret. It's not mine to tell.

Two hours into the dinner, Rogue texts me.

Asshole: I'm outside.

Startled, I look up and see his Aston Martin in the parking lot, lights still on.

Me: I'm not going home. I'm with my friends.

I feel weird calling it 'home'. It's not my home, but what else am I supposed to call it?

Me: And I want dessert.

Asshole: Me too.

My skin heats at the insinuation and just like that, he has me. Grabbing my bag and coat, I scoot out of the booth.

"Hey, Rogue's outside. I'm going to head out."

"No!" Thayer exclaims. "We're just getting started, don't leave yet."

"Sorry," I say sincerely. "He's already here. Promise, I'll spend the entire day this weekend." I add, dropping a kiss on each of their cheeks.

"Alright, but only because one of us needs to get laid. Enjoy! Don't do anything we wouldn't do. Or do and tell us all about it please." She screams after me, and I duck my head to avoid the stares of the other customers.

Outside, I jump into Rogue's waiting car. He pulls out of the parking lot and merges into the lane towards his house. The sun is starting to set and the colors of the sky are beautiful.

"You can't just order me away from my friends when you feel like it."

"And yet, here you are." He says, his hand coming down from the steering wheel to grip my thigh. His hand is massive, the veins popping as he dwarfs my thigh in a possessive hold.

"I'm not happy about it." I cross my arms in mock anger.

"You barely put up a fight."

"I am now."

"That's okay, I'll fuck the attitude out of you when we get home."

A secret thrill rushes through me at his words. It's my turn to play. "I'd like to see you try."

His head snaps to the side. Eyes narrow at me viciously, his gaze burning the side of my face. The fading bruises and cuts starting to heal on his face make him look especially dangerous.

Abruptly, he veers off the main street into a side road bordered by thick trees.

“What are you doing? Where are we going?” I ask, gripping the edge of the window tightly.

He ignores me and keeps driving. A couple turns later, we’re on an isolated road deep into the trees. He turns the car off and jumps out before I can ask another question. My door opens and he bends over me to undo my seatbelt before ripping me out of my seat.

Pulling me to the side of the car, he flips me over so that my cheek rests on the warm metal.

“Rogue!”

“Clearly, this can’t wait until we get home. You know what your punishment is going to be for goading me?” He asks, bunching the fabric of my skirt at the waist and looking down at my ass. I’m only wearing a thong today, so I’m completely on display for him. One hand keeps me pressed against the car while the other caresses my cheeks slowly.

“You’re going to spank me?”

“No.” His hand comes down on my right cheek with a brutal slap. I cry out. “Don’t pretend you don’t love it, Bellamy. That would hardly be a punishment.” He spanks me again, this time on my left.

He’s right. Wet heat pools in my center after the second slap. I love the way he takes me with no regard, just laser focused and obsessed. I’m bent roughly over his car, ass out and legs splayed. We’re in public, anyone could walk by and see me. And a part of me is anxious and terrified.

The other part of me is so insanely turned on I’m afraid I’ll burn the car with my body heat alone.

His head comes down to mine as he whispers roughly against my ear. “No, before we leave here I’ll have you begging for me.”

Standing straight, he slaps my ass in three quick, hard strikes. “I love your ass so much, Bell.” He says with something akin to awe in his voice.

Bell.

“I love that it’s mine. I love that I can touch it whenever I feel like it. I want to tattoo my name on it.”

I let out a sharp cry when I feel his teeth dig into the skin of my left cheek.

He bit me.

He keeps the pressure, suctioning the skin into his mouth.

He’s obsessed with marking me.

No inch of my body is safe.

Releasing me, he runs his thumb over the skin rippled by his bite. A deep growl rumbles low in his throat. His voice is velvety soft and seductive when he speaks. “I love seeing my teeth marks here.”

His fingers trace down the line of my thong. Hooking one under the fabric, he rolls it down my crack pulling my thong from between my cheeks and tugging it to the side.

It’s such a dirty move, more wetness gushes to my entrance. Using both hands, he spreads my cheeks and looks at me *there*. I rear up, embarrassed, but he slams me back down against the hood.

“Stay.” He threatens darkly.

He bends over and drags his tongue down my crack, licking me from top to very bottom. I almost shoot off the car again, pleasure sending my eyes rolling into the back of my head, but his hand comes out to keep me in place.

“You’re wet. You’re always so soaked for me, I should just keep you on my dick 24/7.” He traces up and down my slit, collecting my wetness.

I moan loudly.

“You’d like that, baby?”

I nod, staring back at him with heavy lidded eyes, lust completely glazing over my every other thought.

“Fuck, don’t look at me like that. You’re asking to be completely destroyed. Don’t forget this is a punishment.”

“Like I said, I’d like to see you try.” I get out between heady moans.

He gives me a smirk that’s downright sinister as he plunges three fingers into me in one go.

I scream. He’s never gone in with three right off the bat. The stretch is so tight, I’m afraid I’ll break. He doesn’t give me a moment to get accustomed before he pistons in and out of me at a furious pace. He curls his fingers down and hits a spot that has stars exploding behind my eyes. He’s been fingering me for less than thirty seconds and I’m hurtling fast towards an orgasm so strong I’m afraid it might blind me.

He pulls his fingers out abruptly and takes a small step back. I get up on my elbows and turn towards him.

“What are you doing?”

“Are you ready to beg yet?”

I turn back towards the car, frustration singing in my blood, but say nothing.

“No?”

Rogue steps back towards me and slaps my ass twice before spearing three fingers into me again.

“Rogue!” I scream, struggling for purchase on the flat surface of the car as he picks up the rhythm. Like before, it takes seconds before I reach the cliff of my climax. Like before, he pulls his fingers out and steps away moments before I go over the edge. I blindly reach for him, trying to pull him back to me. “Rogue, don’t.” I whine.

“It’s so fucking hot the way you call my name.” He brings his hand down and smacks my pussy. The blow hits my clit

and sends pain and pleasure flaming through me. “Come on. Beg for me, baby.”

I shake my head repeatedly, brokenly.

The loop of his belt clangs, followed by the rip of his zipper. He tears open a condom with his teeth and sheathes his thick cock before plunging into me in one go.

My mouth falls open on a silent scream as he doesn't give me a chance to adjust, just slams into me, fucking me ruthlessly.

My hips hit the car with his every thrust. I'm face down, my cheek rubbing up and down the hood of the car at a pace that matches his rhythm.

Wrapping one brutal hand around my waist and the other around my throat, he pulls me up, angling my neck back so that I'm bent looking backwards at him.

The fingers on my waist trace down my stomach, part my pussy lips and flick my clit. I'm moaning, panting like a wild animal as he holds me in his grasp. It feels like he's playing with every part of me, inside and out.

“Look at you.” He purrs in my ear. “You're such a good little slut for me, baby. You love it when I string a tune on your clit. Admit it.”

“N-no.”

“Liar.”

He picks up his pace, truly fucking me now. My walls clamp down around him as I reach the peak, needing just a few more strokes to push me over.

He pulls out.

I scream out in frustration. He releases me and I fall limply against the car.

This is torture. I'm so sexually frustrated, I could cry. It feels like I'm seconds away from losing it if he doesn't just let me come.

He flips me onto my back and yanks me by my legs so my ass hangs off the edge of the car. My center rubs against his cock as he rocks into me, teasing me.

“I said beg, Bellamy.”

“Please.” I whisper, looking away.

“What was that? I didn’t hear you.” He grabs my jaw and turns my face towards him. Confidence drips from his very pores as he speaks. “And look at me when you beg. I want to see those pretty eyes and that fuckable mouth when you submit to me.”

“Please.”

“Louder.”

“Please!” I shout, my voice raw.

His smirk is delighted and evil when I give in. “Good girl.”

He powers into me, pinches my clit and bites my nipple all at once and I hold onto him as I explode. My body spasms around him for what feels like minutes as I ride the intense wave back down to earth. He tenses above me and comes with a loud grunt before falling on top of me.

He stays rooted inside me as he whispers against my throat. “What are you doing to me?”

The question is rhetorical, so I don’t say anything.

For multiple reasons, detention is painful that following Wednesday.

First, Rogue isn’t here with me. He got an exemption for an event he had to go to with Rhys and Phoenix.

That means I’m in the library, alone, where I have been for the past three hours stacking books with what feels like no end

in sight.

It's hard to admit that I miss Rogue's presence, but I do. Surprisingly, he's been carrying an equal share of the workload this entire time. He doesn't complain and works diligently next to me. We've made a lot of progress and will likely finish before our six weeks are up.

But while he's helpful from a physical labor standpoint, that's not the reason I miss him. I miss the way he makes me laugh with his sarcastic jokes and his dour, pessimistic view on life.

It's weird going an entire session without him asking me a million questions and me having to resort to threats to get him to answer one. This is where I see him smile the most. His genuine smiles always catch me off guard, appearing out of nowhere and making it impossible for me not to smile back at him. If I saw myself in the mirror, I'm sure I'd have a stupid enamored look on my face.

I check my phone again and see I have zero texts.

Clearly, I'm the only one craving the other's presence. I've got to get a grip. He's busy and he's thinking about other things. Plus, while he's told me I'm 'more than a quick fuck', he never defined how exactly. At best, we're still just friends with benefits and I've got to remember that.

It doesn't help that I'm extra hormonal because my period started today, which is the second reason why detention is painful.

My cramps are killer like they always are. My period only lasts a couple of days but fuck do I pay for those days. The only thing I want to do is stay in bed and watch a romcom.

Come to think of it, I don't see why I can't do that tonight. I have my period so Rogue and I won't be having sex and, no matter his assurances to the contrary, that's the real reason he wants me to sleep in his bed. If we can't have sex, he likely won't want me there.

I ran out early last time I hung out with the girls, so I could use a night at home. Plus, he'll be home late after his event

which means he'll hardly miss me. Not that he would even without the event.

Okay, I'm spiraling.

Grabbing my phone, I shoot a quick text to the girls.

Me: I'm sleeping at home tonight. Rosé and reality tv night?

Nera: Count me in.

Six: Yes!

Thayer: Best news ever. I'm surprised Rogue is letting you though.

Nera: Yeah, true. Did you guys have a fight?

Me: Shark week.

Thayer: Ah.

Six: What's that?

Me: *sends blood emoji*

Six: Lol amazing, never heard this expression before.

Nera: I'll come pick you up when you're done.

Me: Ooh, that'd be amazing. I'll be done in 30.

Thirty one minutes later, I'm in Nera's car driving towards the apartment.

We watch a few episodes of the latest season of *Love Island UK* exactly as I'd pictured we'd do when I first moved in. The four of us are sprawled around the living space, chatting theories about our favorite couples like we know them.

"I love Tasha and Andrew." Six says.

“Yeah they’re cute but I’m Ekinde supremacy all the way.” Thayer replies.

“I think they’re going to win. They’re so cute.” I say, wiping a tear from my eye. We just watched their date and it had me sobbing. Damn those period hormones.

“I’ve seen the spoilers so my lips are sealed.” Nera adds.

“You guys feel free to continue without me.” I say, getting up and heading towards my bedroom. “I’m going to rest for a bit, I’ll be back out later.”

I remove my fuzzy socks and throw on Rogue’s sweater. I never gave it back to him after he leant it to me. I get under the covers and curl up in a ball. I’m exhausted, the cramps are more painful than usual, and I just need to sleep it off.

My eyes close and I fall into a deep slumber.

I’m abruptly awoken when the door to my bedroom slams open and bounces off the wall.

I rub my eyes to try to get the sleep out of them as I mentally emerge from the fog of my nap. Rogue is standing in the doorway, his flinty gaze clashing with mine as I sit up.

He steps into my room, kicking the door shut behind him.

“By all means, do come in. Is there a reason you’re abusing my door this way?” I ask drolly. When all else fails at least I have my best friend, sarcasm.

“Is there a reason I came home tonight and you weren’t in my bed?”

I tamp down the pleased feeling that unfurls inside me. Those words shouldn’t make me as happy as they do. I won’t let myself hope that he’s here because he missed me and not because we have a deal and I’m breaking it.

“Sorry, I meant to text you but fell asleep. Speaking of which, you could have texted and I’d have told you. You didn’t have to come all the way out here. And who let you in?”

“Thayer. And I did text.” He grinds out between gritted teeth.

I’d thrown my phone on the other side of the bed when I laid down for my nap. I grimace when I realize it’s on DND and I have a bunch of missed texts, including a few from Rogue.

Asshole: Where the fuck are you?

Asshole: I was looking forward to burying myself in your tight pussy. You can imagine how thrilled I am to find my bed empty.

Followed by ten minutes later.

Asshole: You better be sleeping.

Asshole: Alone.

And finally five minutes later.

Asshole: I’m coming to find you.

I’m surprised he waited that long, that he didn’t immediately tear the campus apart looking for me. I choose to see it as progress.

“As you can see I was asleep and alone like you wanted.”

“Why aren’t you in my bed?”

I try to stuff the butterflies that erupt in my stomach in a metaphorical box and shove that box deep in a metaphorical hole somewhere.

“I have my period. I’m bloated. My stomach hurts. I’m miserable and in pain and I’ve cried twice today already and the forecast for the rest of the night is not looking too good. Having sex sounds about as enticing as putting my finger in an electric pencil sharpener right now so I didn’t think you’d want me to sleep over. I’m sorry you came all the way here for nothing. I’ll come back in a few days when it’s over, promise.”

I add that last word as an olive branch expecting him to reply ‘pinky promise?’ like we usually do. Instead, he looks at me silently for a few more seconds, giving nothing away as usual.

“So you’re not upset?”

“Other than at mother nature, no.”

He remains silent and because silence makes me uncomfortable, I feel the urge to fill it. “I’m not mad about anything. You and I are fine.”

I’m about to add something else because he still doesn’t speak, but he turns on his heels and stalks out. I hear the front door close behind him as my shoulders sag. I’m disappointed in myself for being disappointed.

If you needed a sign as to where he stands, that was it, Bellamy.

I lay back down and squeeze my eyes shut to keep moisture that feels suspiciously like tears at bay.

I will not cry a third time today.

Twenty minutes later, I’m still on my bed, staring up at the ceiling and rethinking my every life choice when my door bursts open again.

“What the—”

Rogue is already halfway across the room by the time I process he’s back and carrying a bag from the local pharmacy. He begins rifling through as he hands me items.

“I checked and the internet said Aspirin might thin your blood and make you bleed more which seemed counter productive in this scenario so I avoided that and got ibuprofen instead. Take two.”

I blindly reach for the bottle, still trying to process this turn of events.

“I also got you a heating pad. The pharmacist I spoke to said this was the best brand but they’re one-use only so I got you a couple.”

Those also come my way.

“The article I read said snacks were imperative otherwise you might turn into an angry little gremlin so naturally I got a large selection, including about fifteen different types of chocolate. There’s also a bunch of girly shit in there like face masks and nail polish. Google also recommends watching *Pride & Prejudice* in this situation. Apparently crying is expected and that movie should help you get it out. I checked, it’s available on Apple TV so I can cue that up if you want. Otherwise move the fuck over so I can get in beside you.”

He pauses to let me answer but I’m on a ten second delay at least. I’m still working on processing his return, let alone his words. The care in them is completely at odds with the way he delivers them, in his usual detached emotionless tone.

“You’re going to spend the night here.” I say. He nods. “Even though I can’t have sex with you?” I ask, making sure to reiterate that I’m closed for construction. In case he somehow missed the info the first time I said it.

He rolls his eyes in exasperation. “I’m not totally devoid of human emotion.”

“That’s news to me.” I mutter under my breath.

“I heard that. I do have empathy, not much but some, and I can be celibate for 24 hours without the world coming to an end.”

“Again. I’m shocked.” I tease him. Humor is a better crutch than accidentally revealing how much this means to me.

But I also process his words. Just because I can’t sleep with him doesn’t mean he can’t go out and find somebody who can. My stomach turns and I don’t think it has anything to do with period cramps. He said he was celibate so is he not sleeping with anybody else?

A visual of Lyra's hand on his chest flashes in my mind and makes me borderline violent.

"I can see that overactive brain of yours spinning in there. I'm just looking after my "steady piece" as you Americans would say. This isn't a marriage proposal."

Those words have the necessary sobering effect on me.

"We don't need to fuck but you are spending the night with me. That's part of our deal." He adds as if afraid I'm going to kick him out.

"Alright. Start the movie and prepare to see me cry for what will be the fourth time today."

"Fourth? Have you cried since I left?"

"Oh, uh no." I fake cough, throwing the covers back and standing up to distract him. "I counted wrong, it's the third."

His eyes flick down to my chest. I'm about to rib him for looking at my breasts when I realize it's what I'm wearing that he's looking at.

"Is that my sweater?"

"Yeah." I say, pulling at the hem. "It's comfy."

His arm snakes out to wrap around my waist as he pulls me against him.

"Looks like you couldn't spend a night away from me either." He says smugly. His mouth swallows my answer as he kisses me hungrily.

I lean into him and for a couple of minutes all we do is makeout like the horny teenagers we are. He pulls away and looks down at me through heavy lidded eyes.

His voice is throaty and lust-filled when he speaks. "I like seeing my name on you."

26.

Rogue

“Are you comfortable?”

“Yeah, watch the movie.”

“Okay, but I can move if I’m too heavy.” Bellamy offers, nerves obvious in her voice.

When we moved to the living room, I reclined on the horizontal part of the couch and grabbed Bellamy so that she was lying on me.

Her head rests on my chest, just beneath my chin, and I have an arm wrapped around her. She tries repositioning herself but my arm keeps her pinned in place.

“Don’t fucking move.” I threaten.

I want her on top of me, want to feel her weight against my body. I need it after the day I’ve had. I’d told Bellamy I was going to an event, but in reality Rhys, Phoenix and I had met with Müller to discuss updates.

He still hasn’t found a thing.

I’d spent half the afternoon trying to answer detailed questions he had about my mother. When I couldn’t answer the vast majority of them, my mood turned black.

Where was she born? Somewhere in Lebanon.

Where did she go to college? I wasn’t sure if she even went.

What are the names of her parents? No clue.

I didn't know a fucking thing. The anger had grown and festered under my skin, every unanswered question adding to the wound and making it worse. I kept my composure on the outside but on the inside an inferno raged. Again, I asked myself why I was expending so much effort looking for a woman who'd simply walked away and never looked back.

Those spiraling thoughts had done nothing to improve my mood. It'd turned downright violent when I'd arrived home to an empty bed and no trace of Bellamy.

It's hard to describe the emotion that'd punched me in the gut when I'd come home expecting to find her in my bed only to be met with an empty room.

Fury doesn't even begin to cover it. I'd racked my brain thinking back to the last couple of days and if I'd done anything to piss her off. On top of renegeing on our deal, if she was ignoring me again, she was going to pay.

If she was with someone else, she'd witness just how insane I got when I didn't hold myself back.

Instead, I'd found her on the bed looking a little pale and very tired. Her mouth had dropped into a perfect 'o' as I'd barged in. I'd wanted to bite her puffy lips.

I was surprised when I realized the thought of going home to a bed without her in it was downright unappealing to me. It wasn't just about fucking her either.

It was the way she put music on when she brushed her teeth and danced to an entire song before putting her toothbrush away. How she was deaf to the world when she studied, completely dedicated and invested in her future in a way that was totally foreign to me. How she hummed off key when she thought no one was paying attention. And how she always, always curled into me as she fell asleep.

She burrows into me, accepting the comfort of our positions. "Don't hate me when your t-shirt is drenched in tears then."

"I'll just take it off."

I feel her smile against my chest as she watches the movie.

“My mom and I watch this movie together at least once a year.”

“It’s a classic.”

She turns her head towards me, surprised. “You’ve seen it before?”

“Parts of it. My mother loves it too.” I reply, a weight lifting when I realize I haven’t forgotten everything.

“She’s got good taste. Darcy’s hand flex after he helps her get in the carriage is so swoonworthy.”

“You like that?”

“It’s so romantic. It’s an unguarded moment for him. He’s usually so cold and aloof and doesn’t reveal his feelings for her, but in one movement he reveals so much.”

“I’ll see when we get to that part.”

We watch the movie quietly for a few minutes before she speaks again. “Were you thinking about her today? Your mom?”

I pause before answering. Maybe it’s the frustration of today or the fact that I’m more comfortable in this moment than I have been in a long time, but I want to tell her. “I’m looking for her.”

She looks at me. “What do you mean?”

“I hired a private investigator to find her.”

“Wow, that’s... that’s a big deal. Has he found anything yet?”

“No.” I say curtly. “He can’t find any trace of her since the week she left. And it doesn’t help that I can’t answer a single question he has. I don’t know anything about her.”

She wraps her hand around my neck and her fingers play with the hairs on my nape. It’s something I’ve noticed she does when she tries to soothe me. It works.

“That’s really hard, I’m sorry. Don’t blame yourself for not knowing every intimate detail about her. I mean, how could

you? I doubt your dad is answering any questions you have about her.”

Bullseye read from Bellamy on that one. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“Have you tried genealogy websites? I’m a bit of a true crime buff and recently I’ve watched a couple episodes where the cases have been solved by using familial DNA matches through websites like 23andme to find people who share the same DNA as the killer. Using a similar approach, you could see if you have any maternal relatives and trace her from there.”

Fuck, I hadn’t thought of that. “The PI took a DNA sample from me last week. I’m guessing that’s what he needed it for.”

She beams at me. “There you go! I’m sure he’ll find something.”

Leaning in, I give her a kiss. She deepens it.

“Well isn’t this cozy?”

We both turn to find Thayer leaning against the kitchen island with a smirk on her face. Bellamy blushes as she sits up. “I’m going to take a quick shower, I’ll be right back and we can continue the movie.”

I throw Thayer a dirty look as Bellamy heads to the bathroom. She returns the look, crossing her arms as she stares me down.

“What?”

“I don’t trust you.”

“You’re the one who let me in.”

“You threatened to kick down the door if I didn’t let you see Bellamy. That’s not much of a choice.”

“Semantics.”

“What are you doing?” She asks as I walk around her and fill a cup of water.

“Getting a glass of water.” I reply, setting it on the counter.

“No, I mean what are you doing here. She’s told me this is just a fuck buddy thing for you, so why are you here? Don’t you think this is giving her mixed signals?”

“Bellamy knows what we’re doing. I don’t see how this concerns you.”

“It concerns me because she’s my best friend and I don’t think you fully appreciate how lucky you are to have caught her attention. You’ll excuse me for questioning whether you deserve it or not. You won the lottery with her. She’s the most patient, kind, and loyal person I’ve ever met and absolutely incapable of protecting herself from assholes like you, which is where I come in.”

“I’m all ears.”

“I know I should be afraid of you since you could absolutely ruin my life if you felt like it, but that should tell you how serious I am when I say that if you hurt a hair on that gorgeous head of hers, I’ll make you regret it.”

“Noted.” I say, chuckling. “I can see why Rhys is obsessed with you.”

She’s saved from answering when Bellamy walks out of the bathroom, dressed in a new loungewear set and with wet hair. She’s reapplied her perfume and the scent of amber wafts up my nose and down to my hard dick.

I push the glass across the counter to her and hand her two ibuprofen. “Take these and drink.”

“Yes, dad.” She replies sarcastically, although she gulps down the pills.

Thayer watches the back and forth with an inscrutable look on her face.

“Don’t give me any ideas about having you call me daddy.” I reply suggestively.

“And that’s my cue to leave.” Thayer says as Bellamy blushes. “Enjoy your night.”

Bellamy falls asleep almost instantly once we settle back on the couch. Not wanting to wake her, I watch the rest of the movie before moving her.

When the movie is done, I pick her up and carry her in my arms to her room.

“Sorry. Didn’t realize I fell asleep.” Her words come out groggy with sleep.

“Go back to sleep.” I say, setting her down and drawing the duvet over her.

Standing up, I grab my t-shirt and yank it off by the neck. My trousers join it on the floor.

“You’re really staying?” She asks sleepily.

“Yes.”

“Good.” She answers, scooting to the other side of the bed and flipping over the corner of the duvet for me to get under. Inexplicable satisfaction blooms inside me as I watch her make room for me.

She turns away as I get into the bed beside her and I hike her hips back so her ass is against my front. The length of my erection presses into her lower back. There’s no way she can’t feel it.

“Ignore that. Go back to sleep.”

“It’s hard to ignore.” She says, giggling softly. Turning over, she moves into the crook of my arm, her head on my chest, her arm thrown across my body as she settles for the night. “Secret’s out.” She mumbles sleepily.

“Hmm?”

“You are a good person.” She says before her breathing evens out and she falls into a deep sleep. “I knew it.”

“The period hormones are making you hallucinate.” I say, my tone amused. “Goodnight.”



27.

Bellamy

When I wake up early on Thursday morning, Rogue is already out of bed and pulling on his clothes.

“Thanks for coming over last night.” I tell him, unsure what else to say. Him spending the night taking care of me and then sleeping in my bed feels like uncharted territory for us and I’m honestly not sure how to navigate it.

“You have a chill morning today, right?”

“Yeah, I only have one class before lunch, otherwise I just have study blocks. Why?”

“I called a nail salon in Aubonne and they’re sending a couple techs in an hour. You and the girls can get manicures if you want.” He tells me nonchalantly as he grabs his phone and wallet.

I gape at him, confused. “They’re coming here? What’s the occasion?”

He shrugs. “You said you like getting your nails done when you have a bad day.”

“I mentioned that weeks ago.”

“I remembered.”

“Okay, now I’m really getting concerned.” I say with a frown on my face as I go to him. Cupping his face between my hands, I turn it to the left, then the right as if looking for something. “Who are you and what have you done with Rogue?” I ask, laughing.

Grabbing my hands, he twists my arms behind my back and grips them with one hand while the other goes to cup my jaw.

“It’s as much a gift for me as it is for you. I want to feel these nails digging into my back next time I fuck you.”

“That can be arranged.” I say, getting up on my tiptoes to kiss him. He deepens the kiss and we stand there for a couple minutes before he pulls back.

His thoughtfulness surprises me. Coming over yesterday with a period first aid kit had been unexpected and lovely. Him booking this appointment because he listened to me and remembered, because he knew it’d make me happy... that stirs feelings in me I haven’t felt before. Feelings that I’m afraid of, because they already feel unmanageable in their strength and power.

He’s the one who’s been clear about what this is, or rather what it isn’t, but then he does things like this. If he keeps these small attentions up I’m afraid my feelings will snowball into something I can’t control.

“I’m going out of town for a few days. I’ll be back Sunday night.”

Startled and pulled from my thoughts, I follow him out into the kitchen. “Where are you going?” When he throws me a look over his shoulder, I add hastily. “You don’t need to tell me if you don’t want to.”

“London and Geneva. My grandfather’s inheritance includes his shares of Crowned King Industries, so I’m about to become a major stakeholder. I have to wine and dine the board and reassure them that the succession plan is still intact.”

“Sounds intense.”

“Not really. It’s mostly letting them pour me Macallans in their private burlesque clubs while they talk at me about the ‘good ole days’.”

“We really do lead different lives.” I say, my stomach turning at the thought that he might hook up with someone

else while he's gallivanting across Europe. We never said we were exclusive, so he's fully within his right to do so.

My heart is in my throat just thinking about it.

"Well, bye then." I say lamely.

He wraps an arm around my waist and tugs me against him. He kisses me hard, his voice husky when he pulls away. "Bye."

On Friday, I text him a photo of my nails. He gives it a thumbs up but says nothing else.

By Saturday evening, I'm frustrated that I haven't heard from him since. Six catches me checking my phone for the umpteenth time, hoping I'll find a text from him.

"I'm sure he's just busy." She offers helpfully.

"Yeah, busy having sex with someone else." I say, dolefully.

I didn't expect to feel his absence as much as I do. The fact that he doesn't text has the dual effect of making me miss him more and making me realize that he doesn't even think about me.

"Alright, that's it. I'm stepping in." Thayer says, jumping to her feet from where she was laying on our living room couch. "I'm not letting this pity party go on any longer, B. Who cares what Rogue is up to? It's Saturday, let's go have fun somewhere ourselves. Why don't we get glammed and go dancing? There's got to be somewhere cool near here, right Nera?"

"There's not much in Aubonne, but we could go to Baroque in Geneva."

"I actually know the owner! I can text him and he'll definitely get us in tonight." Six adds.

“Look at this plan coming together.” Thayer cups her hands in a plea to me. “Come on, B. Let’s go dancing tonight, it’ll get your mind off Rogue.”

Nera looks up from her phone. “I just checked their IG. It’s Latin night tonight.”

“Say no more.” I say, putting my hand up. “Maluma has my heart. I’m in.”



“Santé!” Six yells over the music as the four of us knock back tequila shots.

“Those never get easier.” I say with a grimace as I bite into the lime wedge Thayer hands me.

“That’s half the fun.” Nera answers with a wink.

“Come on, let’s go dance!” Thayer exclaims, pulling me to my feet.

Thanks to Six’s friend, we were able to get a VIP table at Baroque. It’s situated in a dark and moody corner of the main room just off the dance floor and has plush burgundy velvet couches that we’ve been lounging on since we got here an hour ago.

I follow Thayer onto the dancefloor, swaying my hips to the music as the swell of people swallows me. J Balvin blasts through the club and pulses through me as the vibrations rock my very bones.

I’m in the moment, energy and tequila buzzing through my veins as I close my eyes and give in. My body moves mindlessly to the music as I let it wash over me, erasing every thought I’ve had about Rogue over the last couple of days.

“Fuck, B. You look hot!” Thayer shouts in my ear so I can hear her over the music.

Peeling my eyes open slightly, I look at her through lowered lids. She has her phone out and is filming me. The alcohol has loosened me up and I dance slowly for the camera, swaying my hips and giving it a seductive come hither sign with my finger.

“That’s my best friend! She’s single and up for grabs, gentlemen and gentlemen.” Thayer adds before lowering her phone. She types away for a couple seconds.

“Are you posting that?”

“Duh. Look how hot you are.” She says, tilting her screen in my direction to show me.

I have to admit I look good. My lips are painted blood red and my hair is wild from running my hands through it as I dance. Thayer can be heard screaming that I’m single from behind the camera.

“This is going to make him eat his heart out.”

“You mean Rogue?” I ask. “What happened to ‘who cares what he’s doing’?”

“We don’t.” She says. “But that doesn’t mean we can’t get even.” She’s gleeful as she locks her screen. “Posted.”

“If you ever decide to use your powers for good you could bring about world peace.” I say thoughtfully, huffing out a breath when she jabs me in the ribs.

“Shut up.” She answers playfully.

Laughing, we make our way to the bar and let a couple guys buy us shots, then drinks, eventually waving them away when they try to dance with us.

The music changes as we dance to something slow and sensual and I move my body to match the change in tempo. Time goes by, one song flowing into the next, and I dance along to it. Hands come to grab my waist and I allow myself to imagine that they’re Rogue’s. That he and I are dancing together in this club, that he holds me and claims me in front of these people.

I let myself fall into the fantasy for a few seconds, but the hands are all wrong. They do nothing for me, and neither does the voice that drunkenly grunts against my ear, “Do you know where you’re sleeping tonight, baby?”

The syrupy sound of his voice as he calls me that has me bolting out of his arms and stumbling backwards.

“In my bed.” A voice snaps out behind me.

I stumble and my back hits a hard chest.

Strong hands wrap around my arms to stabilize me.

This voice, I know intimately. It’s bullied me and called me names. It’s whispered dirty things in my ear and called my name as it’s owner has come.

And now it snarls in a tone I’ve never heard before. Furious and jealous and possessive as he holds me tight enough to bruise against his body. A shiver shoots down my spine.

The man who I’d been dancing with scampers away in fear. I have half a mind to do the same because Rogue voice promises retribution.

I turn towards him slowly and my heart nearly beats out of my chest when we come face to face.

He’s standing in the center of the dancefloor surrounded by hundreds of people but he’s all I see. Even dressed in an entirely black suit, he still manages to stand out.

I’ve missed having his presence around. My world is just a little duller when he’s not in it. I even miss his overbearing remarks and the way he orders me about under the guise of using our deal.

My excitement at seeing him fizzles out when I see the look on his face.

His jaw is set. The muscle in his cheek jumps so hard that it looks painful. If I thought I’d seen his eyes darken beforehand, they’re downright black now. They shine against his tanned face, his pupils dilated with unfettered violence.

“Rogue.” I say, unable to keep the silent standoff going any longer.

“Bellamy.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I told you. I have business in Geneva.”

“I mean what are you doing *here*? In this club.” I ask, feeling defensive. His tone immediately has my back up.

He’s looking to pick a fight and I’m in the mood to give him one.

“Rhys sent me Thayer’s story. Thought I’d come say hello. Didn’t expect to find you practically fucking another guy in the middle of the club.” He says, speaking in hacked sentences.

I narrow my eyes on him. “You’re the one who’s spent the last couple of days in private cigar rooms and underground burlesque clubs and hasn’t texted. I’m sure you haven’t been spending those nights alone.”

“And what if I haven’t?” He asks, looking for a reaction.

He gets one.

“Screw you.” I say, losing my temper. I stalk off, anger mercifully keeping the tears at bay. Pushing through the crowd, I emerge into a dark hallway.

Rogue comes behind me and grabs my arm, shoving me against the wall. His hand slams down just above my head as he comes to loom over me.

“You think I’ve been fucking other women so you’re here to pick someone up, is that it?” He demands angrily. “Is that what this is, Bellamy? Revenge?”

“I was dancing.” I say, ripping my arm out of his grip and heading down the hall. “Go away, Rogue. Go back to whatever flavor of the month you’ve had keeping you company the last few days.”

I can see the smug smile even without turning around. “Jealousy looks good on you.” He calls out after me.

“You’re one to talk.” I spit out, whipping around to face him. He eats the space between us in less than two steps, his body towering above me as I speak. “You’re the one who tracked me to this club and ran off the guy behind me because you were jealous.”

“You’re damn right I’m jealous.” He sneers, grabbing me by the throat and speaking against my mouth. “Seeing you on IG in this hot little outfit knowing a hundred different guys would be trying to fuck you tonight, only to walk in and find some random wrapped around you with his hands all over your body made me homicidal. It’s no secret that I don’t want anyone else touching you but you keep pushing me.” He adds. “How far were you going to take this, Bellamy? Would you have fucked him?”

He slams his palm against the wall near my head when I don’t say anything. “Answer me Bellamy, or I’m going back in there and choking the fucker to death in front of you. I’ll lay his body at your feet and you’ll have no one to blame but yourself.”

He’s crazy enough to do it, the bastard, especially with the deranged look currently shining in his eye.

“No. I wouldn’t have fucked him.” I say. “But I could have if I wanted to.”

“Is that right?” He grinds out, his voice dripping venom.

“You never said you wanted to be exclusive.”

He grabs me by the arm again and yanks me towards the VIP bathroom before kicking it open.

“Everybody get the fuck out.” He demands, his jaw working back and forth as he glares down at me. Because he’s a Royal, they listen. The couple people in the stalls and sitting area avoid my eyes as they duck out.

Once everyone is gone, he releases me and locks the door with a foreboding *click*. He loosens his tie and takes a step towards me.

“I heard Thayer say you were single in her video. Do you really think I’d ever let someone else fuck you?”

His body is tense as he waits for my response. He looks ready to snap.

“*If* I think I can fuck someone else it’s only because you’ve said repeatedly that you weren’t looking for a relationship or anything serious.”

“Yes or no, Bellamy.” He demands.

“Yes.” I say, exasperatedly. “I didn’t think you’d mind if I went out with or slept with someone else.”

His hand shoots out and grabs my nape, using it to tug me against him.

“Wrong.” He bites a trail from my throat across my jaw line and to my lips where he draws blood. The metallic taste fills my mouth. “There’s no one else for you, Bell.”

His lips come crashing down on mine.

He’s an animal. He bites, he licks, he takes.

He’s always been possessive, but this is different. It’s like he wants to mark every part of my body, to leave traces of himself everywhere on the outside like he already has on the inside.

But I can’t get his words about him sleeping with someone else out of my head.

“Rogue, stop.” I say, ripping my mouth away from his and turning my head. “I’m not sleeping with you if you fucked someone else this week.”

“I didn’t.”

“You didn’t.” I repeat.

“I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you.” He says, yanking the top fabric of my wrap around halter dress up and exposing my breasts. He tweaks both nipples as he nuzzles my neck. “I missed you.”

“You’ve got a funny way of showing it.” I say, trying to resist his advances.

“This is new for me. No idea what I’m doing.” He says, mollifying me. His words are muffled against my skin. “Tell me you missed me too.” He kisses and bites the column of my neck.

I arch into him, the combination of biting, licking, and sucking sending heat pooling into my belly.

“I missed you too.” I admit.

His hand snakes under my dress and rips my panties clean off. He stuffs them in his pants before drawing his fingers up my slit to my clit.

He moans approvingly against my skin. “You’re always so wet for me baby.”

“Mhmm.” I moan huskily as he pushes two fingers into me, his thumb staying back to flick my clit. He spears me with his fingers, his rhythm brutal.

“You’re such a good girl for me. I can feel you squeezing my fingers and gushing on my hand. You fucking love it rough, don’t you?”

He slaps the side of my ass when I say nothing.

“Ah! Yes, I love it.”

He slides a third finger into me, continuing his savage pace. I’m on the cusp of a blinding orgasm, seconds away from teetering over the edge when he abruptly pulls out of me.

I cry out sharply at the loss of his fingers.

His hand wraps around my throat and squeezes once, warningly.

“That’s for letting another man touch what belongs to me.” He smacks my clit.

Once.

Twice.

Three times in quick succession.

A tortured cry falls from my lips.

He flips me and bends me over the sink. I'm facing a mirror and I watch him watch me. His pupils are blown with lust and dominant ownership as he strokes my ass.

I watch my mouth drop open as his hands part my cheeks and his finger runs up and down my crack.

"And this," He says, dipping his middle finger in my pussy before trailing it up to my back hole. My eyes widen and flick up to meet his in the reflection to say something — what, I don't know — when he pushes his finger in to the hilt.

My palm shoots up to hold myself against the mirror as a noisy moan leaves my lips. "This is for thinking there's a world in which you'll ever fuck somebody else." He whispers darkly above me, his gaze fixated on my face as he takes in my every micro reaction to his intrusion.

He starts moving his finger in and out, his pace getting steadily faster. "No one else touches you. No one sees you like this."

My eyes roll into the back of my head at the pleasure and pain of his exploration. I push my hips back to meet the thrusts of his finger, my mouth opening on a silent scream.

Faster than I can make sense of it, I'm back on the cusp of the orgasm that escaped me earlier. I'm panting, chanting his name, gripping the sink for support

"That's right baby, say my name. I'm the one fucking you. The only one." He says, his voice strained. "I'm going to fuck you so hard you'll never forget it again."

Grasping my waist he pulls out his finger and yanks my ass up to meet his hips. The rip of his zipper is the only warning I have before he thrusts his cock into my pussy.

"Fuck." I choke out.

He's fucking me raw.

"I love it when you curse. Your pretty mouth is so filthy when I fuck you."

He wraps his hand around my middle and yanks me up against his chest, moving his hand to grab my jaw and turn my

face towards him.

“You take it so good baby. You’re so tight around me, squeezing my cock like you’re mad at it.”

His mouth comes down on mine in a violent kiss. Our teeth clash and our tongues war as we battle each other.

He shunts into me roughly.

Slow, measured, powerful thrusts that are meant to punish. They’re threatening to send me over the edge.

He keeps kissing and fucking me as his finger finds my back hole again and pushes in. He swallows my incoherent moans in his mouth. It’s a tight fit and he’s pushing my limits.

“If you ever talk about fucking another man again I’ll fuck your tight ass and tattoo my name on it so you never forget who you fucking belong to.”

His right hand comes around to play with my clit and the combination of his hand, his dirty words, and his thrusts push me over the edge. I come with a tortured scream as I break apart around him.

“Dirty girl. You like the idea of me fucking your ass?”

I clamp down on his cock. He grunts and keeps pumping into me and strumming my clit as I ride out the waves of my orgasm. Finally, he comes with a roar, his hips thundering into me before he stills and empties himself inside me. Warmth floods my belly as his cum fills me.

He pulls out and crouches between my legs. I’m draped over the sink and too exhausted to be self-conscious.

He collects the cum that’s leaked out with two fingers and fucks it back into my pussy. His other hand caresses my back as he fingers me lazily.

“You’re going to take every drop of my cum.”

I’m not this girl. I’m a mostly quiet Midwesterner whose definition of ‘adventurous’ is getting yelled at by the staff at the Weiner Circle. Not someone who lets a guy she’s known less than a month finger her ass and fuck her in a European

club bathroom. Rogue unlocks this version of me that craves risk and adrenaline.

I want to live on the edge with him.

I'm still laying on the sink trying to catch my breath. He cleans me and pulls my skirt down over my ass before pulling me to my feet and wrapping his arms around me.

"You fucked me without a condom." I speak against his chest.

"I'm aware."

I step back and his arms drop to his sides. He's going to have to do better than that flippant response.

"I think I should get a say in that."

He crosses his arms and looks at me. "What's the problem? I know you're on the pill. I'm clean and I know you are since I'm the only one who's fucked you."

He loves to remind me of that fact, like I could ever forget it.

"You can't fuck me without a condom if you're sleeping with other people."

The left corner of his lip curls into a small smile. He closes the gap between us, his finger coming to stroke the line of my jaw and the column of my throat down to my collarbone.

"I won't fuck anyone else."

Satisfaction roars through me at his words.

"Good." I say with a decisive nod, hoping it covers the shaking of my hands.

We're exclusive.

"I thought I made that pretty clear but I'm happy to go again if you need further demonstration. There's no one else." He says, his hand coming back to cup my throat. "For either of us." He adds, his voice deadly.

I nod, agreeing.

“I’m possessive as fuck when it comes to you, Bellamy.” He says, “I don’t want to be the asshole who lies to you though. You know how I feel about relationships and love in general. I don’t believe in it and I don’t know if I’m capable of it. What I do know is I want you. More than I’ve ever wanted anyone or frankly anything before. And I don’t want you fucking anyone else. That has to be enough for you.”

He’s not telling me anything I don’t know and yet it still sucks to hear. Figures the first guy I like would be fucked up beyond measure.

“What if it isn’t?”

Rogue looks away. The muscle in his jaw jumps as he grinds his teeth down. “Then I’ll use our deal to make you spend every waking and sleeping moment with me.” He looks back at me. “And when our time is up, I’ll tie you to the bed so you can’t leave.”

“You’re crazy.”

“I’m obsessive, there’s a difference.”

“What about the fact that I have feelings for you? There’s only one ending for the person who has stronger feelings for the other and guess what? It’s not a happy one.”

“Look, I don’t have all the answers. The sex is hot as fuck and clearly we like spending time with each other. I propose we continue this until one of us has had enough and then we part as friends. No hard feelings.” He runs his hand through his hair and exhales a deep breath. “I’m not going to break your heart, Bellamy.”

It’s stupid. I should say no and walk away. I know no matter what I do, this only ends in heartbreak for me. But as hard as knowing I’m probably going to get my heart broken is, the thought of not seeing him or spending time with him anymore is harder.

I extend my fist at him, jutting out my pinky. “Promise?”

He wraps his around mine. “Pinky promise.”

We shake once before releasing each other. As he pulls away, he raises his hand and holds it up between us. Looking into my eyes without saying a word, he flexes it, stretching the fingers out before dropping it next to him.

“What was that?” I ask with a frown.

His answer is quiet, careful. “You said you liked the hand flex scene right?”

My brow smooths out and I try not to swoon when I realize what he’s talking about. He just referenced my favorite scene from *Pride & Prejudice*, the one I’d said revealed Darcy’s real feelings for Elizabeth. Is that what Rogue is implying?

Bantering with him gives me whiplash. Every time I think I understand where we stand, he does something that makes me question everything. He’s a real head fuck but I’m the one who likes him.

What does that say about me?

28.

28.

Bellamy

“There you are! Where have you be— oh, hey.” Nera’s eyes flick above my shoulder as she speaks. She cuts herself off mid-sentence when she notices Rogue behind me.

“Hey.” Rogue answers, sitting on the couch in our VIP section and pulling me down onto his lap.

“We didn’t realize you were here. That explains where Bellamy’s been this whole time.” Six says with a smirk.

“I was... freshening up in the bathroom.”

“*Bien sur.*” Of course.

“If only she knew my cum was leaking out of you right now.” Rogue whispers against my hair so only I can hear him.

I elbow him in the stomach and I feel his answering laugh against my back. The tone is melodious and addictive and has warmth spreading through my chest.

“Where’s Thayer?” I ask, looking around. There are a few men I don’t know sitting next to Six and Nera. Randoms from the club, I’m guessing.

“Off somewhere bickering with Rhys.”

“Rhys is here?” I ask, turning around to look at Rogue.

“He came with me. Did you think he’d stay away when he realized she was at a nightclub?”

“She has a boyfriend.” I say, chastising him slightly. There’s no love lost between Carter and I, but Thayer won’t be unfaithful. She won’t betray him like he did her.

“Not for long.” He says.

His eyes are focused elsewhere and thinned into slits. I follow his gaze and am surprised to see he’s watching Six. She’s sipping her drink distractedly and the man next to her leans close as he whispers something in her ear. Rogue growls as the man puts his arm around the back of the couch behind her.

“What?” I ask.

“He needs to keep his hands to himself.”

Now I’m confused. They’ve known each other a long time. Is he interested in her? A small part of me shrivels up inside at the thought.

“The guy talking to Six? Why?”

“It’s not his place.” He answers stonily. “Phoenix won’t like it.”

I exhale a breath I didn’t know I was holding, tension leaving my body as I do.

“Phoenix doesn’t get a say, she doesn’t belong to him.”

“She does.” He says, typing something on his phone.

Oh, heck no.

I appreciate that he’s protective of his friends, but so am I. Pulling out my phone, I text Six on the side.

Me: FYI I think Rogue texted Phoenix and told him you were here.

Six: Why?

Me: That guy was existing a little too close to you apparently.

Six: Lol Phoenix acts like I don’t exist most of the time. Why would he care?

Me: Maybe he won’t. But something tells me he will.

Six: I doubt it.

Me: You know what to do when he gets here?

Six: He won't come. But no, what?

Me: Give him a show.

Twenty minutes later, Thayer struts into the VIP section with Rhys in tow.

“Hello, gorgeous.” Rhys says, bending down to give me a hug.

Rogue intercepts him, shoving him back before he can. “Piss off.”

Rhys throws his hands up innocently as he takes a step back, giving me a playful wink in the process. He loves goading him.

“Hey Rogue,” Thayer says. “See my IG story and come running did you?”

He shoots her a glare, his arm tightening around my waist. I stroke his forearm back and forth absentmindedly, the gesture soothing.

“Where have you been?” I ask.

“Dancing and getting a drink.” She answers, handing me one of the cups in her hand.

“Thanks.” I say, taking it. “With Rhys?” I ask her dubiously.

“I ran into him at the bar.”

“Don't you know we're friends now, Bellamy?” Rhys says, dropping his arm around Thayer's shoulders. She tenses at the contact, an almost imperceptible shudder running through her as he pulls her against him.

She ducks out of his hold. “Don’t get ahead of yourself now.”

“She loves me. It’s only a matter of time until she realizes it.” He says, giving me a cocksure smile.

“Keep dreaming.” Thayer says, patting his shoulder.

“You know I will.”

“You’re sick.”

“Only when it comes to you.”

I watch their flirty banter, my eyes ping-pong back and forth between them. The chemistry crackles in the air as they go toe to toe with each other.

“Come dance, Thayer.” I say, standing and grabbing her hand. “We’ll be back in a bit.” I throw over my shoulder at Rogue.

Before I can take another step, a hand curls around my left thigh. Fingers dig into my skin, keeping me in place. I turn back towards Rogue, lifting a questioning brow at him. He rubs up and down my thigh, going a little higher with each stroke.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

I bend at the waist and bring my mouth to his in a sensual kiss. His tongue pushes through my lips and spurs with mine, turning the kiss into a battle for dominance. I cup the back of his neck and bite his lower lip. He groans into my mouth and brings his other hand to my ass.

“Alright, alright. Enough of that, B. We’re going dancing.”

I pull back at Thayer’s voice, dizzy from her kiss.

“I’ll be back.” I tell him, running my finger along his jaw as I walk off. His hand follows me as far as it can before dropping when I get out of reach.

Thayer grabs my hand and pulls me onto the edge of the dance floor. There’s a direct line of sight from the VIP section to where we’re dancing and I glance back to see Rogue and Rhys watching us.

“It’s borderline scary how he looks at you.” Thayer says, bringing her drink to her lips.

“How does he look at me?”

“Possessive to the extreme. Like he can’t decide if he wants to fuck you or strangle everyone around you to death for looking at you.”

“You know sometimes he likes to choke me.” I say

It’s her turn to choke, this time on her gin and tonic as my words land.

“You’re a freak, B. I feel like Mother Superior next to you.”

It’s an opening to ask how about her sex life with Carter. Thayer is an open book about everything, except this. She gets cagey and quiet whenever I bring it up.

“So Carter, he’s never...?”

“No.” Her tone is closed off and I know I can’t push further.

“It doesn’t matter anyway. This isn’t anything long term. It’s basically just exclusive sex until we get bored.”

“Bellamy, please.” Thayer says with a snort. “If I wanted a comedy show I would go to one.”

I turn my head questioningly towards her. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, you’re serious? Wow, ok.” She clears her throat. “I’m sorry to break the news to you, but you’ve got it bad babe. I don’t know why, believe me I’ve laid awake thinking about this, but you’ve got big time feelings for the psycho. How strong those feelings are, I’m not sure. You’re going to have to dig deep, do a self-eval and let me know. And then let me know if I should book the exorcism for Monday or Tuesday so we can try and get this demon out of you.” She laughs as I smack her playfully.

“Very funny.” I say. “But you’re right. I do have feelings for him.” I add miserably.

“Why the sad face? Apart from the fact that we hated his guts a month ago.”

“He doesn’t feel the same.”

She full on belly laughs at that. “Bellamy, the only one who’s above you on the “got it bad” scale is him.”

Now I know she’s way off base. “You’re wrong. He’s the one who said it was just sex only. That he wasn’t interested in a relationship or, god forbid, love.”

“That man wouldn’t know a feeling if it kicked him in the balls. He’s definitely feeling those little flutters in his chest where a normal human’s heart would be and instead of recognizing the feelings and feeling them he’s trying to bury them further down.” She smacks her forehead with her hand in despair. “Jesus, you’re going to have to teach him everything when you date. Good fucking luck with that one. The good news is what he lacks in romantic emotional maturity he absolutely makes up for in obsession with you.” She says, nodding her head at something behind me.

I turn and see Rogue looking at me as he pulls from his beer. His legs are splayed open in a way that shouldn’t be so attractive but is. His hands drop to his lap, his head tilting back against the wall as his stare burns into me.

I’m surprised I didn’t feel it when it was boring into my back. It’s all I can feel when I turn back towards Thayer.

“He hasn’t looked away from you since we left. Like I said, obsessed. One thing’s for sure; whether he’s bullying you or hot for you, he doesn’t do things in half measures.”

I feel the urge to defend him. “He’s not all bad, you know. He’s changing.” I say taking a sip of my drink.

She grabs my hand and squeezes it. “I know. Anyone who can make you glow like you have been these last few weeks is okay in my book. Psycho or not.” She wraps her arms around me and pulls me into a hug. “But I don’t trust him yet. I haven’t forgotten what he did to you when we first got here.”

I kiss her cheek loudly. “That’s why I love you.”

Hands grab my hips and I'm about to rip them off when they move up to my waist and a mouth comes down to whisper in my ear.

"Let's go home. It's been too long since I fucked you in my bed."

I turn to face Rogue. "I thought you wouldn't be back in Aubonne until Sunday?"

"It can wait." He says, dismissively.

A club remix of *Todo De Ti* by Rauw Alejandro comes on and Thayer loses her shit as she shrieks, "This is our song!"

I laugh as I watch her dance her ass off.

"Let me grab my stuff and we can go." I tell Rogue, trying not to focus on the fact that he's choosing to come home to me over finishing the business he came to Geneva for.

"I'll get it." He says, putting a hand out to stop me. "Finish your drink and dance with Thayer. We can head out in 15?"

I nod. "Sounds good."

"That was freakishly thoughtful." Thayer says with an approving hmph once he's gone.

"I told you. He's a better person than he pretends to be."

"I believe you. You wouldn't like him if he wasn't."

She pulls me into the throng of people and we dance to the next three songs, the DJ lining up banger after banger.

I'm sweaty and laughing when I finally emerge and fall into Rogue waiting arms.

"Thanks for waiting." I say, looking up at him.

He simply wraps my jacket around my shoulders and kisses the top of my head.

As we exit the club onto the sidewalk, I crash into Phoenix as he tries to storm inside. He doesn't pay me any attention, looking instead above my head at Rogue.

"Where is she?"

“VIP area. Straight ahead to your right.”

“Thanks.” He says, dapping him up and charging inside.

“Wait—” I say, turning to follow after him.

Rogue wraps an arm around me and tugs me in the direction of a waiting limo. “No. Let him go.”

“He’s going to ruin her night.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.” He says with a grin, opening the door and motioning for me to get in first. “This might be the kick up the ass he needs.”

“To do what?” I say, ducking in and sitting on one side of the car.

Rogue gets in and sits across from me. He knocks on the partition and the car starts, merging into the neighboring lane. “To stake his claim.”

I huff at that but I’m distracted by my surroundings. “Is this your limo?”

“The company’s.”

“And they just let you take it?”

“Why not? I’m going to run it one day.”

“Really?” I ask, surprised.

“When my father dies, it’ll turn over to me. That’s how it’s been for generations since my family created it and it’s continued even after we went public.” He says matter-of-factly.

“Is that what you want?”

“Sure.” He says with a shrug. “The best part of me being CEO though is that it means my dad will be dead. And that day can’t come soon enough.”

I reach a hand out and squeeze his forearm. “I can’t wish anyone death,” I say, “But I wouldn’t turn my nose up at a little bit of light torture if it were to happen.”

He laughs surprisedly, his chest shaking with every chuckle. “I don’t know what I expected you to say, but it

wasn't that." He says, pulling me into his lap. "Come here."

"I've got to keep you on your toes." I reply, joining my hands together behind his neck.

"You already do." He sits back, tilting his head against the seat as he looks at me with warmth burning in his eyes.

No one's ever looked at me like that. With total focus on me like there's no world around him. Like if he looks away for even a second, he'll miss something.

"What about you? Are you close with your dad?"

"Never met him. He made himself scarce when he found out my mom was pregnant."

He moves a strand of my hair out of my face and places it gently behind my ear. "He missed out."

"I certainly like to think so."

For a few seconds we just sit as we are, his hand in my hair and mine wrapped around his neck as we stare into each other's eyes.

"You've got an eyelash."

His eyes widen a fraction. "Where?"

"You have to guess." I say, gently. "That's how it goes, right?"

He points at his left cheek.

I shake my head.

He points at his right cheek.

I nod, giving him a smile. "You still get to make a wish." I tell him.

"Yeah?" He asks, his eyes shining as they look at me. "You're letting me?"

"I can break the rules sometimes." I tell him. "That's how I landed in detention, remember?"

Whatever next evolutionary form butterflies take, they flock in my belly as he laughs again. This is quickly turning

into one of my favorite nights of all time.

He buries his face into my neck and sucks in a deep breath. “What are you doing to me?” He grumbles into the skin of my throat, his lips resting against my thrashing heartbeat.

He’s asked this before and I wonder if he’s any closer to an answer.

He leaves an open mouthed kiss on my throat that has wetness pooling in my lower belly, and pulls back.

“One condition though.” I say.

“Go ahead.”

“No wishing for death. No matter how deserving your dad is, that’s bad karma for your soul and I don’t want that for you.”

He considers me for a second before acquiescing. “Alright.”

He closes his eyes for a moment, looking at rest, and I resist the urge to kiss his sharp cheekbones and his full mouth.

When he reopens them, his eyes are heated with lust. “I made my wish.”

I kiss him sweetly, stroking the hair on his nape. “I hope it comes true for you.”

“Me too.” He replies, capturing my lips in another kiss.

We have a good old makeout sesh like the horny teenagers we are, kissing and groping each other the entire riddle home.

He rips my dress off the moment we get home, leaving both of our clothing strewn over his foyer, up his staircase and to his bedroom door as he attacks me.

As promised, he throws me on the bed and fucks me hard all night long.

29.

Rogue

We wrap up organizing the library by Thursday of that following week. Thornton claps me on the shoulder and heartily congratulates us on a job well done.

“Ahead of schedule too.” He crows. “Well done.”

“Are we done with detention now? Or do we have to finish out our time doing something else?” Bellamy asks.

“I think we’re done.” I jump in, giving Thornton a pointed look.

“Ahem, yes of course.” He says, giving me a shifty glance. “You’re released from your detention duties, Miss Ward.” With that, he turns on his heels and leaves.

“Yay!” Bellamy says, clapping her hands excitedly. “You realize what this means right?”

“What’s that?”

“You can’t order me around anymore.” She says, trying to rib me.

“A pity.” I answer.

She pouts disappointedly. “That’s it? I thought you’d be at least a little dismayed.”

“Why would I be?” I say dropping my arm around her shoulders. “I know all I have to do to get some obedience out of you is lick your pussy.”

“I knew you were going to say something crass.”

I snort. “Please, enough with the innocence act.”

“Hey!” She says in mock outrage. “I am innocent.”

My lips come to her ear and I bite her lobe. “Not for me. You’re a filthy little slut for me.”

“Mhmm, you have a point.” She breathes out, leaning into my mouth as I suck her lobe.

She pushes me off and puts one foot behind the other until her back hits the bookshelf. “What do you say? One last quickie before we say goodbye to the library?” She suggests seductively, her arms stretching to grab the shelves behind her.

“Fuck yes.”

I’m across the room in two steps. Bellamy jumps into my arms, wrapping her arms and legs around me and giggling happily. I push her up against the wall and fuck her quick, my hand slapped over her mouth to swallow the sexy little noises falling from her lips.

Later, I’m helping her button the back of her dress when she speaks. “You know what this also means?”

“Hmm?” I answer, focused.

“If our deal is over,” She says, turning towards me. “Then I don’t have to sleep in your bed every night.”

Straightening to my full height, I glower at her. “Are you trying to piss me off?”

She gives me a mischievous smile in response. “You’ve got to admit,” She says, “Our angry makeup sex is pretty hot.”

My hand shoots out and grabs her ass, fingers digging into the meaty flesh and using it to pull her against me. “I fucking knew you liked it when I spanked you.” I say, bringing my lips to the top of her head. “Run away before I fuck you again.”

Her delighted laugh can be heard through the halls as she does as I say.

I chase after her.



Phoenix and I are freshly back from a run early Saturday morning when we come across Bellamy jogging down the staircase in the foyer. She's got her purse on and a light jacket thrown over her arm.

"Where are you going?" I ask as Phoenix gives her a nod before continuing into the kitchen.

"Meeting Six in the library to work on our English Lit project, then getting brunch and going on a hike with all the girls."

"I thought we were going to do something together today."

"We do something together every day, Rogue." She says jokingly, putting her hand on my chest as she gives me a quick peck. "I miss my friends, I want to spend time with them."

"Fine." I say, going for detached but coming off sulky instead. "Come back tonight." My tone is clear that that's an order, not a request.

"Maybe." She says with a coy smile.

"Up to you. I'm happy to kick your door down and drag you back here if you want to be chased."

"Careful, your obsession is showing."

"Leave before I show you just how far this obsession goes." I growl out.

She gets on her tiptoes and kisses my cheek. "I'll see you tonight."

I smack her ass as she passes me and watch her walk out of the house.

Following Phoenix into the kitchen, I drop into one of the dining room chairs and watch from afar as he makes us breakfast.

"Eggs good?"

My mind goes back to the omelet Bellamy had made me. I doubt Phoenix is going to be able to top that. “Sure.”

Rhys jogs in, a football in his hand. “I saw Bellamy head out. You guys want to play footy after this? We really should take advantage of the time we have without her here before she comes back and Rogue forgets about us.”

I flip him off and am about to snap back when the doorbell rings.

“Never mind.” Rhys says mournfully. “Looks like she changed her mind.”

Jogging to the front door so as not to make her wait, I simultaneously open it and ask her, “Did you forget something?”

But it’s not Bellamy standing in the doorway.

It’s Müller.

He has a folder in his hand and a grave expression on his face.

“Why are you here?” I ask him, my brow furrowing. “You should have called.”

“I thought you’d want to hear this in person.” He says, shouldering past me and into the kitchen.

“Hey, mate.” Rhys says, surprise on his face at seeing him walk in. “I didn’t know you were coming today.”

“That’s because he didn’t give me a warning.” I say, crossing my arms. “I assume you’ve found out something about my mother.”

He nods but doesn’t say anything else.

“Well, where is she?” I ask him, getting aggravated now.

My eyes snap to the folder as he throws it on the counter between us.

“There’s no easy way to say this...”

The physical response is immediate. Ice freezes the blood in my veins and my heart in my chest.

“Say it.”

“She’s dead.”

All the air in my lung exhales in one whistling breath. I knew it was coming and yet it somehow doesn’t cushion the blow in any way.

“When?”

Müller is all business. He’s transactional in the way he delivers the information. It’s just data to him, there are no feelings involved. But this time, he hesitates.

“When?” I repeat, my jaw clenched.

I’m trying my best to contain all physical reactions to this moment. I don’t trust him with the information of how I react to the news.

“Ten years ago.”

“Fuck... mate.” I hear Rhys exclaim softly off to the side.

Confusion hits me almost as hard as the anger that follows. She’s been dead this whole fucking time.

“How?”

How did he find out and how did she die?

“She died around the same time she reportedly walked out on you and moved to the US. Like I said, there were no traces of her in Europe let alone getting on a plane to the US. I looked everywhere in every conceivable place I thought she could be without leaving a trace and when I still couldn’t find her the next obvious place to look was the morgue. I went through unsolved files prioritizing those of Jane Does around the time of her disappearance and found a case that I thought could be her. Female body, around the same age, same physical descriptors, badly decomposed and unrecognizable after her body was found in a lake...strangled. She’d been in there between two and five years.”

The vein in my temple is pulsing repeatedly by the time he finishes speaking. I grind my jaw back and forth.

Dead.

“You identified her through my DNA?” I ask.

His request for my DNA makes sense now. So much for the genealogy connection.

He nods.

“Does anyone else know?”

“No.”

“Keep it that way and I’ll pay you triple.”

He nods again, watching me.

“The money will be in your account tomorrow. See yourself out.”

I walk past him further into the kitchen, a sign of dismissal. My back is turned and I don’t watch him leave.

Dead.

If she was dead, she never left her family behind. She didn’t walk out on us and abandon me. My fists clench in my pockets, my knuckles crunched so tightly I feel like I’m losing circulation in my fingers.

My psychopath of a father has all the resources in the world at his disposal to search for someone. There’s no way he ever looked for her. If Müller could find her in less than three months ten years into a cold case, then he should have been able to find her, especially since she was right here. Why did he tell me she was in America?

I don’t know how to process the fact that she’s been dead as long as she’s been gone. I’ve spent more than half my life hating her for something she apparently never did. She didn’t abandon me, she was taken from me.

A glass filled with rich brown liquid appears to my right. I look over my shoulder at Rhys who holds it extended in front of him.

“You’re going to need this.”

He obviously knows from experience.

I turn, grabbing the drink as I come to face him.

“I’m sorry.” Phoenix says.

What a trio we make. Phoenix’s brother passed away when we were children and he never got over it.

We’re now friends bonded by death and the shared experience of grief.

“What do you need?” He adds.

“More of this.” I say, lifting my glass before draining it.

“You should lay off the bottle, mate.” The warning comes from Rhys who looks at me with concern in his eyes.

“Piss off.”

“Listen, I know you’re in pain –”

“Piss. Off.” I grind out. “Can you just let me drink in fucking peace. We’re on my private property, I’m not going anywhere, I’m not going to drive, I don’t have my phone. I’m not endangering myself or anyone else so just let me try to drink away the fact that my mother was murdered ten years ago and I’m just finding out about it.”

“We just want to make sure you’re safe.”

Rhys is next to Phoenix and the both of them are standing over me. I’m in a lounge chair by the firepit on the east part of the grounds. A bottle of scotch lays beside me, almost empty.

“Then grab a glass, sit down and stare quietly into the firepit with me while I get fucking drunk.”

Phoenix nods wordlessly as they sit down on either side of me and, thankfully, do as I say. I don’t even know how to sort through the maelstrom of bullshit, contradictory, and unclear emotions I’m feeling right now.

One five minute conversation can change the foundation of your life and everything you believe. How am I supposed to

reconcile ten years of despising her with the sadness and unexpected grief of losing her. I hated her for so long and in one moment I have to love and mourn her at the same time.

Anger and resentment at somehow losing her a second time before I could even find her have blackness taking over my soul. I should have never gone looking for her. Living with the belief that she'd walked away from us is less painful than knowing she's been dead far longer than I've thought to look for her.

We drink quietly for what feels like hours. If I thought the alcohol would drown out the pain, I was wrong. It makes everything worse. It exacerbates every thought, every hateful emotion in my body, every vicious thought. It fuels the black pit of negativity inside me.

The peeling of a bright laugh rings through the fog of darkness, slicing through it easily. It rings clearly amongst my jumbled thoughts.

I know that laugh. I've worked to extricate it from its owner countless times.

Bellamy.

I look up and see her walking to the fire pit from a distance. She's talking on the phone and walking animatedly towards us, almost skipping. Her happiness seeps from her every pore. She's wearing biker shorts, an oversized sweater and sneakers paired with Nike socks.

She's breathtaking.

She's distracting.

Looking up, she sees me staring at her and smiles, giving me a small wave with her free hand. Her hand is a little hesitant, almost like she can sense that I'm fucked up. Like she can see it in my eyes from over there.

Maybe her light can pull me out of the darkness.

As she gets nearer I hear her say, "Alright mom, I'll talk to you later. I love you so much, have fun with Dave."

If happiness seeps from her pores, venom leaks from mine. That little exchange is enough to make the darkness slam back down around me.

The poison seeps through me, filling my veins and drowning me in bitterness.

My field of vision narrows.

“Hey.” She says as she nears us. “Hey guys.” She gives them a little wave.

Rhys waves back at her weakly.

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

The words are enough to stop her dead in her tracks. The good mood and goodness that was wrapped against her slam head first into the brick wall that is my rage.

“Rogue.” Rhys barks out my name as he jumps to his feet. His tone is meant to be a warning.

Don't do anything you're going to regret, it says.

Too bad. I'm in self-destruct mode.

I turn back towards Bellamy who's still standing there frozen with a puzzled expression on her face. She's thrown off by the dynamics at play here.

“I said, what the fuck are you doing here, Bellamy?”

“I heard you.” She says, tipping her chin up. “Is that a joke?”

Her small act of defiance sends a message loud and clear. She's not backing down.

Excellent. She wants to play and I have the need to destroy.

A voice inside me tries to break through to the surface but I don't listen to it. I don't hear it as it chants.

Not her. Not her. Not her.

“I'm bored of you.”

She doesn't answer immediately, just crosses her arms as she glares at me.

"What is wrong with you? I thought we were past your asshole phase."

"Watch it." I say, snapping at her. "You're getting too comfortable. You've forgotten your place and who you're dealing with. I said we were exclusive, not that you could come and go here like you own the place. Or own me. You're just the flavor of the month." I pause, thinking. "Or maybe of the week. It's getting a little stale."

"Why are you doing this?"

The slight tremble in her voice is the only indication that I'm getting to her.

"Because I'm done with you." I say with a shrug.

Clean. Simple. Break.

That's what we need.

So why do I have an ache on the left side of my chest as I deliver each blow.

I take a swig from the bottle of scotch in my hand and close my eyes so I don't have to see her walk away.

But when I open them again, she's still here. Why is she still here?

My words should have driven her away already.

"Why are you still here?"

"I'm trying to work out if you're drunk or just an asshole."

I laugh darkly. The sound is ugly.

"Both." I say with a coldness, detaching myself from the situation. "You were just like every other girl. Good to keep for a few days then on to the next. I will say you were a better fuck than most."

She tries to hide it but those words strike a blow.

She takes a step back, her gaze sliding to look first at Phoenix then at Rhys. They're standing rigidly on either side

of me. I can sense their displeasure. They like Bellamy, they think she's good for me. They probably hate the way I'm talking to her but they'll always have my back.

She walks away.

Her steps are measured and I know she's trying to keep her steps measured, to not run away as she loses her composure.

I know I've hurt her.

I watch her walk into the back of the house. The silence stretches before Rhys breaks it.

"You're a fucking asshole." He says, shaking his head. "I know you're grieving and it's raw and you don't know how to process it just yet, but this isn't it." He walks away, his hands jammed into his pockets.

"Yeah, leave. See if I care."

"I'm not leaving, Rogue. You twat." He says, disappointment clear in his tone. "I'm going after Bellamy so I can try to fix the mess you just created. Because I promise you, you'll regret this tomorrow when you're not so completely pissed and angry. I guarantee it, even if you won't admit it to yourself."

He storms off without another word.

"Anything else to add?" I toss in Phoenix's direction.

He shakes his head. "That about covers it."

He heads after him then pauses and turns towards me. "I know you're hurting, you have every right to be. But taking a verbal flamethrower to the only girl you've ever cared about is not the way to handle that."

That's what I do. I want to yell it at him. I push people away. Better to hurt than be hurt.

Angry energy jolts through my body like a stroke of deadly lightning. I'm up on my feet pacing angrily beneath an old oak tree. I can't control it.

She fucking matters. What am I doing? No, there was always an expiration date on us anyway. Why not do it now?

I'm not sure I'm done quite yet.

I roar in frustration, wishing I could rip the conflicting thoughts out of my brain. What do I want?

The need for violence.

The need to fight.

The need to go after her.

They're all competing for attention inside me, searching for dominance. I whip and punch the tree trunk viciously. Repeatedly. For fifteen seconds I unleash blows without thought.

Left hook.

Right hook.

Left hook.

Right hook.

What have I done?

30.

Bellamy

“Bellamy! Bellamy, wait!”

I don't stop. In fact, I increase my pace as I try to distance myself from Rhys. I'm walking as quickly as I can without looking like I'm physically running away.

I don't want him to think I'm running away.

I'm angry, not hurt.

I have to save face. I'm not going to let him make me look like a fool.

I got played by a guy, who could have seen it coming?

Literally everyone. They warned you and you didn't listen, you idiot.

I furiously wipe the tears off my face as they come out.

They're tears of anger. Because his tone was frankly unacceptable. Not tears of hurt because he just took a power saw to my heart.

Nope.

They're righteous tears, not naive ones.

Who am I kidding, I think Rhys can hear the sound of my heart bleeding from where he is.

I hear a car pull up right behind me.

“Bellamy, stop. Where are you going? Were you really hoping to outrun a car at that speed?”

“What do you want, Rhys? I’m tired.” I say, continuing to walk as the car coasts slowly alongside me.

“Look at me, please.”

I do. Phoenix is sitting next to him, driving the car. He gives me a chin tip when my eyes meet his.

Why couldn’t I like either one of them? They’re just as good looking as Rogue, although no one has enigmatic eyes like his. Or such beautiful eyelashes and cheekbones.

But they’re funny *and* nice, at least to me.

Why did I have to like their damaged, sadistic friend?

Because the sadistic friend makes you feel things you’ve never felt before. Because you want to crack him open and roll around in his damage and make it the both of yours, because you know you can tackle it together.

Shut up.

I raise my chin and cross my arms before meeting his gaze.

“He didn’t mean it.” Phoenix says.

I let out a humorless laugh. “Bye.” I say, walking off again.

“His mom died.”

That stops me.

“He found out today. She was murdered ten years ago when she was supposed to have moved to America. She was a Jane Doe up until today I guess, when his DNA matched with hers.”

“Sorry, he’s trying to give you the abridged version.” Rhys adds.

My hand comes up to my mouth.

My heart hurts for him.

“I’m not saying to forgive him – in fact, please make him eat shit for a little while, his ego needs muzzling, it’s getting out of hand – but just... don’t walk away.”

I nod. He doesn't need to convince me. I can only imagine the mess I'd be if I'd just found my mother had been murdered. I can't imagine the things I'd say.

I'm angry at him. Furious even. But I know he needs me even if he won't admit it to himself. He's pushing me away like he does when he feels like he needs to protect himself.

"Can you drop me off?"

"Sure. You're at the pen right?"

"Not home." I say, "Back there." I point behind me as I get in the backseat.

Once I put my seatbelt on, I meet his eyes in the rearview mirror. He quirks a brow.

I shrug. "You said not to walk away."

"He'd be stupid to let you go."

I snort. "He needs to decide he wants me first."

I'm back in front of his house less than five minutes later.

Instead of using the front door, I go around the side to the back, hoping to catch a glimpse of where he is through the many windows.

My eyes land on his back as I get to the garden. He's standing in front of the wet bar. His two hands splayed at his side as he hangs his head.

His head snaps to the side when I step on a branch and his eyes flare slightly as they take me in.

"What do you want?" He asks, surprised and slightly wary to see me.

"Don't push me away."

I walk up to him and wrap my hands around his middle. His spine stiffens, locking into place.

“I don’t need you.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“I don’t need you.” He repeats, weaker this time. His head drops down, hanging against his chest. I hug him from behind, my head against his back.

His hands are braced on the counter. His knuckles are broken and bloody knuckles, I have no idea what from. He’s got the weight of the world on his shoulders. Grief pours off him. His heart beats a crazy rhythm.

I try to convey everything in that moment. How sorry I am. How much I hate to see him in pain.

He’s still rigid, refusing to give in.

“No.”

He flips around suddenly, sending me tripping backwards.

“Leave. Get the fuck out of here. What part of ‘I don’t want you here’ do you not understand?”

His breathing is ragged, his chest pounding like he’s been sprinting but the look in his eye is haunted. I can read him like a book, even in this moment. He’s pushing me away but it’s a defense mechanism.

Hurt me before I can hurt him.

He thinks people can’t love him and if miraculously they do then look what happens to them.

I reach out and cup his cheek.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

He looks at me. The energy is completely charged. The silence drags on ten, twenty, forty seconds before he accepts it.

“Leave.” It’s feeble this time.

“Let me in. Or you’re going to lose me.”

The change isn’t exactly visible if you don’t know him but it’s there – in the way the line of his shoulders smooth out, the way his chin falls a fraction of an inch and his hand rakes his hair.

“It’s not that big of a deal. She’s been gone for ten years.”

I grab his face and press my lips to his. It’s just a peck but all the emotion was in it.

“You’re still allowed to grieve.” I run my hands over his shoulders and down his arms. “You have to feel your feelings and not use anger as a shield to push people away when you feel vulnerable.”

He looks down at me, his gaze unreadable.

“What?”

“Why did you come back?”

“You needed me.” I say, grabbing his hand and bringing it up to my mouth. “And I wanted to.”

I kiss the bloody knuckles. Whatever or whoever he hit must have taken a beating.

“What happened to you in the last 15 minutes?”

He works his jaw back and forth. “I hit a tree. A few times.”

“What were you thinking? This looks so painful.”

“I was thinking I’d just verbally assaulted my girl for no good reason and had just lost her because I’m a massive dickhead.”

My girl.

I peck his lips and put my arms around his shoulders.

“I’m sorry. For being an asshole. And for lying.”

I look up at him quizzically.

“You’re nothing like the others. And I’m nowhere near done with you.”

I press a kiss to his chest before looking up to meet his gaze.

“You’re forgiven.” I bring my knee up between his legs and place it against his penis threateningly. I don’t apply real pressure, just press enough to send the message.

He stiffens.

“But don’t *ever* speak to me like that again. I get whiplash being with you. One day you’re attentive, the next you’re cruel. I’ve made excuses too many times in our short history together; I’m patient but even I have my limits. Get your shit together or I’ll put myself first next time and won’t forgive you.” I place my foot back on the ground, releasing my hold on his dick.

His body relaxes, physically sagging with relief.

His head drops to my shoulder as he turns to bury his face in my neck.

“I will.” He murmurs. “I’m sorry.”

He’s never said those words to me before five minutes ago. Every step of progress is like pulling teeth out of this man.

But it’s worth it to me. He’s completely blinded me to anyone but him and I think a big part of why is because we relate to each other’s traumas through our own experiences. His life has been far more privileged than mine and yet, in many ways it’s been a much harsher, isolating, and painful existence.

I’ve wanted for material things, but I’ve never wanted for love. Even my dad’s lack of presence in my life is offset by the overwhelming amount of love my mom has for me.

I’ve seen the person beneath the hurt and anger, I know the real him. With every passing day, he lowers his walls more and more. It often feels like I have to drag him every inch of the way towards progress, but we’re getting there. This could have been a major hurdle and yet it feels like we cleared it together.

We stay like that for a while. His head on my shoulder, his hands on my hips. My cheek against his chest, my hands cupping his neck.

I hold him, rocking back and forth slowly.

I hurt thinking about what he’s going through. I can’t imagine losing my mom.

That’s a closed door he can never reopen.

And behind that door are lots of wounds that are festering.

“Ask me why I came back.” I tell him.

“Why did you come back?”

“Because I love you” I whisper.

The words are out before I can second guess if I should say them. It’s probably not the right time. His mom just died and we had our biggest fight yet.

But it is the right moment to say them because I feel them.

I love him. Somewhere along the way I fell in love with Rogue, the one thing I said wouldn’t happen while I was in Europe. I wasn’t against it, but it certainly wasn’t my focus.

No unnecessary distractions, I’d told myself.

Look at me. Wrapped around the biggest distraction I could find.

He pushes me back and looks into my eyes. His gaze is penetrating – he’s searching for the lie.

“Why?”

I huff out a laugh. “Only you would ask that question.” I tell him. “Why? Because despite how much effort you put into pushing people away and trying to make them hate you, you’re a very easy person to love.”

I bare myself open to him. I let him see the truth of that statement in my gaze.

“Say it again.”

“I love you. And I won’t ever leave you.”

He grabs me and spins us around before setting me down on the counter. Grabbing my shorts by the hem, he yanks them down followed by my panties.

“How can someone so perfect love someone so awful.” He muses, standing between my legs, eyes roaming over my face.

“You’re not as bad as you pretend to be.” I whisper, cupping his face in my hands. “I’m in love with every part of you, but the real you under all the hurt, the side that you seem

to only show to Rhys and Phoenix and now sometimes me, that Rogue is the one I love the most. Thank you for showing that part of yourself to me.”

His eyes darken with desire at my little speech and his mouth comes down to claim mine in a searing kiss. He yanks his zipper down and pulls out his thick cock. The veins are ropery along his length, making it look angry. He spits on his cock and oh god, that’s so fucking hot. There’s something so primitive about it.

He places the head of his cock at my entrance and pushes in, pumping twice before bottoming inside me.

“So fucking tight.” He snarls against my ear, jerking his hips in and out of me. “I’ll never get tired of your pussy.”

“Mhmm.” I moan against him, focusing on my building orgasm.

His fingers tighten on my ass and thigh as he tries to bring me even closer against him.

“Again.”

“I love you.”

He comes with a roar, pumping into me furiously for endless seconds as his orgasm stretches and sets me off. My walls squeeze him like a vice. I drop my forehead on his shoulder to help hold me up as I fall limply.

He turns his head and kisses the corner above my ear.

“Good girl.”

“Shit. Shit, shit, shit.”

Those are the words that greet me as I walk into the kitchen. The oven door is open and Bellamy is fanning the smoke plumes coming out of it as the alarm rings.

“Are you trying to burn my house down?” I ask dryly.

She turns at the sound of my voice, a distressed look on her face. “No! I got distracted and forgot the pita bread.” She shows me the black disk in her hand. “Which is now charcoal bread.”

She’s barefoot, wearing volleyball shorts and one of my t-shirts. Her hair is mussed from how I grabbed and pulled it last night and her body bears the signs of my obsession with her.

Bite marks and bruises cover her thighs and neck. I growl at the sight, my cock hardening. She’s fucking stunning.

I grab two additional burnt disks out of the oven and am about to throw them in the trash when I notice their uneven shape.

“Did you make this from scratch?”

She nods, pulling more dough from the fridge. “Yeah, I did. I have some dough left so I can make more.” She says, before making a small pout. “But I ruined the surprise.”

I raise an eyebrow at her questioningly. She reaches back into the fridge and pulls out a couple tupperware and a salad bowl. She peels the lids off the tupperware, speaking as she does so.

“You mentioned a few dishes from your childhood so I thought I’d try and make them.” I look into the now open dishes and my heart skips a beat when I recognize the vibrant green colors of tabbouleh and smell the smokiness of the freshly made baba ghanouj.

“You made this for me?”

She nods. “You haven’t told me much about her but I thought... I thought this could be a nice tribute.”

“Obviously, they’re not going to be as good as your mom’s, I just used recipes I found on the internet and I’m sure hers were from her family, but I tasted everything and it’s good. Well, aside from the manaqish – am I pronouncing that correctly? – anyway, yeah, I didn’t mean to burn it and the jury’s still out on whether it’ll be any good, but,” She pauses,

“I wanted to try.” She adds with a shrug that’s meant to look indifferent.

But I know her well now. She rambles when she’s nervous and by the way she’s peering at me discreetly from below her eyelashes, I know she’s anxious to see my reaction.

I grab her hip, using it to tug her towards me. Surprised by the move, she gives a startled cry as I bring her body flush against mine.

I kiss her deeply, longly. It’s a relatively chaste kiss, our mouths fused together without parting, and yet it feels more intimate than anything I’ve felt before.

“Thank you.”

Her arms circle around my waist and she sets her cheek on my chest. I’m sure she can hear my heart beat when she says, “You’re welcome.”

31.

Bellamy

The next couple of weeks fly by in a blur of happiness.

Rogue tries to get a hold of his dad to get answers, but he evades his every attempt, dodging all of his calls and texts. Rogue's anger spikes with every declined call and ignored text, but he never loses control. He holds on to the hope that Müller will discover something new in the additional forensic testing he's conducting.

I spend my days either with the girls, in class, or hanging with the larger group. There's different types of tension to navigate between Phoenix and Sixtine's private feud and Rhys and Thayer's weird energy. Nera is constantly texting, her nose buried in her phone as she types away. I wonder if she's met someone. But why wouldn't she tell us?

I spend my nights, everyone of them, with Rogue.

In his bed. In my bed. In the car. In the supply closet.

It's not just the nights.

During the day we play video games. He wins at *Mario Kart*, but much to his annoyance, I win at *Mario Party*. He says I must be cheating.

We go to the movies and watch a period drama I'd mentioned wanting to see. He buys the tickets and surprises me.

I make us dinner. I buy books and learn different recipes for him and the guys. He fucks me to thank me for being a

good girl.

We run together.

He wins.

He gloats.

He usually fucks me against a tree when he sees the sweat glisten on my skin.

He shows me the extensive library in the guest house then fucks me in it because libraries are “our thing” and “it’d be wrong not to fuck in every one we visit”.

He demands to hear me say I love him multiple times a day.

He doesn’t say it back.

With each passing day I feel more and more vulnerable having been the only one to say it.

But I know he’s only just getting comfortable with the concept of a relationship, let alone love.

The other day I was playing chess with Rhys, or at least attempting to, as he teased me mercilessly.

“Might as well just give up now Bellamy, there’s no saving your game now.”

“If you didn’t talk so much maybe I’d be able to focus more.” I grumble at him grumpily. “I just want to win one game.”

“If you played a better game I wouldn’t need to distract myself with idle chit chat, darling.”

“Don’t call my girlfriend ‘darling’, fucker.” A voice thunders from the doorway, making me jump. I set the piece I’m holding down randomly.

Rhys cheers and moves his bishop. “Checkmate! And girlfriend? “

He’s asking the question on the tip of my tongue. This is news to me.

“Isn’t that what you are?” Rogue asks, looking me in the eye.

I nod, slowly.

“Good. Then that’s sorted. I have to go to class, I’ll see you guys later.”

It’s not the most romantic of declarations but it’s Rogue so it’s perfect.

“Wait.” I say as I run up to him and, when he’s turned around, jump on him.

He catches me easily and my legs wrap themselves around him. He holds me by my ass cheeks, groaning as he pulls me closer to rub against his length. I bring my face down to his and kiss him softly.

One of his hands moves to cup my head as he deepens the kiss, moaning into my mouth. I let myself slide down his body slowly.

“Have a good day.” I say as he licks his lips, his gaze hazy with lust.

“You’re lucky I have a presentation today, otherwise I’d stay here and make you pay for turning me on before class.”

Once I’m on the ground, he slaps my ass sharply and bites my earlobe.

“See you later, Bell.”

The door closes behind him and I turn back towards Rhys.

“Girlfriend status, huh?”

“Apparently.” I say as I try to keep the stupid grin from hitting my face.

“I like who he is with you.” He says, giving me an approving smile.

Sometimes he gets a faraway look in his eyes. Or he starts fidgeting with a cigarette, playing it back and forth in cool tricks through his fingers.

In those moments I know he's thinking about his mom.

I think he's processing. Or whatever his version of processing is.

He brings her up a few times. Once when we walk past a ride around, he tells me about the time she let him cut class and took him on rides for the day when he was eight years old.

Or the time when his dad was away on a business trip and she threw him a half-birthday party.

"She just wanted an excuse to throw me a party." He says with a faraway smile.

That night, he takes his time undressing me. His hands caress every inch of my body as he leisurely unbuttons and unhooks my clothes.

He kisses me passionately, his mouth licking and biting my exposed flesh as he pushes into me. His hips move back and forth slowly, exquisitely, until I want to scream in frustration. I close my eyes but he cups my jaw.

"Look at me."

I do as he says.

"You look at me when I fuck you like this."

So I do.

And it acts as kindling to the ever growing fire raging between us.

It feels like he makes love to me.

The next morning, I wake up wrapped around him. He sleeps half on his side, half on his stomach, his arm enveloping

my waist and holding me against him.

Careful not to wake him, I extricate myself from his arms and get out of bed. I've got a huge Chem exam on Monday and I need to study. There's no way I'll be able to do that here, not when he distracts me all day long, so I'm going to the lab.

I pull on my clothes and look back at Rogue's sleeping form wondering if I should leave a note. If I woke up and he was gone, I'd be disappointed.

But you love him and he doesn't love you. A nasty voice whispers in my head.

Unhelpful internal monologue, Bellamy. I snit back at it.

He moans deep in his throat and repositions his head on the pillow. Affection seeps into my bones as I look at him. No one should be that attractive in a dead sleep. I walk back to the bed and bend over him, pressing a kiss to his cheek.

His eyes peel open when they feel my lips on him.

"Where are you going?" He mumbles sleepily into his pillow. His arm is hanging over the side of the bed and his index comes up to wrap around my hand. His eyes are still closed as he rocks our hands back and forth.

"Sorry, didn't mean to wake you. I'm going to go study for a bit, I'll be back later."

"What are you doing tonight?" He asks, his eyes still closed. I'd think he was still asleep if he wasn't talking.

"I assume you're going to tell me."

"I'm asking this time." He says, opening his eyes and peering up at him. "There's the grand opening event for the Mackley library tonight. I'm going as a representative of CKI and to support Rhys." His hand squeezes mine. "Come with me?"

"I'd love to."

"Good." He says with a smile, reaching up to kiss me.

"Wait, how fancy is this going to be? I don't have anything to wear."

“I’ll have things sent to your suite. And before you say no,” He adds quickly, seeing my mouth open, “I dropped this on you last minute. It’s on me to get you something to wear.”

“I believe you called it charity last time.”

“I’m calling it taking care of my girlfriend this time.”

“I love it when you talk dirty to me.”

He chuckles, rolling onto his back. “Alright, get out of here before I make you come back to bed.”

At his words, I dash out without a backwards glance.

“See you later!”

Rogue

After calling a stylist and organizing a suite of dresses to be sent to Bellamy, I jog down the stairs. I'm whistling a happy tune as I head to the kitchen to make coffee.

I don't think I've ever whistled before.

Is this what contentment feels like? Maybe even happiness?

"Make me an espresso."

"Fuck." I exclaim sharply, almost jumping out of my skin.

My sperm donor is sitting in one of the kitchen chairs, his arms casually resting on the armchairs as he looks at me. He's wearing a three piece suit, immaculate as always.

He was here only a couple weeks ago, and the same before that. His visits are increasingly frequent and unwanted in equal measure.

"Make it yourself." I answer, pressing the button on the machine and turning towards him with crossed arms as the coffee begins to pour behind me. "You got my messages then." I say, matter-of-factly.

"I got your pathetic calls and texts, yes. I'm only here for the opening tonight."

"That's all you have to say?" I spit out. "She's dead. She's been dead this whole time. You never looked for her." I accuse

him.

He stands up as I speak, buttoning his suit jacket as he slowly approaches me.

There's nothing overtly threatening about his movements and yet violence is palpable in the air. His muscles are pulled tight beneath his thousand euro suit as he levels me with a hate-filled glare.

I expected a punch so this time when it comes flying towards me, I'm prepared.

I duck, narrowly avoiding the blow. Air whistles against my ear as his arm goes past my face.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" He hisses at me, recovering his balance. His brow is furrowed in anger and confusion.

Usually I just take, but not anymore.

"I want answers."

He pretends to right his suit cuffs, momentarily pulling my attention and distracting me.

It's enough of an opening.

His right hand snakes out and connects with my stomach in a brutal punch. All the air leaves my lungs as I bend at the waist, clutching my abdomen. Cupping the back of my neck, he brings his knee up into the same place.

I fall to the ground, struggling to catch my breath.

"You're so fucking useless you worthless piece of shit. I should have killed you when I killed your mother."

The world stops and ringing sounds in my ears as his words land.

At first, I think I'm hallucinating.

There's no way he just casually said those words after ten years of non-answers. Naively, there's also shock. Robert Royal is a terrible, abusive man who up until a few days ago I

was sure had driven my mother away ten years ago, but the thought that he might be her killer had never crossed my mind.

I didn't think he was a murderer.

“What did you just say?”

His answering laugh is cruel. “Did you really think she'd walked out on you? She was planning on leaving me, but she was going to take you with her.” He smooths down his tie, speaking matter-of-factly like we're chatting about the weather and not the fact that he murdered my mother. The gleam in his eye is terrifying. For the first time, I see the full scope of evil inside him. “I couldn't let that happen of course. I didn't mean to kill her, it was her fault really. She came into my office and told me she was leaving and taking you. The next thing I remember is squeezing her throat. Squeezing the life out of that stupid bitch. She really thought she was going to leave me?” He says with another dark, disbelieving laugh. He looks at me as I get to my feet with some difficulty. “She of course begged for you the entire time. Begged me not to kill her little boy.”

My physical reaction is catastrophic. Blood pounds in my ear and the edges of my vision blur. Fury is whipping through my body with such force that it's taking everything in me not to black out.

“You fucking—” I say, darting towards him.

I'm going to kill him.

Just as fast as I move, he pulls out a gun from the back of his waistband and points it in my direction.

I freeze in my tracks as I stare down the barrel of the gun.

“Go ahead, kill me.” I snarl. “If you don't, I'll tell everyone you killed her.”

He tsks me. “For the same reason I didn't kill you ten years ago, I won't kill you now. I need my father's inheritance. Once I have it, I'm afraid I won't have much reason to keep you around. But until then, you're safe.”

“You’re fucking delusional if you think this ends any other way than with me calling the police.” I sneer at him. “And why do you need the money in my trust? You have your own fortune.”

“Bad investments.” He says with a dismissive wave of his hand. “And I know for a fact that you won’t say a word to the police. Do you want to know why?”

“There’s nothing you can say that’ll stop me.” I warn him.

“Really?” He says, a fake pensive look on his face. “How about the fact that I’ll torture and murder your little girlfriend if you go within fifty feet of a police station?”

My heart stops in my chest. I physically feel it stutter to a stop as he delivers the verbal blow. I force myself as best I can not to react. I know he’ll be watching my every expression like a hawk, but my eye twitches.

“Bellamy? She’s just a girl I’m fucking, she’s no one important.” I say, hoping he buys the lie.

“She’s not? So you wouldn’t mind if I fuck her myself then?”

I lunge at him with an animalistic snarl. He fires a shot off above my shoulder, freezing me momentarily in place.

He’s completely lost it and suddenly I know the threats he’s making are very real.

“That’s what I thought.” He says with a sneer.

“If you touch her, if you so much as breathe her air again, I’ll show you exactly what I learned growing up with a psychopath.” I say, the promise clear in my tone.

“You don’t threaten me.” He thunders.

I close the gap between me and the gun, letting it rest against my heart as I bump into it. “It’s not a threat, it’s a fucking guarantee.”

I didn’t think the shock of learning my father murdered my mother could be topped, but the moment he threatened

Bellamy I realized there were lower levels of hell and pain I could enter.

The thought of him hurting her or hell, being around her in any way, terrifies me. It has the blood stopping in my veins and the air freezing in my lungs.

My mother is long dead and while I want justice for her, the priority is making sure Bellamy is safe and far away from this psychopath's reach.

If it comes down between the two of them, I choose Bellamy every time. Without hesitation. I feel some shame for abandoning my mother's cause so easily, but Bell is my future. She's alive and well.

She *loves* me.

I have to protect her.

"There's no need for that," My father says. "Think about it, what would going to the police do? You have no proof. It would just be a baseless accusation from a disgruntled teenager against his model citizen father. You have nothing to gain from going to the police. Your mother's been dead for ten years, nothing is going to change that. But you do have something to lose." He adds. "You hold up your end of the bargain, I'll hold up mine. No going to the police and she'll be safe."

"Fuck you." I spit at him.

He laughs, the sound winding me up even more. "Seems we have an accord." He says, walking towards the exit before stopping and throwing parting words over his shoulder. "I'll expect you to be on your best behavior tonight. And cover those awful tattoos," He orders, "You're an embarrassment to the family name."

He walks out, leaving me struggling to fight against the rage. It has me in a chokehold, making it hard to breathe.

He promised if I kept my mouth shut, she'd be safe.

But I can't trust him. Can't believe a word he says.

He murdered my mother in cold blood apparently, what's to say a bad day won't have him renegeing on our deal and going after Bellamy?

No. I have to do everything to protect her.

Even if it means breaking her heart in the process.

33.

Bellamy

For the first time in my life, I feel like the main character.

You know those people in TikToks who others are just drawn to? The ones who you look at and just know, they're the star of their own lives? I've always understood it and looked on with some measure of jealousy, feeling like that was going to be forever out of reach for me. But for the first time ever, I feel like people are looking at *me* that way.

I'm standing in the middle of the large Mackley library, on the edge of the makeshift dance floor, in a floor length emerald green dress with an asymmetric neckline. My hair is down in beach waves around my shoulders, my makeup light except for my burgundy lipstick.

"All eyes are on you tonight." Nera tells me with a bright smile.

She's standing across from me in a bold orange dress. The kind that would dwarf me but that only emphasizes her beauty.

Fierce is the word that comes to mind when I look at her.

"Not just me, look at you." I say, awe curling the edge of my words.

She does a full twirl in front of me, the wide body of her dress bumping against mine.

"You rock orange better than anyone I've ever met." I tell her honestly.

“Thanks! My mom actually sent...” Nera’s sentence trails off as she spots someone above my left shoulder.

I know who it is even without turning around. It’s like his body calls to mine as I feel a heat against my back, a pull to lean against him. I feel his gaze on me like a proprietary touch on my lower back.

She throws me a conspiratorial look. “Someone can’t take their eyes off you.” She kisses my cheek and throws me a wink. “We’ll catch up later. Have fun.”

I look over my shoulder and my gaze clashes with a pair of stormy eyes.

He looks amazing. He’s in a tuxedo tailored to within an inch of his life, emphasizing his tall frame and defined muscles.

He looks expensive and powerful.

He looks dangerous.

His gaze rakes down my body and turns hungry as he takes in the way the dress molds to my curves. The dress is modest and classy, but the way it hugs my body is borderline inappropriate.

He extends his hand towards me. “Dance with me.”

Placing my hand in his, I let him pull me to the dance floor.

“Take care of her!” I hear Six yelling from behind me.

He walks us to the middle of the dance floor, pulling me into his arms as his hand claims my waist possessively.

“You look beautiful.” He says looking down at me from his substantial height. “Like a fucking dream.”

My cheeks heat under his gaze as he guides us in this slow, sensual dance. He’s here with me, his body flush against mine and his fingers digging into my flesh, and yet he feels miles away. There’s a distance there that I’m just noticing. Not enough that I can overtly question it but still enough to know

something has changed since this morning. I can't help wondering if I did something wrong.

This dress is part of the pre-selection he sent to me this morning, the hair and makeup done by the artist he paid for who showed up at my apartment two hours before the party.

I'm not sure what's changed.

"Thank you." I say, unable to come up with something more creative as I try to work through whether the difference is just in my imagination or not.

"Just stating the obvious. Every guy in here wants you."

"And you?"

"Me?" He questions.

I nod, my breath hitching in my throat as I wait for his reply.

A slow, sexy and satisfied smile stretches across his face, wiping away any doubts I had previously.

The perceived distance between us must have been a figment of my imagination earlier.

"I already have you." His grip further tightens around me, bringing me even closer as he leads us around the room.

His words ring with a truth I've rarely heard from him.

"Have you seen Rogue?" I ask Rhys.

He's off to the side, staring daggers at Thayer and Carter. The latter surprised her this morning by flying to Switzerland and unexpectedly showing up at our suite door.

They're dancing in the middle of the room, looking like a happy couple. Only I can tell how uncomfortable she is. Her shoulders are rigid, her body stiff as she throws furtive glances in Rhys' direction.

The man in question is coiled tight, his eyes fixed on Carter's hand curled around Thayer's waist. He doesn't hear my question, his attention completely devoted to Thayer. I put my hand on his arms gently, pulling his gaze towards me.

"Rogue?" I ask.

He shrugs, his eyes slipping back to my best friend. "Haven't seen him."

Me neither. When we finished our dance, he simply kissed my hand and walked away. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time, thinking he was going to grab a drink, but he's been gone for over an hour.

I've done the rounds with my friends, have met new people, hell I've even run into Rogue father. He cornered me in the room, asking me how it was going with Rogue. I answered him with generic platitudes, swallowing thickly around the hate in my throat as I kept the peace, knowing Rogue wouldn't want me to make a scene.

The man in question hasn't made an appearance since, however.

I amble down the halls of RCA aimlessly.

Pulling out my phone, I shoot him a quick text.

Me: Where are you?

When he doesn't answer me five minutes later, I put it back in my clutch. Maybe he's taking a call in one of these rooms?

I start at the end of the hall, opening first the door of my English Lit class and then the room I know belongs to European Studies, finding both empty. I open the third door and find it empty as well. Getting slightly frustrated at his lack of appearance, I go towards the next door.

I wonder if he went home and simply didn't tell me. We're still working on his flawed communication skills, so I wouldn't be surprised if he did.

I open the fourth door, deciding this one will be the last I check if I don't find him and stumble when I see a man's back

and a woman's hands wrapped around his neck. His head is bent, his hands are around her waist.

I'm about to apologize profusely for interrupting when the man shucks his suit jacket, tossing it to the side, and rips his tie off.

He still hasn't turned around, but I know the way this body moves. I've seen those very same hands rip his and my clothes off as he desperately tried to get to bare skin.

Like seeing a trainwreck in real time, I stand frozen, watching as he removes his shirt next.

I know that back. The wide shoulders, the tapered waist, the dimples on either of his spine just above his waistline. I know this body, it's bent over me dozens of times.

His head turns to the side when the sound of the door closing doesn't immediately follow, and I recognize the lock of hair that flops on his cheek.

I recognize the hands on the other girl's waist.

I recognize the green eyes that give me a dead look.

"Rogue?" I question, my voice small and disbelieving.

There's got to be another explanation for this. This isn't happening, not now.

Before he can say anything, Lyra's – *Lyra's* – head pops out to the side.

The *déjà vu* is powerful, my brain merging together memories of the first time I found him like this with her with these fresh images of a new betrayal.

She digs her nails in his shirtless back, like she's in the throes of passion. My gaze is fixed on her hands. How dare she touch him like I touch him?

How dare he let her?

"You mind? Close the bloody door will you?" She sneers.

I'm going to be sick to my stomach. It feels like a tornado, a tsunami and an earthquake hit all at once. There's alarms,

and screaming, and cries, and death, and blood ringing in my ears and yet I'm pretty sure that outside of my head, the world is quiet.

He still hasn't said anything and neither have I.

Somehow, even with the evidence plainly displayed in front of my eyes, I'm still foolish and naive enough to believe there's a chance it's all a misunderstanding. There's no way he's doing this to me when I told him I loved him less than a week ago.

When he's begged me to repeat it every day, every hour since.

There's no way he got up and out of my bed this morning just to fuck her at an event he also invited me to. Even at his meanest, he's never been this cruel.

"Rogue?" I repeat, trying to hide the tremble in my voice. My words are hardly audible. If I speak any louder, he'll hear the heartbreak in my tone.

I barely recognize him. He looks like when we first met and those subsequent weeks when he harassed me. He's detached and unreachable. What little humanity was left in his eyes leaves his gaze as his jaw sets.

I know he's going to strike a blow.

"You heard her." He says. "Close the door."

This isn't happening.

"Rogue, stop." I beg.

"What don't you understand?" He asks, still not facing me. I realize Lyra is sitting on a counter, her legs on either side of him. Other than her hands on his waist, they're not touching.

"What you're doing!" I cry. "Why are you here with her?"

"She's it for me." He delivers coldly, matter-of-factly. "She's always been it for me. You were just a means to an end, a way to make her jealous so I could get her back."

Pain battles with seething anger for dominance inside me.

He's abused my kindness and patience too many times before. I warned him last time that he didn't have any more chances.

Cheating is so far past the line, there isn't a world in which I'd forgive him for that. He won't make a fool of me any longer and he certainly won't see me break.

"That's who you want?" I spit out the question. "After everything we've been through."

"Yes."

A one word answer.

Simple.

My spine snaps to attention and I stand ramrod straight. "Congratulations," I say, my voice cold as ice. "You deserve each other."

I turn on my heel, walking out without another word. I feel his eyes boring into my back the whole way out. As I close the door behind me, I wonder if he can hear the sound of my heart hitting the ground and shattering to pieces.

Can he see the gaping wound he leaves behind?

I hear the door click open behind me. Is he really coming after me now?

"Bellamy." He says, grabbing my wrist.

I wrench my arm out of his hold. "Don't you fucking touch me. You'll never touch me again." I sneer, inches from his face.

"Why are you acting so hurt?" He has the nerve to ask me. "You knew what you were signing up for with me. I never pretended to be nice. I told you from the beginning that I was the villain in your story, not the hero. You're the one who didn't listen."

"That's a lie." I snap back. "If you were really the villain in my story, you wouldn't have let my friends stay over for brunch. You wouldn't have talked me down from my panic attack. You wouldn't have spent the night with me when I had

my period or organized manicures for me the next day because you knew I'd had a hard time." I shove him back with all my might, trying to physically distance myself from him as much as I can. My rage must give me additional strength because this time he at least takes a step back. "Maybe I'm naive for not listening to you when you said those words at the beginning of our relationship, but you're the one whose actions haven't reflected your intentions. You're the one who promised you wouldn't break my heart." I choke out, my throat constricting. "You're a liar. You've been lying to me this entire time."

I break down in involuntary tears, sobs racking my body as I stand before him. He takes a step towards me but I throw my hand up to stop his advance and take three steps back to keep my distance.

"Stop." I say, holding my head high even as the tears stream down my face. "You've destroyed *everything*. Everything good we had, and for what? A meaningless fuck? Don't let me keep you." I add with a laugh that borders on hysterical. "Hope you enjoy it. I'm so done being hurt by you. I'm so done with *you*."

"We're done." He concludes, his voice devoid of any emotion.

"We were done the second you decided to fuck someone else." I thunder, my voice echoing in the empty hall. "You've made the biggest mistake of your life. And by the time you realize that's the case, I'll have moved on and you'll be nothing but a bad memory to me."

Glad to have given that final parting shot, I turn on my heel towards the exit. Shoulders back, chin up, dignity only slightly tarnished.

It's only as I walk out that I notice Rogue father in the corner of the hallway. He clearly witnessed my humiliation.

My steps falter as I see him, a part of me wondering what will come next for Rogue and if he'll be safe.

It's not your problem anymore, Bellamy. He chose someone else.

Why am I even worrying? Now that I've left, he's just going to go back into that room and finish what he started. He'll fuck her, the way he's fucked me countless times before. She'll dig her nails in his back and call his name like I used to.

I scream in frustration, trying to get that image out of my head.

When I get home, the home I share with my friends, not the one of the past few weeks, I fall on my bed. Clutching my knees against my chest, I ball myself up and cry deep into the night.

I don't understand how we went from perfection to destruction in the blink of an eye.

"Bellamy?" A voice asks. A hand comes down on my shoulder and gently shakes me awake. I must have fallen asleep at some point. There's sunlight coming into the room from my window, so I assume it's the next morning. "Are you alright?"

I blink up at Thayer's voice, parting my eyes with some difficulty. They're swollen and crusty from hours of crying.

I see Nera and Sixtine's concerned faces in the doorway.

"What happened, B?" Thayer asks gently. "I saw you run out, but didn't see why. Rogue looked as equally devastated as you. Did something happen?"

I give a humorless laugh. "Devastated? Yeah, I don't think so." I say, sitting up in bed. "We broke up last night."

"What?" Nera exclaims.

"I thought you guys were doing great." Six adds.

“If the way he was looking at you last night was anything to go by, he was as obsessed with you as usual.” Nera finishes.

“Why did you break up?” Thayer asks, disregarding the conversation behind her as she focuses on me.

“I caught him.” I say, my words stumbling against the ball of emotion lodged in my throat. “With Lyra.”

Six’s sharp inhale sounds behind Thayer. “You’re joking.”

“That fucking wanker.” Nera adds, steam almost shooting out of her ears, she’s so angry.

“Why?” Thayer questions again.

I sigh, emotionally exhausted. I don’t want to spend any more time thinking about the why of his actions. My heart has a gaping wound in it, bleeding all over the floor. Does the weapon really even matter?

“I don’t know. He got tired, I guess.”

“Nope.” Thayer answers, shaking her head. “I don’t buy it. Not for a single second.”

My eyebrows pull down in a frown as I look at her.

“Since when are you a fan of his?” I ask her.

“Since I saw the way he was with you. That man is obsessed with you. *Obsessed*, B.”

“I saw him with my own eyes.”

“There’s got to be a reason.” She replies, convinced.

“There isn’t. He’s just a phenomenal liar and I’m the idiot who fell for it. You guys were right to warn me, I just didn’t listen.”

34.

Rogue

She bought it.

Mission accomplished.

Plan executed.

So why did I want to run after her and yell at her for believing I'd ever fucking do that to her?

I'd had to hold myself back from doing just that when I followed her into the hallway. My feet had moved of their own volition, my first instinct being to go after her.

My father couldn't have had better timing. I hadn't planned for him to witness our breakup, he'd just walked in at the perfect time. He'd seen Bellamy completely destroyed by my supposed betrayal.

Even as everything clawed inside me, screaming, telling, no *begging* me to tell her, seeing my dad there solidified my decision and kept me rooted in place.

I shattered her heart and mine in the process, but at least she was safe.

Without acknowledging my father, I turn and walk back into the room. Lyra is still sitting where I left her, legs parted as if we're going to pick up where we left off.

Over my dead fucking body.

My skin crawled just having to grab her waist. Having to feel her nails in my back. It was all wrong.

I pick up my discarded shirt, jacket, and tie and head back towards the door without a look in Lyra's direction.

"Babe." She whines from behind me.

"Not interested." I snap, slamming the door closed behind me.

Once outside, I pause, suddenly world weary. The weight of what I just did hits me and takes me out at the knees.

Sitting on the front steps of the RCA main building, I pull out a cigarette and light it, watching the end burn against the black of the night.

I take a drag and try not to think about Bellamy's face. I rub my hand over my eyes hoping it'll help erase the memories, but all I can see is the haunted, betrayed look stamped on her lovely face.

The truth is, being with me isn't safe for her. I'd unknowingly put her in danger by dragging her into my life and around my father. The moment he'd threatened her, I'd known I needed to find a way to keep her far away from him and by extension, me.

I almost hadn't been able to go through with it when I'd seen her standing in the library. She'd been so breathtakingly beautiful, it'd stopped me in my tracks. A happy, earnest, loving smile on her face as she saw me.

Me.

How I'd gotten so lucky as to have her smiles directed at me, I didn't know. I'd wanted to lock her away somewhere and keep her to myself.

But keeping her safe was the priority. If that meant losing her in the process, that was a deal with the Devil that I'd gladly make.

It'd only taken one look in Lyra's direction to have her follow me into the classroom, desperate as always. She'd tried jumping me, kissing me, but the thought of touching anyone else had my stomach roiling.

She wasn't Bellamy and I didn't want anybody else.

I'd trapped Lyra's upper arms against her sides so she could only grab my waist. I'd bent over her, using my size to make it look like I was holding her caged beneath me in an intimate moment.

Bellamy had walked in on us then. Lyra, only too happy to be the victor by supposedly having stolen me back, had jumped in with petty commentary that had been the final nail in the coffin of selling this act.

I take drag after drag, burning the cigarette down to ashes as I relive those moments.

I always thought that when the time came, I'd easily give Bellamy up. Our journey would have run its course and we'd go our separate ways without a backwards glance.

Now, as I pondered how I was expected to go about life as if there wasn't a gaping hole in my chest where a certain vital organ used to be, I realized the truth of the statement that sometimes it takes losing something to make you realize how much you really cared for it.

35.

Bellamy

A week passes without a word between us.

I see him every day.

He's everywhere.

In my classes, sitting a couple tables away in the cafeteria, settling under a tree next to ours on the lawn.

It's impossible to avoid the king of RCA when he doesn't want you to and I swear I think he's keeping an eye on me.

I feel his gaze burning into my back or the side of my face throughout the day. I never look, never give him the satisfaction of giving in and checking if it is him, no matter how much I'm dying to. But I know it's him. He's undressed me with that same look hundreds of times before.

I ignore his direct gaze but sometimes I steal a quick glance when I know he's not looking. He always looks the same; stoic, a frown on his face, a cold detachment emanating from him that distances him from the rest of the crowd.

He doesn't look like he's dying on the inside. Doesn't look like being around me is painful for him, like being around him is for me.

And why would he, I guess. He's moved on and isn't looking back.

Thankfully, except for the excruciating moment I caught them together, he hasn't flaunted her around campus. Hasn't

rubbed their new relationship in my face or even spent any time near her when I'm around. I'm not naive enough to think that it's not happening behind the scenes, but at least I'm not being made to watch it and pretend not to care.

On the inside, anxiety has me feeling like my stomach is eating itself. It's been a week of sleepless nights laying awake, driving myself crazy analyzing every interaction leading up to that evening to try and see if there were signs I missed.

A week of tasteless food and wet textbooks as tears fell openly on the pages as I studied.

A week of every little thing I do reminding me of him in some way.

A week of radio silence.

In short, a week of emotional torture.

No wonder Rogue doesn't believe in love. If this is the pain that comes with being in love, I'm not sure I want it either. Losing him like this doesn't feel like something I can easily survive.

That doesn't mean I'll ever go back to him.

If he could so easily cheat on me, then he never really liked me. I only ever asked him for one thing in our short lived relationship and he couldn't even do that.

I guess he never claimed otherwise. He's the one who'd repeatedly told me he didn't believe in relationships or love and, by proxy, monogamy.

I should have listened.

I'm standing in the takeaway line at *Bella's* waiting to order one of their famous milkshakes. I figure that while there's no cure for heartbreak, whipped cream and chocolate certainly can't hurt.

I move out of the way of a passing waiter, accidentally bumping into the man in front of me in the process. “Oh, I’m so sorry.”

He turns around and I realize it’s Jeremy.

“Hey, Bellamy. I didn’t see you there.”

“Me neither.” I say with a laugh that sounds hollow to my ears. “I was deep in thought, sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it.” He replies, taking a backwards step to stand shoulder to shoulder with me as he looks up at the menu. “Are you getting a milkshake?”

“Yeah,” I say, my mind suddenly flooded with memories as I see the ‘Malteser Milkshake’ on the menu. My throat closes and tears threaten to form.

Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.

I swallow around the ball in my throat, something that’s become a regular occurrence these days. “Probably just a regular chocolate one with whipped cream.”

“I’m a vanilla man, myself.”

He gives me a charming smile. I struggle to return it, not having the energy to deal with flirting right now.

“So,” He says, shoving his hands in his jeans and kicking his foot out. “Listen, I was wondering... is there anything going on with Rogue?”

“No.” I say, my tone definitive. “I’m sorry about the way he attacked you at his house party.”

“Forget about it. And good, I’m glad to hear it.” He says, the charming smile back on his face. We’re at the front of the line now. Turning towards the cashier, he orders. “One vanilla milkshake for me and one chocolate milkshake with as much whipped cream as you can put on there for my girl here, please.”

His words rankle.

I’m not ‘his girl’ and the last and only person who called me that just threw my heart in a blender and set it on high

speed, so I'm not looking to be anyone else's 'girl' anytime soon.

He takes out his card and pays for both shakes.

"You don't have to do that." I tell him, although I'm too late.

"I know." He says, putting his card back into his wallet. "I wanted to."

We move off to the side, waiting for our milkshakes. My gaze clashes with a pair of familiar eyes as I see Rhys lounging in one of the booths. He's alone, with books and an empty plate spread out around him.

His gaze moves from my face and slowly slides to the left, taking Jeremy in between narrowed slits.

Clearly, he doesn't like what he sees.

I know those three have each other's backs, but I'm no longer Rogue's. What I do is none of his business. If I wanted to, I could fuck Jeremy right in the middle of *Bella's* and he wouldn't have a say.

At this point, I doubt he'd even care.

I return his stare, adding a glare to mine, before turning back to Jeremy who's still speaking.

"What did you say?"

"I was just asking if you were sure everything between you and Rogue was done. He seemed extra possessive of you at the library grand opening."

"That's also the event where he cheated on me, so I assure you everything between us is done. Dead and buried."

"Shit. Sorry to hear that, I didn't know." He cups my shoulder in a comforting gesture.

"Vanilla and chocolate milkshakes for Jeremy!"

He grabs the milkshakes from the counter, handing me mine.

"Are you staying here or...?"

“Going home. I have to study.”

“I’ll walk you out.”

He holds both doors open for me as we walk outside. We’re standing in front of each other, the moment turning uncomfortable. I’m not sure how to say goodbye.

“Well,” I say, rocking back on my heels. “Thanks for the shake. I’ll see you later.”

“Bellamy, wait.” He smiles at me, his lips curling adorably at the corners. “Listen, I know you’re going through a shit time right now and my timing is off, but I wanted to know if you’d like to grab a drink sometime? I’m a good guy, I won’t break your heart, I promise.”

I’m sure he wouldn’t. I’m sure that unlike Rogue, he’d keep that promise. Once again, I find myself asking whatever higher power there is why I couldn’t fall in love with someone like him.

I know it would have been a very content and safe relationship, reflecting exactly the way I lived my life before Switzerland.

Before Rogue.

“I’m sorry, Jeremy, I really am.” I say, taking a step towards him. “I’m not in a place to be with anyone else right now.”

His face falls dejectedly. “I get it. But you’re not ruling it out completely, right? I think we could have fun.”

The look on his face is so earnest, I don’t have it in me to slam the door in his face completely. “One day, *maybe*. But realistically, I’d say you’d have much better luck trying it on with literally anyone else.” Reaching up, I hug him tightly. “Thank you for the milkshake though. I hope we can be friends.”

He returns the hug, looking down at me with a grin. “Of course. Let me know if you ever need a shoulder to cry on.”

“I promised myself no more tears, actually.” I tell him because if I tell someone, maybe it’ll come true.

He nudges my chin up with his fingers. “Damn right. He doesn’t deserve them.” He says and I give him a small smile. “I’ll see you around.”

I watch him get into his car and wave as he drives away.

Turning back towards my golf cart, I stop in my tracks when I see Rhys. I don’t know how long he’s been standing there, but if the look on his face is anything to go by, he heard that entire conversation.

“Say what you have to say so I can leave.” I tell him with a tired sigh.

“He didn’t touch her.”

I don’t know what I expected him to say, but it certainly wasn’t that.

“What?”

“He didn’t touch Lyra.”

“Yes he did.”

“There’s no fucking way.” He says, shaking his head. “You’re the only person who matters to him. Other than me and Phoenix, obviously. He won’t talk about this with me which is part of the reason I know something’s afoot here. I don’t have any more information than you do, but I don’t think that he did this.”

“You and Thayer have that belief in common.” I say, dryly.

“Of course we do.” He answers, his mouth stretching into a proud smile. “Clever girl.”

“Look, I’m tired, Rhys.” I tell him with a huge sigh. “I’m tired of thinking about that night and going over every detail wondering if I missed something. I’m tired of debating with people whether my boyfriend – *ex-boyfriend* – cheated or not when I saw him do it with my own eyes. The truth is he did it. Openly. He then followed me and confirmed it. Case closed, there is no misunderstanding here.”

“Maybe you saw what he wanted you to see and heard what he wanted you to hear. I’m not trying to cause you any

more pain,” He adds quickly, seeing my face drop. “I just... Fuck, I don’t know what I’m doing. I guess I just want you to know that he’s obsessed with you. I’m pretty sure he hasn’t slept more than ten hours in the last week nor have I seen him without a scotch bottle glued to his hand since.”

“I don’t care. If the consequences of his actions are making him miserable, he has no one else to blame but himself. He’s the one who cheated. He can go and cry on Lyra’s shoulder for all I care.” I say, lying through clenched teeth.

“She hasn’t come over. He doesn’t give a shit about her, she’s completely expendable to him. I’m telling you there’s something else going on here.” He puts a hand up to silence me when I open my mouth to argue. “You don’t need to believe me, just... keep that in mind the next time a guy hits on you and you think about moving on.”

I laugh humorlessly. “You’re a good friend, Rhys.” I say, hugging him. “But what I do, and who I decide to do it with, are none of your or Rogue’s business anymore.”

Wishing I’d driven anything but a golf cart to *Bella’s* because I know I’m going to look absolutely moronic driving away, I start the engine and peel out of the parking lot.

36.

Rogue

“Did you find something?”

“We’ll get the results back by the end of the day.” Müller’s voice comes out over the speakerphone. “They found some DNA on her body and we’re testing it against yours. If it’s your father’s DNA, it should come up as a paternal match. We’d be able to prove his guilt.”

“Good.” I say, nodding even though he can’t see me. “Call me the minute you hear.”

“You got it, boss.”

Hanging up, I pocket my phone and go to resume the music I was listening to when the door opens.

“Guess who I just ran into?” Rhys asks me, walking into the upstairs living room and sitting down on one of the couches next to me.

“I don’t give a fuck.” I’m not in the mood to deal with Rhys’ jokes today.

“Really? Huh.” He says, surprise coloring his words. “I thought you’d want to know I saw Bellamy. But no matter.” He adds, jumping to his feet and walking to the door with a spring in his step.

He’s playing with me, the fucker. He wants to see if I’ll ask him to tell me. Well fuck him.

Except...

“Stop.”

He turns towards me, a knowing grin on his face.

“Tell me.”

“She looked sad like she has every day for the past week. Well done, mate.” He says, sarcasm dripping from his words. “You really showed her what a massive knob you can be.”

I flip him off, otherwise ignoring his jabs. “But she was fine?”

“Apart from how obviously sad she looked, she seemed alright, yeah.” He tells me.

This is what I’ve been relegated to in order to get updates on Bellamy. Scrounging for crumbs.

Thayer refuses to tell Rhys anything — I believe she invented a whole slew of colorful curse words when he asked — and the woman in question won’t look at me in the halls.

It’s been a week without talking to her and I’m not sure I’ll make it another.

“Of course, Jeremy was there so that helped cheer her up.”

Rhys’ words drag me out of my reverie. I snap my gaze to his. “What did you just say?”

He gives me a wide-eyed, innocent look. “I saw her at *Bella’s* with Jeremy.”

“What were they doing?”

“He got them both milkshakes.”

Hearing that he bought her a milkshake of all things has spiteful anger barreling through me like a cannonball.

Our story began at *Bella’s* and now she’s there with another guy? My muscles are corded so tightly, a single, small movement would break me like fine china.

“Actually, I got a picture of them in the parking lot if you want to see.” He offers, casually.

He pulls the phone from his pocket and I snatch it out of his hand. “Alright, touchy.” He says, putting his hands up.

Going to his camera roll, I click on the last photo taken and enlarge it.

Jeremy and Bellamy face each other in the parking lot, a milkshake in either one of their hands.

He stands too fucking close.

Less than a foot separates them. He looks down at her and she smiles up at him. It's a small smile, imbued with sadness, but it's still directed at him.

He has his hand on her chin.

I see red. Bright, furious red.

The photo leaves me wondering what happened next. Did he bring his other hand to her hip and pull her against him? Did he lower his head and claim her lips?

I hurl the phone against the wall, the sound of it shattering giving me only a modicum of satisfaction.

“Mate, what the fuck.” Rhys groans next to me. “You’re getting me a new one.”

I stand and straighten to my full height. “What happened after you took that picture? Did he kiss her?” I demand.

“You know, I’m not sure.” He says, lifting his shoulder in a careless shrug. “I didn’t stick around to see the rest.”

“Fuck you.” I tell him before storming out.

His laughter follows me out of the house.

37.

Bellamy

I'm sitting in the newly opened Mackley library, studying. I'd gone back and forth deciding if I should come back here, unsure if I could set foot in this place when it was so full of recent memories with Rogue.

Ultimately, I'd decided he'd taken a lot from me already and I wasn't going to let him take books away from me on top of everything else.

Plus, I have another six months left at RCA. If I avoid every place that holds memories of him and I together, then I'll effectively become a recluse.

It's Saturday so the library is empty except for yours truly. I'm doing my best to focus my attention on the World History lesson and not let my thoughts wander thinking of all the dirty things we did between, and often against, those shelves.

I get on my tiptoes, reaching to grab a book on Winston Churchill from the top shelf, when the air in the room changes. A chill runs down my spine and I come back down slowly, not turning around. A body closes in against my back as a hand comes over my shoulder and easily reaches for the book. He hands it to me and takes a step back.

“Go away.”

“Rhys saw you with Jeremy at *Bella's* yesterday. What were you doing with him?”

Thanks, Rhys.

Clutching the book in my hand, I turn around. Being prepared to see him doesn't lessen the blow of actually coming face to face with him in any way.

He stands before me, a dark king with dangerous, thunderous energy swirling around him. He's in black slacks and a white button down shirt casually opened to reveal the smooth expanse of his chest. A couple brown locks have fallen haphazardly on his forehead, his hair looking very disheveled overall.

Almost like he's been racking his hands through it repeatedly. It only adds to his wild and untamed look.

"Is that a joke?"

His jaw works, his teeth clenched tight as he levels me with a glare. "Do I look like I'm laughing?"

I hurl the book at him and because Churchill was problematic to say the least, it's a thick one. He plucks it out of the air with infuriating ease, grabbing it before it can hit him.

"Get lost, Rogue. I'm not going to entertain this conversation with you."

Turning back towards the shelves, I pretend to search for another book hoping he'll understand that I want nothing to do with him and leave.

"You move on fast."

I whip back around so fast, I almost snap my neck. "What did you just say?" I ask him because surely that must have been an auditory hallucination.

"I said," He starts, and I just know he's going to repeat it. "You move on fast. Especially for someone who claimed to love me just last week."

I stare at him, stunned and frozen to the spot. Throwing my love for him as an accusation in my face is low, even for him.

I walk up to him so we're standing toe to toe and get up as close to his face as I can.

"Not as fast as you." I hiss.

I go to move past him but he grabs my arm, yanking me back against his body. I feel the anger vibrating in his chest. How is he acting the injured party here?

He's the one who ripped my heart out of my chest with his bare hands, not the other way around.

"Get your hands off me."

"What were you doing with him, Bellamy? Rhys showed me a picture, he had his hands all over you."

I try yanking my arm out of his grasp, but he keeps me locked in place. His hold doesn't loosen, no matter how hard I pull at it.

"Let me go."

"Answer the question."

"That's none of your business, Rogue."

"It sure as fuck is my business actually."

I abruptly stop fighting, letting my arm go limp in his hold. He looks at me questioningly.

"What are you doing?" I ask him. "I caught you about to fuck someone else, you made your choice. Why are you acting like a jealous boyfriend right now?"

"Just because we broke up doesn't mean he gets to touch you." He grinds out.

I burst out laughing at that. "That's exactly what it means, Rogue. It means if I want him or anyone else to touch me, there's nothing you can do about it."

"Do you want me to kill him?" He snarls, his mouth inches from my face. His breath hits my cheek as he bends over me. I can't stop my body from reacting to his closeness. The smell of his musky aftershave wafts into my nose and triggers my arousal. My panties are a mess for him, even as he threatens

me. “Is that what you fucking want, Bellamy? Because if he so much as lays another finger on you, no amount of begging will save that asshole from a long and painful death.”

The violence in his words snaps me back to reality and I remember seeing him wrapped around Lyra.

Screw him.

“I am not yours any longer.” I say, ripping my arm out of his hold with a decisive tug. “If I want to fuck him, I’ll fuck him and there’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

I push past him as he lets out a terrifying roar. I hear the sound of wood splintering and turn back around to see him pull his fist out of the side of the bookshelf. He doesn’t acknowledge it or the pain it must undoubtedly have caused, just levels me with a deadly glare.

“You wouldn’t.”

“I would. Maybe I’ll even send you a photo since you like those so much.”

I didn’t know I had a vindictive side but apparently I do. Getting the last word in my confrontation with Rogue fills me with cruel satisfaction. I hope I hurt him at least a fraction of the amount he’s hurt me.

Jogging down the stairs of RCA, I set out for the pen on foot. We’re approaching the deep nights of fall and the night reflects it – the sky is dark, the air is crisp and scented with the smell of smoke and spices. The leaves have fallen and crunch beneath my steps.

I cut across the parking lot, completely focused on appreciating the beautiful night. I don’t hear the footsteps come up behind me and am only alerted to someone’s presence by the sound of a snapping tree branch. I turn around at the noise, but it’s already too late.

I see a flash of something silver and then something hard and heavy connects with my temple. I stagger back as confusion swells and darkness takes over my vision before I pass out.

38.

Rogue

I stay at RCA a while longer, spending the time in the gym punching the bag in an effort to distract myself from going to Jeremy's suite and snapping his legs in two. I didn't Bellamy had a cruel streak in her. The visual of them together, her writhing under him has me threatening to tip over the razor's edge of insanity.

Two hours later, I'm pulled from my workout when my phone rings. I grab a hand towel and use it to wipe down my face and body. I'm dripping in perspiration from the exertion and still working on catching my breath. The images of Bellamy fucking someone else are still front and center in my mind.

"Fuck!" I roar, tossing the towel aside and grabbing my phone. It's Müller. "Give me good news." I demand, answering the call.

"It's a match. The killer is someone who's related to you on your paternal side."

Relief hits me like a tidal wave and I release a long breath I didn't even know I was holding. "Thank you." The gratitude in my voice is clear even to my ears.

"You're welcome. I'll pass on my files to the police and let them know an arrest is needed."

I hang up.

"Fuck yes!" I scream out loud in the empty gym.

I have proof. The police will have a strong case and my father will go to prison for the rest of his life. I'll be able to tell Bellamy the truth and make her forgive me.

Force her to if need be.

I dial her number next but my call is immediately answered by an automatic voice telling me the number is unrecognizable.

I grind my jaw so hard, I probably shave off the top layer of my teeth.

She blocked me.

I'll spank her ass for that later.

First, I have to confront my father.

Robert: Come to the guest house.

A cryptic text from my father, just as I pull into my parking spot outside. He couldn't have had better timing.

I'm looking for him too.

Walking around to the back of the house, I text the guys an update.

Me: Müller got him. There's a DNA match. Confronting him now, the police should be on their way soon.

Phoenix: Wait for the police to get there. He's dangerous.

Phoenix's number flashes across my screen, but I decline the call. When I don't answer, another text comes through.

Phoenix: Don't go in there and risk your life for this.

I put my phone in my back pocket as I walk up to the guest house door. Opening it carefully, I cross the threshold into the house. Turning to the right into the living room, I'm met with my worst nightmare come to life.

Bellamy is sitting in a chair in the middle of the room. Her wrists and ankles are tied to the legs of the chair using rope. Tape covers her mouth. Her head hangs limply on her chest and I see blood trickle down the side of her face.

I take two running steps towards her when my father steps between us, a gun pointed at my head.

“What the fuck have you done to her?” I ask him, fear making my voice unrecognizable. I walk up to him, pushing my chest against the barrel of the gun as I try to push him back so I can get to her. “Move, I need to make sure she’s okay.” I say, trying to keep the frantic note out of my voice.

He pushes the gun into my chest, forcing me back. “She’s fine.” He says, taking a step backwards. Without looking away from me, he grabs some of her hair and uses it to tilt her head back. Her mouth parts on a groan as she starts to come to, her eyes wincing at the pain. “See? She’s fine. At least for now.”

I try to think rationally, fighting the primal urge to beat him to death for touching her.

If I reveal how much she means to me, then he’ll definitely kill her. Her only hope is to stay the course and keep him talking long enough for the police to get here. Hopefully they’ll move with a German, not Swiss, sense of urgency.

Otherwise, we’re both screwed.

“Why are you doing this?”

“I overheard your call with the private investigator. Müller was it?”

Fuck. I yell at myself on the inside.

I hadn’t been anywhere near careful enough.

39.

Bellamy

I wake with a screaming headache. My entire head throbs and my brain feels like it's being suffocated by the walls of my skull. Groaning at the pain, I try bringing my fingers up to massage my temples, but can't seem to move my arms.

There's rope around my wrists, keeping me pinned to the spot.

Why am I tied to a chair?

The sudden realization that I am in fact tied up and not hallucinating this entire experience is a jolt to my system. I'm immediately awake.

God, my head is really pounding.

I try turning it get some relief, but my movements are limited by a hand clutching my hair. Looking up, I freeze when I see Rogue staring down the barrel of a gun pointed at his chest. My eyes follow the gun, up a pair of hands and arms until they fall on a familiar face.

Robert Royal.

Fear trickles down my spine and into my veins as the silent standoff unfolds before me. Darting quick looks around, I realize we're in Rogue's guest house.

I try to focus on the exchange, catching only the last of their conversation. "I overheard your call with the private investigator. Müller was it?"

What's going on?

The last thing I remember is leaving RCA and heading home. There's a flash of pain and then nothing. Rogue's father kidnapped me, but why? What did he overhear in this conversation with Müller?

The flash of silver I'd seen must have been the gun. Being pistol whipped explains the throbbing headache.

Rogue's eyes flick down to meet mine. They're carefully devoid of any overt expression, but I see the unsaid question in his gaze.

Are you alright?

I nod discreetly, my head barely moving. Rogue's eyes snap back up to his father's, rage swirling with hate in his blown pupils.

"Then you know it's over for you. You're not getting away with it."

Getting away with what? I want to scream.

But I know one thing for sure right now – whatever I do, I don't want to bring Robert's attention back to me. He's clearly unhinged and the last thing I want is to find myself face to face with his gun.

"I'm not going to prison."

"What's your plan then? Why did you take her and bring me here?"

Robert laughs maniacally in response, as if Rogue said something funny. "I need you to sign your trust over to me. Since I didn't think you'd do that willingly, I brought Bellamy here as...incentive."

"I won't have access to my trust for months and you know that."

"My funds will last until then. You'll make me trustee of your inheritance and I'll work with my lawyers to turn it over to me."

“You think I’m going to give you money to help fund your escape? You’re even more fucked in the head than I thought and that’s saying something. I’m going to do everything in my power to make sure you rot in prison for the rest of your life for killing my mother.” Rogue snaps back at him. The sound is vicious and broken, the emotion clear in his voice.

A shocked cry falls from my lips, one that I couldn’t have stopped it even if I wanted to.

“He killed her?” The question is directed at Rogue, the incredulity clear in my voice.

Rogue’s father killed his mother.

My heart breaks for him. No matter how much he hates his father, learning that he was behind the murder of his mother and that he hid it and got away with it for so long must be destroying him. He’d never explicitly told me the reason he’d been trying to find her, whether he was hoping for a happy reunion or to get closure, but either way the pain must be excruciating for him. I wish I could hold him and tell him how sorry I am.

I wonder how long he’s known and why he didn’t tell me. He must have found out recently, after he cheated. The reminder of that betrayal has acid churning in my gut, but I tamp it down. In the context of murder and a kidnapping, cheating is the least of our problems.

“You’re a piece of shit.” I seethe, turning my head up towards his father and shooting him a loathsome glare. “A wife killer and child abuser. How do you look at yourself in the mirror? Do you have no remorse?”

Anger at learning he’s the one behind Rogue’s mom’s murder has me forgetting the gun in the room.

“Bellamy, stop.” Rogue warns.

Too late. I have Robert’s attention now. His gun remains pointed at Rogue as he turns towards me.

“Dangerous game you’re playing little girl, I’m the one with the gun.”

“Yeah and I’m the one tied to the chair because even with a gun you’re still nothing but a coward.”

“Watch your mouth.” He snaps.

His eyes are wild, his movements frantic and unpredictable.

“You’ll have to shoot me to shut me up.” I retort, mouthing off at him.

“Why do you think I brought you here?” He says, his delivery slow and cruel. He’s drawing this out, enjoying seeing us shake in fear before him.

The sudden reality of my situation has my earlier bravery evaporating on the spot. Fear has me shaking so badly, I hear my teeth clash together over the pounding of my racing heartbeat.

My vision tunnels.

The walls are closing in and I feel like I’m suffocating.

I can’t breathe.

No. No, no, *no*.

Not now.

I try to slow down my racing heartbeat, focusing on what Rogue told me when he found me last time.

“Keep your chest open like this. When you bend over like before, you’re closing your lungs and making it harder to breathe.”

Closing my eyes to avoid seeing what triggered me, I focus on rolling my shoulders back and opening my chest up. I gulp in deep breaths trying to keep the measured and consistent to slow down my still racing heartrate.

“Let her go.” I hear Rogue say through the fog. He takes a single step towards me before his father waves the gun at him, inching him backwards.

The edging on my vision slowly peels back as I come back to mental consciousness. I’m drained, the fear of being

kidnapped and the stress of the panic attack having sapped all of the energy out of me.

The panic attack may be receding, but this feels hopeless.

“Don’t fucking move.” Robert answers, turning back to look at me. “Let me enjoy my time with your little girlfriend.”

“Ex-girlfriend. I told you, she doesn’t mean anything. I’ve moved on.”

The casualness with which he dismisses the time we spent together hurts as much as the betrayal itself. I’m distraught and disappointed in myself for having so obviously misjudged him.

I’m going to die here. I’m going to die here and I don’t know what’s going to kill me, the father with his gun or the son with his cruel words.

“Is that right?” Robert swings his arm slowly over to me, pointing it down at my chest.

“Don’t fucking point a gun at her.” He snarls.

“Or what?” His father replies, goading him.

“You piece of s—” Rogue shouts, taking a couple hacked strides towards me. The sound of the gun cocking explodes in the silence room, stopping him dead in his tracks. His hands fly up in the air to show his harmlessness as his eyes flit back and forth between me and the gun. There’s real fear in them now. It’s the most vulnerable emotion he’s ever revealed to me and it scares me.

Because Rogue is never afraid. Not even when I saw him getting assaulted by his father.

He was angry and hurt but never scared.

If he’s afraid, then I know I’m in real trouble here.

“Shut the fuck up. You think I won’t do it?” He threatens before pressing the gun to my temple. The ice cold touch of metal against my skin turns fear to absolute, bone-chilling dread. I’m frozen, afraid that even a swallow will set off the trigger. “Give me the money.”

I close my eyes. If I'm going to die here, I don't want to see this place. Memories of Thayer, my mom and I laughing and having fun loop in my mind like a spinning wheel.

More tears fall down my cheeks.

I don't want to die. Not like this.

"I'll sign every cent over to you right now, just—" Rogue answers, faltering. "Don't hurt her."

The brief silence is shattered by a siren outside.

Police.

Robert's eyes snap to the window and Rogue uses his momentary distraction to jump on him and tackle him to the ground.

"Rogue!" I yell, helpless.

They roll over, struggling for the gun. It's clenched between them, clutched tightly in both their grips as they wrestle for dominance.

He's going to get hurt. A voice screams in my head.

As terrifying as potentially losing my life is him potentially losing him.

I can't just sit here and watch this. I try dislodging my wrists from the ropes, but they're skin tight. The only thing I can think of is Drew Barrymore in *Charlie's Angels*. Clutching on to the sides of the chair, I try jumping up and back down in the hopes the legs will break.

I let out a frustrated howl when they don't.

They're still fighting for the gun, but now Robert has the power position. He's flipped Rogue on his back and is trying to push the gun towards him.

"Help! Police!" I scream at the top of my lungs. "Please help us!" I jump up and down as I do, hoping the added noise will help direct the police to us and the main house. From what I can see out of the window, there's no one out front yet. "We're in the guest house." I add, shrieking as loud as I can.

A loud bang sounds out in the room.

I whip my head back towards them. “No!”

Neither of them is moving.

“Rogue? Rogue! Are you alright? Please say something.” I say, sobbing now. “I changed my mind. I don’t want you to be the hero. Not if you’re going to risk your life like this. Be the villain.”

There’s movement on the floor and then Rogue emerges, his father rolling off him and falling limply to the floor next to him. Rogue is covered in blood.

“You’re bleeding! Are you alright?”

He gets on his knees and crawls the short distance to me. His hands work to untie the knots, starting first with my ankles.

“I’m fine. He’s the one who got hit.” He says, as he moves to the second knot. “Are you alright?”

My gaze trails up to where his father lies on his back. Blood soaks his shirt and pools around his upper body. I’m frozen by the way it spreads and seeps into the floorboards around him.

His eyes stare vacantly into the distance.

He’s dead.

“I’m—I’m fine.”

Rogue finishes untying the last knot.

“You’re shaking.” He says, picking me up in his arms.

Our heads snap to the entrance as we hear the sound of a door shattering against a wall.

“Gendarmerie de Genève! Mains en l’air!”

The police escorted Rogue to the station to get his statement of the events and process the evidence. Meanwhile, an ambulance took me to the local hospital where I was ordered to stay overnight for observation.

I haven't seen or heard from him since yesterday. I don't know if he's still at the station or if he was allowed to go home. Disappointment crawls in my stomach at the thought that he might be home and hasn't reached out. We may have broken up but I thought he still cared enough to check in on me.

The girls came to visit this morning, bringing snacks and gossip. Thayer hugged me for a long time, refusing to let me go and telling me that I wasn't allowed to die without her. They left a few minutes ago and now I'm alone, pacing the length of my room in frustration as I wait to be discharged.

I turn when I hear the door sliding open, my mouth dropping when I see who's standing in the doorway.

"Hi, sweetheart." My mom says before crossing the room and throwing her arms around me. "I've missed you so much."

"Mom." I say, choking on the word as emotion swells in my throat. When she pulls me into her warm embrace and I smell her familiar perfume, I break down into tears.

"You're alright, sweetheart." She replies, stroking my hair the way only your mom can. "I'm here now."

She holds me for a few minutes as I cry on her shoulder, the fear and anxiety of the past twenty four hours melting away in her arms. I eventually pull back, wiping my wet cheeks as she puts a strand of hair behind my ear, careful to avoid touching the stitches on my head from where Robert hit me.

"Does it hurt?"

"They gave me some pain medication so I don't really feel it."

"I'm so sorry. I'm glad you're okay. I don't know what I would have done if I'd lost you." She says, her voice cracking as she speaks. I realize that as scared as I was, she must have

been equally terrified hearing the news that her daughter was hospitalized after being kidnapped.

“How did you get here? How did you even know to come?”

“A young man called me.” She says, giving me a knowing smile. “He told me what happened and that I needed to come see you. Said there’d be a plane waiting for me at O’Hare and sure enough, there was.”

My heart stumbles in my chest at her words. “Did he tell you who he was?”

“I think you know exactly who called me.” She says with a grin. “Tell me about him. I need to know how a man you’ve never spoken to me about came to send a private plane to bring me to your side.” She adds, throwing me a stern look.

“I’m sorry. I... I just got caught up in it. It’s really complicated and I didn’t want to tell you about him until we leveled out.”

“And have you?”

“Well, he cheated on me. So we leveled out in the sense that we broke up. His father mistakenly thought he could still use me as leverage, that’s it.”

“How do you feel about him?”

“I loved... love him.” I say, looking away from her as I admit the truth – my feelings haven’t disappeared overnight.

“Honey,” She says, grabbing my hands in hers and giving them a squeeze. “I don’t know about this cheating business, but that man cares deeply for you. You don’t charter a plane for the mom of someone you don’t have strong feelings for.”

“I’m sure it’s just guilt for dragging me into this.”

“Or maybe it’s because he knew that you’d want me by your side for this.” She says. “He begged me to come. Not that I needed encouragement, mind you, but he sounded desperate to make sure you were taken care of.”

“He’s capable of being the best person in the world. I’ve experienced it first hand and him bringing you here is just further proof of that. But that doesn’t negate the fact that he cheated. I can’t and won’t get over that.”

The door slides open again and I watch Rogue stride into the room, almost as if I summoned him. He comes to an abrupt halt when he sees my mom and I in the middle of the room.

He looks completely untamed, his hair disheveled and his eyes wild as they rake down my body, inspecting every part of me with a look that both checks for injuries and appreciates what he sees. My whole body comes alive at his perusal. I want nothing more than to step into his warm embrace and burrow my face in his chest.

But nothing’s changed.

“What are you doing here?”

My mom turns to face him, taking him in as he stands before her.

“I had to see you.” He answers, rubbing the back of his neck as he speaks. “I... They didn’t tell me how injured you were. Are you alright?”

I nod. “A few stitches but no concussion thankfully. You?”

“I’m fine.” He answers with a dismissive wave. “I was worried about you. I’m sorry I didn’t come sooner, I just finished my statement and came directly here.”

He looks at me with such intensity in his eyes, I wonder if he can see into my soul. For an extended moment, we simply stare at each other, barely blinking. I can feel his gaze on me like it’s a physical touch.

My heart pounds in my chest.

My mom watches the silent exchange besides us, a bemused look on her face.

“Hi, I’m Trish. Rogue, was it? It’s nice to meet you.” She says, stepping towards him with her hand extended. He shakes it before reluctantly peeling his eyes off me and looking at her.

“Nice to meet you as well. I’m glad you could make it.” He says, giving her a warm smile before looking back at me.

“Thank you for bringing her. Truly, it means the world to me and I appreciate the gesture.” I tell him. “But please leave. I’m fine, I promise, but I honestly don’t want to see you right now.”

“I—,” He says, pausing to think about his words. “Alright. This isn’t over though.”

“It is over.” I retort without heat. “You made sure of that.” I look away from him, cutting off our connection.

I hear shuffling as he turns towards my mom. “You have my number if you need anything. Please don’t hesitate to use it.” He tells her before walking out.

I watch the door close behind him before my mom abruptly turns towards me.

“Bellamy, you didn’t mention how hot your man is. I mean *wow*, I need to know everything.”

I laugh in response as the nurse walks in with my discharge papers. “I’ll tell you.”

40.

Rogue

It's been over a week since I saw Bellamy and I'm not waiting a fucking minute longer. I gave her her space, letting her enjoy her time with her mom, but now I've had enough. She's mine and she won't keep avoiding that reality anymore.

Her mom flew home this morning so I know she's alone. I just have one obstacle to get through before I go get my girl.

I'm standing outside in the pen courtyard, waiting for her to come out. The doors open and she strides out without looking around her.

Perfect, just who I was looking for.

"Thayer."

She lets out a blood curdling scream, clutching her chest as she turns to face me. When she sees it's me, she bends at the waist, inhaling heavily as she tries to catch her breath.

"What is wrong with you? You can't just sneak up on women like that, have you never watched an episode of true crime?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you."

"If you're here to see Bellamy, that's not happening. You've already done enough damage, I'm not letting you within ten feet of her." She says, crossing her arms over her chest and straightening to her full height.

"You're the one I wanted to talk to."

“What the hell do you want?” She asks, throwing me a distrustful glare.

“Your help getting Bellamy back.”

She huffs out a humorless laugh. “Nope. Did you not hear a single thing I just said?” She says, hiking her bag on her shoulder and starting to walk away.

“Stop.” I thunder after her, and she does. She turns around slowly, staring at me dubiously from her position a few feet away from me. “Look, I’m doing this purely as a courtesy to you as her best friend because she listens to you. And also to make my life easier so you’re not in my way like a guard dog when I try to win her back. But I don’t actually give a damn one way or the other what you think of me or our relationship. If I have to go through you, I will. Bellamy is mine and I’m not stopping until I get her back, whether you approve of that or not.”

She quirks a brow. “Interesting tactic. Are you trying to piss me off?”

“No,” I answer, walking right up to her. “I’m telling you that nothing’s going to get in the way of me getting her back.’

“Why would you want her back? You’re the one who cheated, remember?”

“I didn’t. I made her think I did, but that’s something I’ll explain to her, not you.”

She still looks at me dubiously, unconvinced.

“She’s probably better off without you. She could have anyone she wants.” She throws out, watching my reaction with eagle eyed attention.

“She’ll have me.” I say through gritted teeth, my back ramrod straight and my fists clenched.

“Why’d you do it?”

“To protect her.”

“Why?”

“You know why, Thayer.” I answer, frustration bleeding into my tone. “Don’t make me say the words I haven’t said to her yet.”

I find myself holding my breath as she remains silent, pondering the decision before her. Whatever she decides, there’s nothing that’s going to stop me from going up to see her. I’ll kick down the door if I have to.

“I won’t get in your way.” She finally says. “She can make her own decision.”

Thayer leads me up to their suite and opens the door. Bellamy is in the kitchen, chopping something on a cutting board, her back turned to the door.

“Back already?” She asks, turning around. “Did you forget somet—” Her eyes snap to Thayer standing off to the side. “You let him in?”

Thayer takes a step forward. “He cornered me outside and wouldn’t let me leave until I listened to what he had to say. He’s fucking stubborn that one.” She adds, throwing me a harmless glare. “For what it’s worth, I think you should hear him out. There was a pretty speech about getting you back. I get the appeal B, I really do.”

Bellamy wipes her hands on a kitchen towel and tosses it on the counter.

“I’ll leave you to it.” Thayer says. “Just grabbing this so it’s out of reach.” She adds, grabbing the knife Bellamy was holding before turning back towards me. “Don’t make me regret trusting you. If you ever hurt my best friend again, I will use your family jewels as Christmas ornaments. Do you understand me?”

I nod and she heads to her bedroom and closes the door.

Bellamy watches her go before looking back at me. We stand there silently for a couple beats before she sighs.

“Well? What do you want?”

“I’m sorry.”

She looks at me, surprise on her face. She clearly wasn’t expecting to hear those words from me. “What for?”

“For dragging you into my family’s mess. For putting your life at risk. For the emotional trauma of witnessing what happened last week.” I tell her. “I’m so sorry.”

“That wasn’t your fault. Your father was sick, there was nothing you could have done.” She says, waving away my apology. “I’ve been wanting to ask how you got my mom here so quickly?”

“They let me call my attorney before I made a statement. I called her instead, I didn’t want you to be alone.”

She considers me for a moment before looking away. “Well, thanks. I had a great week with her.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” I tell her. “I missed you.”

She ignores it. “How have you been holding up?”

“Not well.”

“I can imagine. I’m sorry about your parents.”

“I’ve had years to grieve for them. My mom since she disappeared my dad since the first time he hit me.” I tell her honestly. “That’s not why.”

“Why then?”

“Because your smell is gone from my pillow and I can’t sleep.” I say, staring at her unblinkingly. “I want it back. I need it back, actually.”

Anger flashes in her eyes, the first emotion she displays since I walked in.

Good, I think. We’re making progress.

“You should have thought of that before you slept with someone else.”

“I didn’t fuck her.”

She laughs lifelessly. “I don’t believe you.”

“Why would I?”

“Why wouldn’t you?” She retorts.

“Because I love you.”

Something breaks inside her and she turns from me. “Get out.”

“No.”

“Get out!” She says, her voice raw with emotion as she works to hold back tears.

“No. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Fine, then I’ll leave.” She snaps, grabbing her keys, wallet and phone off the counter and heading towards the door. I take two steps to the right, blocking her exit and towering over her.

“Not until you hear me out.” I tell her. I grip her jaw and turn her face towards me, forcing her to meet my gaze. “Whether you believe it or not, I’m madly in love with you Bellamy. I don’t know exactly when it happened – what I know of love is brutal fists and endless pain so I didn’t know how to recognize it when I felt it. It could have been when we spent every afternoon in detention or when you cooked my favorite Lebanese dishes or even as early as the first time we met. That’s absolutely when I became obsessed with you because you haven’t left my mind for a single second since. I wake up thinking of you in the mornings, you’re the first person I want to tell good news to, and the only one I want in my bed at night.”

“I don’t know when I fell in love with you, but what I do know for sure is that my world almost ended when my father pointed a gun at you. I’d rather have died than let him hurt you anymore than he already had.”

“He didn’t hurt me anywhere near as much as you did.” She replies tearfully.

“I’m telling you the truth. I never touched Lyra. When I found out my father killed my mother, I confronted him and he threatened you. He knew how I felt about you before I did and he used it against me. I set that whole thing up at the grand opening so that you’d think I cheated and we’d break up. It tore my heart right out of my chest to hurt you that way and to make you hate me, but I’d rather have you hate me and be safe than continue loving me and be in danger. You’re the person I care about the most in the world, giving you up was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do, but I did it to protect you. In the end, it didn’t even make a difference.”

“You could have told me.”

“Would you have let me go? Tell me honestly.” I add before she can answer. “You wouldn’t have stayed away and let me handle it on my own.”

“No, but it wasn’t your decision to make. There are two of us in this relationship, you don’t get to arbitrarily decide things for me, especially not when those decisions hurt me.”

I grab her waist and pull her against me, relishing the feel of her body against mine. It’s been too long. “I’m sorry I lied to you and hurt you, but I can’t apologize for the decision I made. I’d make the same one again if given the choice.”

“You didn’t sleep with her?”

“I didn’t even touch her. You’re the only one I want. There’s no one else for me.”

She pushes against my chest and I reluctantly let her go.

“I don’t know, Rogue.” She says, not meeting my eyes.

“Please.”

My tone is desperate and imploring. Her gaze snaps up to mine, surprised to hear it.

“Do you want me to beg? I’ll get on my knees right now if that’s what it’ll take for you to forgive me.” I drop down on one knee but she puts a hand out, stopping me.

“Don’t.”

I look up at her expectantly, breath held in my chest as I wait for her decision.

“I forgive you. But,” She adds, holding a hand up to stop my movement. “You’re in the doghouse. You’ve got some groveling to do.”

“Fuck yes.” I exclaim. I wrap my arms around her middle and stand to my feet, swinging her around in a circle as she laughs happily. “You’re so fucked, baby. Because now that I have you, I’m never letting you go.”

41.

Bellamy

Rogue carries me into my bedroom and kicks the door shut behind him before dropping me on the bed. I get up on my elbows and watch him as he rips his shirt off. The defined ridges of his abdomen ripple in the dimly lit room.

I reach for him but he grabs my wrist and holds it to the side. I pout, looking up at him.

He places a knee between my legs and uses it for support as he bends over me. Grabbing the collar of my shirt on both sides, he tugs sharply at it, ripping it in half away from my body.

I lay below him in my bra as his hungry gaze devours me. His lips leave featherlight kisses on my chest, breasts and down to my flat stomach. My eyes roll into the back of my head as his tongue swirls around my belly button before dipping in.

“You owe me a few answers first.” He says, capturing both my hands and pinning them above my head.

“What?” I ask, confused.

“Jeremy.” He snarls. “I need to know.”

I decide to niggle at him. “That’s not relevant. We weren’t together then.”

He freezes above me, his head lifting to look at me as his eyes search mine. “You’re playing with fire, Bell. I’m not in

the mood to be toyed with, and never when it comes to another man touching you. Did he ask you out?"

"Yes."

His grip on me tightens as a growl comes from deep in his chest. "Did you say yes?"

I shake my head.

"Did he kiss you?" He asks, running a thumb across my lips and sending a shiver coursing through my body.

I shake my head again.

"Did he touch you?"

"Where?"

"Bellamy." His voice grinds out threateningly, getting me more and more excited. "Any fucking where."

I love it when his angry possessiveness shows up in bed. It's been too long since I felt his touch and I want him now.

I slowly shake my head.

"Thank fuck." Is his relieved answer before his mouth slams down on mine.

Our tongues battle each other for dominance as they clash together. My back arches into him, desperate for more contact. One hand comes down to grab my waist, his fingers digging into my skin. The kiss is brutal and downright violent, carrying weeks of resentment and bitterness turned to relief at being reunited.

"I love you and I'm going to make love to you later, but right now I need to fuck you."

My skin tingles at his heated words. His hands release my wrists and tug the cups of my bra down, freeing my breasts from their hold. He lowers his head to my chest and sucks a nipple into my mouth. I cry out at the sensation, my fingers digging into his hair to hold his mouth against me.

He alternates suctioning and biting my left nipple, laving it with attention while he roughly massages my right breast.

I'm so hot for him that I'm afraid I'll come just from the way he stimulates my nipples, especially when he moves to the right one.

"Rogue." I moan.

"That's me, baby." He answers, lifting his head and smacking a kiss on my lips.

Straightening up slightly, he works the button of my jeans open and yanks them down my legs in one move. He stares at me spread below him, tits out and my pussy covered only by the thin layer of my thong, and lets out a satisfied groan.

He comes down to kiss me before nuzzling his face into my neck. He licks and bites down the column of my throat leaving his usual marks before coming back up to whisper against my ear. "God broke the mold when he made you. You're fucking perfect." He purrs. "I can't believe you're mine."

"I'm yours." I tell him.

"Fuck." He exclaims sharply. "Say that again."

I wrap my arms around his neck, giving him a warm smile. "I'm yours."

"Damn fucking right."

He drags my thong down my legs and throws it across the room before tugging me closer to the edge of the bed. Bending my legs at the knee, he places them on either side of him as he settles between my legs.

His arms wrap around my thighs and his face comes down towards my center as his tongue darts out and licks my pussy from my opening to my clit.

My back arches off the bed at the sensation, but he uses his hold on my thighs to keep me in place as he licks me again. I roll my hips towards him, searching for the contact of his lips against me. He doesn't make me work for it, his tongue lapping up and down my pussy at an almost frantic pace.

"You taste so fucking good. Best meal I've ever had."

I throw my head back in pleasure at the sensation. The sounds coming from me are ungodly. His thumb comes over my thigh to flick my clit as his tongue pushes into me. He darts in and out of me repeatedly, pressing down on my clit in conjunction.

“Please,” I say, “I’m so close.”

He pulls his tongue out of my entrance and drags it up my slit until he reaches my nub and suctions it into his mouth. The climax hits me with the power of a freight train as I scream through the orgasm. He continues sucking my clit and doesn’t release it until I fall limping to the bed.

I only have a moment of relief before he pushes two fingers into me. A violent shudder runs through my body.

“Always so tight for me.”

He plows in and out of me with his fingers, stretching me and getting me ready for his thick cock. He flicks my clit repeatedly with his other hand, the combination of both his hands sending me hurtling back towards the edge mere moments after my first orgasm.

He adds a third finger before slapping the side of my ass.

“Come for me, baby.” He commands.

And I do.

I’m a whimpering mess as the second orgasm tears through me, even more powerful than the first. I can’t do anything except ride the wave of pleasure pain as it rips through me. My eyes are closed as I struggle to breathe, my chest working up and down furiously.

“Look at me, Bellamy,” He demands.

I peel open my eyes and watch him suck his fingers into his mouth before releasing them with a pop.

“Delicious.” He says, his eyes twinkling with dark possession.

He takes his time unbuckling his belt, pulling it out through the loops slowly.

“Hands above your head.”

His voice is rough with lust, the tone raspy and octaves lower than usual. I do as he says, bringing them together and above me. He wraps his belt a couple times around my wrist before buckling it closed.

“You stay like this.” He orders.

Straightening back up, he pulls his pants and briefs down and positions himself at my entrance. Ever so slowly, he runs the tip of his hard cock up and down my center. I roll my hips towards him and wrap a leg around him, trying to push him inside me.

“Ready for me, baby?”

I nod my head vigorously in response when he powers inside me. My breath cuts off in my throat at the way he enters me, stretching me to the very limit around him. My mouth drops on a silent scream of pleasure as my eyes roll back.

Rogue’s hand wraps around my neck and gives a sharp squeeze. “Look at me.”

I do as he says, my eyes dropping to his as a low, throaty moan comes through my lips.

“Fuck, I love those noises.”

His other hand moves upwards to grab my tied wrists and pin them to the mattress. He uses both holds on me as leverage to thrust into me, setting a dominating pace. I’m completely at his mercy like this and it adds a layer of heat that has my pussy walls clamping around him as I build to yet another climax. The pleasure’s so great that there’s almost pain there. I shake my bed back and forth.

“I can’t. Not a third time.”

“You can and you will.” He says, squeezing my throat a little tighter. “But not until you tell me what I want to hear.”

He stills, his wild thrusts coming to a complete stop. My eyes search his frantically. He can’t leave me like this.

“What?”

“You know what.”

I try grinding down against his pelvis, but he tilts backwards until he's almost out of me. I cry out at the loss. I want to tease him, to make him work for it, but sexual frustration takes over and I can only tell the truth.

“I love you.”

He gives me the slowest, most smug smirk yet and drives back into me. “I love you too.”

“Promise?” I say, extending my pinky as my hand sits above my head.

His gaze flicks up to it and back down to me, his smile pleased. He grabs my wrist and brings my hands over my head and down to rest on my stomach. He wraps his pinky around mine.

“Pinky promise.”

He picks his thrusts back up and shunts his hips towards me at a savage pace. Goosebumps erupt all over my body and I feel like I go temporarily blind as my orgasm hits. Rogue falls on top of me, his hips pumping slowly, lazily into me as he comes moments after me. He sucks my skin into his mouth and suctions it.

He eventually rolls over once we've both caught our breath. “You alright, baby?” He asks, untying my hands.

“Mhmm.” I reply, boneless. He pulls his pants up and heads to the kitchen, coming back seconds later with a glass of water that he hands to me. He lies on the bed next to me and wraps an arm around my middle, using it to pull me against him.

He's on his side, his weight on his elbow as he looks down at me.

“Thank you.” I say, taking a sip of water.

He acknowledges it with a tip of the chin. “I'm working on being a good boyfriend.”

I set the glass down on the table next to me. “Bold of you to assume I’m your girlfriend.” I say, teasing him.

He doesn’t take the bait. “Call yourself what you want. My girlfriend. My fiancé. My future wife. Doesn’t really matter, as long as you know you’re mine.”

“You’re getting a little ahead of yourself aren’t you?”

“No, baby. You’re in this for life.” He tells me, putting a strand of hair behind my ear.

“So are you.” I tell him, reaching up to cup his neck and bring his mouth down on mine. “But we should probably graduate and get jobs first.”

“About that,” He says, reaching over to grab his pants. His hand dives into its back pocket and comes back holding a small card, the size of a business card. “Look what I received this morning.”

I grab the paper from him. It’s incredibly heavy for being such a small size. The back is beautiful, designs of silver and black that speak to the quality of the car. I turn it over and read the back.

The King is dead. Long live the King.

**Congratulations Rogue Royal on your appointment as
the new Chief Executive Officer of Crowned King
Industries.**

CKI

“Holy shit.” I say, my gaze snapping up to meet his.

“You’re telling me.”

“Does that mean that you’re moving?” I say, disappointed. I doubt he can run a company from Aubonne.

“No,” He answers, “I’m going to get an interim CEO until I graduate. But it means that I’m going to move once I do.” He gives me a knowing look. “It’ll have to be somewhere in the US.”

I wrap my arms around his neck, bringing him closer to me.

“That means you’ll move back with me?” I ask, joy clear in my voice. I hadn’t wanted to think about our future, what we would do once we graduated. There’s no way I can live so far away from my mom long term, and I’d been afraid it would be a long distance relationship at best, a breakup at worst.

“I told you, I’m not letting you go.”

We kiss deeply before I pull back and peer up at him with a blinding smile. “Good, because I’m not either.”

The End

Epilogue

Rogue

I'm running late.

Bellamy's going to be pissed at me if I make us late to her graduation party, but I have a good reason.

She'll forgive me.

In the little over four and a half years that we've been together, a lot has changed. We graduated and moved to Chicago. I took over my position as CEO of Crowned King Industries and she's been attending the University of Chicago.

For someone who once claimed I'd never go back to the United States, I adapted quickly to life here. I'll miss it when we leave in a month, but am looking forward to our new life in London.

I'm established enough in my role that I can work from anywhere and Bellamy wanted to be closer to Nera, Six and Thayer. I was equally excited to be back with Rhys and Phoenix so the decision was an easy one.

We've found a beautiful townhouse in Notting Hill that we'll be moving in soon. Another house was vacant just a few streets down from us so we bought it for Trish.

There was no question of leaving her behind for Bellamy. Or me. She's become a mother figure to me in the last few years and has been one of the many joys of my relationship with Bellamy.

I'm still in love with her as much, if not more, as the day I told her. She's shown me how to feel, how to laugh and love

and just... be happy. All things that come so easily to her but are things that needed to be learned by me.

She's been endlessly patient with me. She's my best friend, my lover, my confidante all wrapped in one and I can't wait another second to make her mine forever.

I turn the key in the lock to our Lakeview home and walk in.

She comes flying into the foyer. "Babe! Where have you been? We're going to be late."

She heads into the kitchen to grab her things and I follow closely on her heels.

"I was running an errand, sorry."

She looks over her shoulder at me as she puts on a gold hoop. "What kind of errand couldn't wait until tomorrow?" She asks, turning back towards the counter to grab her other earring.

"This one."

She turns towards me, her brow raised questioningly and gasps loudly when she sees me on one knee holding a jewelry box open.

"I would have done this three years ago if I thought you'd have let me, but I can't wait any longer, baby. I love you so much. That's the honest truth of it. I can't think when you're near me and I can't breathe when you're far from me and that's exactly what I want to feel every day for the rest of my life, with you by my side. Please make me the happiest man in the world and say you'll marry me. And if you say no, just know that I'll ask you every day until you change your mind."

She brings her hand up to her mouth, tears shining in her eyes. "Yes. Of course, yes. A million times yes."

I grab her and twirl her around, overjoyed. She laughs as I scream in victory.

I kiss her deeply, my hand in her hair pressing her lips to mine, before pulling away from her.

“You were wrong.”

“About what?”

I pull her top lips between mine, sucking it into my mouth in a dirty kiss.

“Our story does end with a happy ending.”

About The Author

Khai Hara

Khai Hara is an American author currently based out of New York City. An avid fan of the romance genre, her debut novel 'Long Live The King' comes after years of planning. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, hiking, reading and spending time with her boyfriend and their dog Thunder.

Follow her on IG at [@authorkhaihara](#) to stay up to date on upcoming releases.

Books In This Series

Royal Crown Academy

Long Live The King

“Go ahead, scream for help.” He taunts darkly as his hot breath tickles my ear. “No one here will save you from me.”

When I get a scholarship to finish high school in Switzerland, I don't expect to meet a villain.

Rogue Royal.

He's the kind of gorgeous your mom tells you to stay away from, filthy rich and his family founded the school I just got accepted to.

Did I mention that he makes my heart race? Only because he hates me, of course. The first day we met, I accidentally spilled a milkshake on him and he's made my life hell ever since.

But this is my best chance at a better future for my mom and I. I won't let him break me.

**This is a full length stand-alone semi dark romance novel, with an alphahole, possessive hero and containing scenes that are not suitable for all readers.*

TBD

Rhys & Thayer's story

TBD

Phoenix & Sixtine's story

TBD

Mystery man & Nera's story