

When *You* Happened



I.B. SOLÍS

when you happened

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When You Happened

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content/trigger warning

THIS BOOK CONTAINS SCENES OR THEMES OF EMOTIONAL abuse, gaslighting, and physical abuse. There are also mentions of racism, biphobia, and suicidal ideation. Please read with care.

*To everyone who has loved and lost and learned to love again,
this one's for you.*

CHAPTER ONE

leaving



LUNA

I'M SERIOUSLY RETHINKING THIS FLIGHT FROM LA TO London. It's twelve hours. *Doce horas!*

Might be a little late now though, seeing as I'm securing my carry-on and looking out the small airplane window. There's also this guy. He's in the seat next to me. I'm trying to ignore him, but he keeps talking about his wedding and his wife and what he has planned for their honeymoon. It's kind of sweet, but I just want this to be a nice, quiet, relaxing flight.

Honestly, I'm a little nervous even though I've flown before. Not a lot. Not enough for someone who's twenty-five and single—as my sister, Sol, likes to remind me often. According to her, I should've used my passport more than two times. And I should've visited someplace other than Mexico to see our dad's family.

As I'm about to escape to the restroom, a young woman I've never met runs toward me, crying. All I can make out is a blur of long brown hair and a tear-stricken face as she throws her arms around my neck. The book I'm planning to reread on the flight, *Como agua para chocolate*, flies out of my hand when she crashes into me.

The fuck?

It's my first time traveling by myself, and some strange woman is crying on my shoulder. I'm wishing one of my siblings were with me. At least then I'd be able to give them a *WTF is happening* look.

That's when I remember the guy seated to my left. The one who, only minutes ago, kept talking and talking about his honeymoon even though I gave him no encouragement to go on. I wasn't trying to be rude, but I'm not much of a talker. With my sister, brothers, or cousins, sure, I can talk their ears off. I've known them all my life. But people I don't know? Not my thing.

Earlier, the honeymooner told me the travel agency made a huge mistake—one neither he nor his bride noticed until *that* morning. The two first-class seats that were *supposed* to be next to each other are on opposite sides of this very large plane.

“Your wife?” I ask him, pointing at the woman clinging to my hoodie.

He apologizes as he peels her off me. They’re standing, muttering something between them, and I’m pretending like I’m not being nosy while trying to listen. How else am I gonna give my sister all the chisme later?

The husband is trying to console the wife. The wife is crying so much that she starts hiccuping. Midway through their conversation, her anger shifts from the travel agent who booked the wrong plane tickets to the man assigned to the seat next to her. She asked if he’d be willing to switch, but he yelled in her face and denied her request in the absolute worst, meanest, most impolite way ever—the asshole! Her words, not mine.

When I look up, the newlyweds are staring at me, hopeful expressions on both their faces.

Oh no. Why are they looking at me? Mierda, I know why.

This is why I hate people. Tears are pouring down her face again once I agree to switch seats with her—this time in gratitude. And he’s gripping my hand so hard—in appreciation—that it’s starting to hurt. It’s too early in the morning to deal with this, so I relent without much of a fight. The husband, on the other hand, seems to be itching for one.

“I should have some words with that piece of shit,” he grumbles, looking in the direction of his wife’s old seat.

The last thing I want is my flight being delayed because of an avoidable altercation.

“Hey, where’d you say the second stop of your honeymoon’s gonna be?” I ask him, and just like I hoped, he forgets everything else.

As he's talking about Venice, I gather my things. It's only then I realize I just agreed to take a seat next to the asshole. *Great. Just fucking great.*

Muttering to myself, I'm practically dragging my feet. I don't wanna be seated alongside some angry jerk all the way to New York. To make matters worse, I didn't even ask if I'd have the window seat. Chingado. Everyone knows that's the best one! Not only do I get to admire the sky and clouds and world below, but I can usually avoid having to talk to anyone.

As I cross over to the other side of the plane, I notice two things: one, it's still the first row, which is cool, *but*, two, the asshole has *my* window seat. *Fucker.*

Most people are still boarding. Everyone else is putting their stuff away. Distracted by the loss of my favorite spot on a plane, I don't see a teenage girl swing her backpack until it knocks me on the side of my head as I walk by. This flight already sucks so bad. She apologizes, but the sting of the heavy leather remains. People continue settling in, but the guy in my seat has a baseball hat on his face. Not his head, his face. And I think he might actually be sleeping. Whatever.

Even more annoyed now than before, I can't help but give this dude the stink eye as I take in his attire. The hat is hiding most of his face, and I wonder what he's listening to since his earbuds are in. Not that it matters.

With three chunky bracelets, a watch, and a gold chain, dude obviously likes to accessorize. At least he's wearing socks with his shoes. It's so gross when people are barefoot on a plane. I do like the thick beige cardigan sweater he's got though. *Se ve cómodo.*

The more I look at him, the more I think he doesn't *look* like an asshole. Truth is, I'm not able to see much of his face, just something of a beard maybe. His hair is definitely short and textured. This guy, he looks like a hipster. Are hipsters still a thing? Maybe he's a college professor.

I don't even know why I'm still checking him out. I guess I was expecting to see some kind of fire-breathing dragon or

some shit, given the crying bride's reaction to him. I'm debating whether I should say something about that.

Mira cabrón, te calmas o te calmo?

I actually wish my brothers Fernie and Vinny were with me. Both would back me up. Sol would too. My abuelita, however, would say there's no reason to get involved. Everyone's okay; no one got hurt. *Mucho ayuda el que poco estorba*, would be her advice. It's her words that give me pause. With a resigned sigh, I take the empty aisle seat and curse those damn newlyweds.

I'm about to text my sister when my stomach growls. Should've gotten something to eat. Maybe stopped by the panadería. Maybe grabbed a couple of tamales too. My sister offered, and I refused. Ni modo. I'd rather be hungry than show up late anywhere.

Sol texts before I do.

Sol: wya

Luna: En el avión.

Sol: apenas?! took long

Luna: Yeah a lot of waiting. And no food. Tengo hambre.

Sol: lol te dije. how's first class?

Luna: Full of drama.

Sol: ?

Luna: Some newlyweds weren't seated next to each other. La novia estaba llorando, the groom was gonna beat up the guy who made her cry. So I switched seats with her ☐

Sol: bro!

Luna: I know!

Sol: you still got window seat?

Luna: No 😞

Sol: ugh i know we talked about you being nicer but you cant let people take advantage of you

Luna: Dude, I'm nice!

Sol: ☐

Luna: And I don't let people take advantage!!!

Sol: who's in your window seat again?

Luna: ☹

Sol: that's what i thought

Luna: It's not my fault though.

Sol: ☐

Luna: I blame the guy next to me! He's the asshole!

Sol: really?

Luna: Yeah, he's a rude, grumpy dude!

I'm waiting for my sister's reply, so I am not at all prepared for the hipster/professor next to me to all of a sudden declare, "I'm *not a rude, grumpy dude.*"

He scares the shit out of me, and I curse out loud as my phone goes flying in the air. The asshole has the nerve to catch it right in front of my face.

I snatch it from his hand. "Thank you," I say out of habit, even as I'm frowning. I want to take my thank-you back, but that would mean talking to him again.

"You're welcome." He sounds smug when he speaks.

When I look over, his hat is covering the top half of his face once more, but I can tell he's smiling. The more I think about it, the angrier I get.

Sabes que, fuck that shit! Quien se cree este güey?

I'm so pissed that I smack his shoulder with the back of my hand.

"Dude, seriously, what the fuck is your problem?"

CHAPTER TWO

lax



LUNA

THE HIPSTER/PROFESSOR DOESN'T REACT. I'M GIVING HIM THE bitchiest face I've got, and he's acting like nothing happened! Well, it's possible he hasn't reacted because he hasn't seen me, but if he did, he'd see my *I will fuck you up* look.

You know, I'm not generally an angry person—okay, that's not true; I am—*but* I don't act out on said anger. Even so, I'm not about to let this dumbass ruin my flight.

Like my abuelita is always telling us, “*El que se enoja pierde.*”

Inhaling and exhaling slowly, I sit as far away from him as possible. In these huge first-class seats, it's not hard to keep my distance.

Still, did he have to be such a dick? First, this asshole was rude to that poor newlywed bride, not switching seats so she could sit with her brand-new hubby. What's that about? They're twenty-year-old kids on their goddamn honeymoon, for fuck's sake!

Then, this jerk had the nerve to read *my* texts? I don't know this motherfucker! Who the hell does he think he is, looking at my phone? You don't do that shit!

And now, he's sitting there, ignoring me. Ni madres, I'm not about to let him get away with his horrible behavior.

“Look, mister.” I don't know why I called him mister. “Maybe you didn't know, but it's pretty fucking *rude* to read someone's *private* texts over their shoulder!” I am *seething* again. Honestly, I can't remember the last time I was this pissed off. “Especially someone you don't even know!” I add, practically growling.

“You mind not yelling?” he mutters, sounding almost bored. His voice is low. Most of his face is still hidden away under the stupid hat. He might have an accent—I'm not sure.

What I do know is, I wanna take that ugly hat off his head and shove it so far up his ass that he'll taste it tomorrow!

“Are you kidding me!”

“You’re right,” the hipster/professor begins to say. “It *is* rude, and I would like to apologize.”

He *does* have an accent. British maybe? Australian? I can’t tell. He has a nice voice though.

“It *is* rude,” I mutter, sounding childish. Ugh, sometimes, I hate being a grown-up. Times like this, you have to accept the apology, right? That’s what adulating is. I mean, he did sound sincere. *Fine*. “I appreciate your apology,” I grumble without looking at him.

“Well, I haven’t actually apologized yet.”

I blink a couple of times, then do a double take.

What?

Continuing to hide under his hat, he adds, “I said I would like to apologize, not that I apologized.”

Is he for real?

That’s when he flinches back in mock fear.

“You’re not going to hit me again, are you?”

Well, shit, he’s messing with me. I turn to face him so fast that my phone flies off my lap. Surprising me again, he picks it up. As he sits back and hands it over, I get a good look at him. I get a *really* good look at him. My entire body just fucking freezes, and I literally stop breathing.

Think of the most attractive man you’ve ever seen. This asshole is better-looking than that guy. With his hat gone, I can see he’s young. Way younger than I initially thought, given that sweater. His eyes are dark brown with a mischievous twinkle while his eyebrows are thick and well groomed.

Those lips though ... I’m not kidding when I say my mouth goes dry. It fucking goes dry! I need a moment because his lips are full and smooth and perfect. And I know this is a test. Someone is testing me. Because, holy hell, he also has

stubble. Not a beard, like I originally thought, but stubble. Dark, neat, delicious *stubble*.

I don't know how I didn't notice it before. Honestly, I don't know what I wanted to fight him about either. For a second, I even forget where I am.

I'm so pissed though because what the actual fuck? I am *not* that girl. I stopped being that girl a long time ago. Now, I am a badass boss bitch who fucking writes novels and doesn't have time for good-looking motherfuckers!

"Asshole," I mutter, turning away.

This isn't even right. Like, how does it feel to be God's favorite? I don't ask him that, but I'm curious. I can hear a light chuckle coming from him. I'm sure he gets my stupid, embarrassing reaction all the time. *Great*.

"Are you still upset?" he asks, leaning over the middle armrest.

"Yes," I snap, and I am being completely honest! I am upset. But not at him anymore. At myself!

"Perhaps we got off on the wrong foot."

"Ha! You think?" I'm still giving him the most irritated expression I've got. It's a look I perfected years ago. I can appear to be pissed, unimpressed, and about to kill you, all at the same time. I secretly thank my younger siblings and the millions of little cousins I grew up with. That's how I'm looking at him now because the alternative is mortifying. It involves anime-style hearts floating from my eyes and around my head.

"I'm sorry about before." His voice is a low rumble. "I shouldn't have read your texts. That was wrong."

"It was."

Just because he's hot doesn't mean he gets away with stuff like that.

"It was," he agrees, his gorgeous face turning serious.

Stop it, Luna.

He continues, “It was sort of an accident.”

En serio? I raise an incredulous eyebrow at him. “That’s the excuse you’re going with? Really?”

A chuckle escapes him, causing a weird fluttering throughout my body.

“I opened my eyes, looked over, and you were texting frantically. I didn’t mean to read your screen, but *rude, grumpy dude* caught my eye for some reason. Like I said, I am sorry.”

“Well, you *were* being a rude, grumpy dude,” I insist, shrugging a shoulder, forcing myself to look anywhere but his way.

The hipster/professor turns toward me a little more. “How so?” he asks.

Something in his voice makes me look up at him. His expression is one of amusement, his head tilted to the side. I’m trying to keep my irritated expression locked on, but it keeps faltering. I can feel a smile tugging on my lips.

“That lady kept trying to talk to you.”

“The lady I don’t know, you mean?”

I nod.

“The lady who saw me trying to sleep and kept shaking my arm?”

I didn’t know she had done that.

“The lady who yelled that I sucked right in my face?”

Esa mentirosa!

“Is that the lady you mean?”

I nod again, but with a little less certainty the second time. In my defense, she didn’t mention any of that other stuff.

“When she came over, she was crying.” He’s serious again, waiting for me to continue, so I do. “She said you were rude and mean and an asshole.”

“Ah.”

“The husband said he was gonna have ‘some words’ with you.” I use air quotes. “I didn’t want our flight delayed because of a fight, so I told the wife she could have my seat, and here I am.”

Now, *I* feel like a jerk. But then I remember he did read my text, and I don’t apologize for all the name-calling.

“Then, I owe you.”

I’m confused and let it show.

“You saved me,” he explains, giving me an indulgent grin.

I roll my eyes.

“I mean it. That angry husband was going to attempt to defend his wife’s perceived slight, but you stepped in.”

“You’re a dork,” I mutter, biting the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing. “Wait, what do you mean, attempt?”

“You think that guy can take me?” He’s arching an eyebrow, daring me to check him out.

I shouldn’t, but I take the bait and look him over. I make it a point not to linger on any part of him for too long. Or to look impressed either. But I am. Very. He definitely has a well-trained fighter’s physique, long and lean with a nice amount of muscles.

“I guess you look like you can handle yourself?” I shrug, acting like I’ve seen better. Let me be clear—I have not.

It hits me then.

“Oh, are you a fighter?” I ask, excited at the prospect. “Like MMA and stuff?”

That could be why, in the short time we’ve been talking, all the flight attendants have been super nice to him. Or maybe it’s because he’s so freaking attractive. Could be that too.

He’s giving me this look I don’t understand. He’s not unhappy, his expression is one of curious relief?

“I am not a professional fighter, no.”

“Oh.”

“You sound disappointed.”

“A little,” I admit. “If you were a famous fighter, I could ask for a selfie to send to my brothers. They’d be so jealous that they might cry.”

“Ah, so you’re a wonderful sister then?” He chuckles.

“The best.”

I find myself smiling at him until I realize what I’m doing. *Why am I even talking to him?* I clear my throat and shift in my seat. I purposely sit back, as far away from him as possible.

That’s when he extends his right hand out for me to shake. “By the way, I’m Henry—”

“Oh no!” I don’t want to know who he is.

My outburst makes him laugh a deep, rich sound. I can see his Adam’s apple bobbing up and down as his laughter subsides. I force my eyes away from him to end the fucking trance he’s got me in.

What the fuck, Luna?

I probably sound like an idiot, but I don’t care. If I know his full name, I’ll be tempted to look him up. The less I know, the better.

“I forgot my backpack!” I jump up and out of my seat, announcing it to the entire plane like the fucking lunatic I’m acting like.

He taps my arm gently. When I look at him, he’s pointing down at my feet.

“That backpack?”

Shit.

“Yes, thank you,” I mumble and sit down again. “I feel like I’m forgetting something though ...”

I actually do. Trying to list all the things I brought on board with me, I look over at the newlyweds, and they’re making out. *Gross.*

I'm not against PDA, but they're being inappropriate. There's grinding going on. Worse part is, I think I left my book over there. *Como agua para chocolate* is gonna have to wait because I don't wanna be anywhere near those two right now.

When I look back at the guy I thought was a rude, grumpy dude, he gives me an amused half smirk before he asks, "Everything okay?"

Everything is not okay, but I nod anyway.

He clears his throat, drawing my gaze back to him. "You haven't told me your name," he reminds me, his eyes twinkling.

I admit, as usual, I contemplate giving a fake name, but don't give it this time. "Luna," I say finally, sounding irritated as I take his hand.

It's a large hand. Warm, smooth palm. Strong grip.

"Luna ... the moon in goddess form."

My cheeks burn as his voice seeps into my thoughts. My mind wanders, picturing where I'd love to feel his hands on me ...

Whoa, where did that come from? *Keep it in your pants, girl!*

When I glance over at him again, he's smiling at me. Chingado, couldn't he at least have no teeth? This asshole has the nerve to look like a goddamn supermodel, and he has a beautiful smile too? Yeah, no. I'm not doing this. I'm not flying twelve hours next to this guy. Or even six, if he's getting off in New York. I need to make that newlywed give me back my seat. And my book.

You know what? Fuck it. I don't need to fly first class. I don't need a luxurious, super-comfy chair. I've always flown economy, and there's no reason why that should change now.

I snatch my hand away. Mainly because weird-ass thoughts of climbing over the middle divider to straddle his lap enter my mind.

"I left my book over there," I grumble. "I should get it."

When I stand, a flight attendant asks me to sit down and put my seat belt on. The plane is ready to depart.

Shit.

CHAPTER THREE

turbulence



HENRY

ON MOST FLIGHTS, I'D BE ASLEEP BEFORE WE LEFT THE runway, but this time's different. Luna's here and not only is she insanely attractive, she appears to have no clue who I am. That's unexpected and quite frankly refreshing. Not sure I could resist those bright green eyes or heart-shaped lips even if she'd known of me, however. When I noticed how the oversized purple hoodie and matching sweatpants she wears, attempt and fail to hide some serious curves, my thoughts quickly escalate from wondering if her pastel pink hair is as soft as it looks to wanting to learn the taste of her golden brown skin.

Once we're airborne, she shifts closer. I realize she's not moving toward me at all. Something out the window has her eyes lighting up. I peek outside to see what caused one corner of her mouth to nearly curve up. The glimmering Pacific Ocean has her full attention. It would be foolish to feel jealous of the largest ocean in the world, wouldn't it?

"Want to switch seats?" I offer, smirking at her when she turns my way. "*Again.*"

"Funny," she drones, but a hint of amusement crosses her features. She looks like she's about to refuse, but reconsiders at the last second. "Actually, can we?"

"Sure."

"Just for a little while," she assures me.

I unbuckle my seat belt and slide over. Luna moves like a dancer, light on her feet, her body avoiding me completely.

"Thank you," she murmurs, her pretty face practically *on* the small windowpane.

I've lost those gorgeous eyes for the time being.

It's all right. She can stay there the entire flight. I wouldn't mind. Would prefer it. I'd have her all to myself. Not that I'm

the possessive type. I do like her attention though.



Luna stirs in the window seat. She's curled into a little ball, sleeping and using her hoodie as a pillow, which is why she's shivering in the cool cabin air. I ask the first flight attendant who walks by for a blanket, but it's a while before he returns with it. By that time, I've taken off my cardigan and placed it over Luna's shoulders. With the warmth provided by the soft material, she visibly relaxes, sinking further into the seat. A contented sigh escapes her as she buries her nose in my cardigan.

Within a few minutes, I have the rapt attention of two flight attendants. They both giggle at something I said as a third joins us. She laughs the loudest. Rex, my younger brother, says it's my superpower. Being able to charm anyone, anywhere. It's not true. I'm simply nice to people. Treat them with the respect everyone deserves. That's all.

Still, I wish it *were* a superpower. Would use it on this beautiful, green-eyed girl who swirled into my life, looking like cotton candy and smelling like the beach. On second thought, I wouldn't. Don't want to "charm" her. Would rather get to know her. Wonder if she'd like to do the same.

"Excuse me, do you mind?" I hear Luna grumble, her voice hoarse from sleep—or perhaps it's from irritation at being woken up.

I excuse myself from the flight attendants.

Before I can make a reply, Luna seems to notice my cardigan slip from her shoulders to her lap. She gives me a questioning look.

"You were shivering," I explain as she hands it back to me.

She blinks. "Are you always this nice?" Suspicion is laced through her words. It sounds like she's accusing me of

something.

“Of course I am.” I wink at her.

“People aren’t nice simply for the sake of it,” she argues, her gaze and tone steady.

Hearing her say that is rather heartbreaking. “You’ve been around the wrong people, Luna.” My voice comes out softer than I intended.

Green eyes narrow and watch me. Twice, she opens her mouth to say something, and twice, she presses her lips together without uttering a word. Eventually, Luna ducks her head and shrugs her shoulders. “Maybe,” she relents and turns to look out the window again.

I meant to say it in a light, joking manner, but when I saw a flash of hurt cross her features ...

Frustrated that I’ve soured the good rapport we had going earlier, I laugh a bit awkwardly while I rub the side of my neck with my palm. Don’t recall the last time I was embarrassed. Soon, I’m talking to talk, trying to cheer her up because her lovely face should never look as sad as it does.

Turns out to be a good thing. We jump from random topic to random topic. Nothing too personal. Our conversation veers toward food. I open the bag of Skittles I brought along for the flight and share with her. Turns out she likes lemon and lime, while my favorites are strawberry, grape, and orange, which makes me laugh. It’s not a sign I tell myself. I simply like sweet, while she prefers sour—so much so, Luna carries a bottle of Tajin in her backpack. She can’t believe I’ve never tried it and sprinkles a bit of the tangy and mildly spicy seasoning into the palm of my hand. Her cheeks turn pink as I lick the seasoning blend. Clearing her throat, Luna starts talking about books. She talks about books like I talk about films. Her favorite authors, different genres, the classics. I mention the old Hollywood pictures, outstanding directors, and significant soundstages. When I ask for her favorite book, she looks at me with disbelief in her eyes.

“I’ll tell you my favorite book if you can tell me your favorite movie.”

All right, she’s got me there, and she knows it. When I tell her so, she smiles triumphantly, revealing the cutest pair of dimples. My heart stops, and I know then why she guards her stunningly beautiful smile so closely. People would fall in love with her left and right if she flashed them that sensual and captivating curve of her lips.

Thoughts of reaching over, caressing the side of her face, her neck, then capturing her mouth with my own race through my mind.

“I meant to ask this earlier,” I say, my voice deeper than usual. “I didn’t wake you, did I?”

“No.” Luna shakes her head. Then, after a beat, she adds, “A little maybe.”

“I woke you up a little?”

A hint of pink blossoms on her cheeks at the question, and my grin widens.

Her eyes meet mine. “Well, it sounds dumb when you say it like that.” A ghost of a smile plays on her lips.

“How should I say it then?” I ask, my tone low, teasing.

Luna chews on that plump bottom lip. I watch, mesmerized.

“You’re not—” She pauses, her expression serious, but something else crosses her gaze, something that makes me lean forward. “Are you flirting with me?” she asks.

“I’m trying to,” I reply with a laugh. I don’t usually have to make the first move. “Might be a bit rusty.”

She snorts. “No, you’re doing really good,” she assures me, “especially deepening your voice like that—”

“Like how?” I interrupt, too curious to let her finish.

Luna rolls her eyes, but the blush on her cheeks deepens. “You *know* how. Anyway”—she clears her throat—“save it for the pretty trio that was hanging on your every word earlier.”

A hint of jealousy clings to her tone, and I grab on to it.

“Were they? Every word?”

“Yes,” she deadpans. “You noticed.”

I shrug. “I’m not interested in them.”

We’re sitting there in silence, gazing into each other’s eyes. I cannot contain my smile, and Luna cannot fight the upturn of one corner of her mouth. She’s the first to look away.

“Henry.” She smirks, shaking her head.

My body reacts to the hesitant whisper of my name from her lips. *Bollocks*. I swallow away the rush of nerves I feel.

“That’s ...” I inhale. “That’s the first time you say my name.”

“Is it?”

“It is,” I assure her, running my tongue over my lips. “I like how it sounds, coming from you.”

Luna shifts in her seat. “You’re doing it again.”

“Am I? Sorry about that.” I’m certain I don’t look sorry at all.

A strand of pink hair falls out of the topknot on her head and curls around her jaw. I’m tempted to reach for it and tuck it behind her ear.

When she looks back at me, I’m grinning like a lost cause.

“Nice weather we’re having,” I say as casually as possible because the urge to kiss her is so strong.

Her laughter rings out. The sound is like warm sunshine on a cold winter day. My heart skips a beat.

Luna relaxes again after that. Talking with ease. Joking. Even teasing me. She smiles. Not often, but I drink in the sight.

She tells me she was born in LA, went to school there, works there, and has always lived there. She listens, fascinated, as I talk of growing up in London, visiting Nigeria and Jamaica every year with my parents, living in New York

with my brothers, and eventually moving to LA for work two years ago.

“Wow, you’ve been everywhere.”

“Not everywhere. Not yet.”

“Okay, of all the places you’ve been, what’s your favorite city? *American* city?”

I make a face like it’s going to be painful to answer. “Luna, I’m afraid you’re not going to like it.”

“If you’re about to say New York, I’m throwing you off this plane.”

I chuckle at the cute way she scrunches her nose.

“Ew, dude, no.” The look of disappointment on her face is belied by the blush that colors her face so prettily.

“What can I say? It reminds me of London.”

“Does it?”

I nod. “It does.”

“I guess I’ll see if you’re right once I get there.”

“You’re headed to London, then?”

Luna nods. “After a layover in New York,” she replies at the same time a bit of turbulence hits and, with it, nausea.

Turbulence is my least favorite aspect of flying. I speak quickly to cover my unease. “Let me ask you three questions, yeah?”

“Three? Like in *The Walking Dead*?”

“Not remotely like *The Walking Dead*.” I laugh.

“Hmm ... I reserve the right to refuse to answer any.”

“That’s not how this works.” Smirking at her, I shift closer. “I ask you three questions, and then you ask me three.”

“And we *have* to answer?”

“Correct.”

She chews on her bottom lip, like she's thinking it over.
"Okay, go."

I lick my lips, and her eyes follow the path of my tongue.
A rush of heat jolts through me.

I clear my throat. "Are you single?"

When she arches an eyebrow, I raise both hands up in defense.

"That's a legitimate question not in the realm of flirting."

I can tell she wants to smile, but holds back.

"Yes, I'm single."

Good.

I lean closer. She doesn't lean back. Green eyes linger on my lips.

"Was your last relationship recent?"

I regret the question as soon as I ask it. The change in her expression is immediate. Luna withdraws from me, literally sitting as far away as possible, her face blank.

"No," she replies.

Before I can apologize for overstepping, turbulence hits again. Then, it happens once more. It's so abrupt and violent that the lights go out.

The plane shakes, and the lights flicker back on. My backpack slides out from under my seat. I must've left the zipper open because a few items fly out, among them a copy of the book I'm carrying, *De East LA*. When I look over at Luna, her eyes are shut tight. The plane shudders, and I grit my teeth, exhale slowly, and try to fight down the nausea.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has turned on the *fasten seat belt* sign. Please return to your seats and keep your seat belts fastened. Thank you."

Within a second of that warning, the plane starts shaking again. A baby cries at the same time lightning strikes outside the window.

It feels like the worst kind of roller coaster. I hate those too. Harsh movements, nasty creaking, and nothing but a long way down below. I try to remind myself of all the stats I've read in the past on how safe flying is supposed to be. It doesn't help.

There's a collective intake of breath when the plane dips. People scream. I've flown through turbulence before. Never like this. This is bad. Behind me, someone's praying. That's when I feel a warm hand suddenly on mine.

The lights go out completely. Everything's consumed by darkness. I squeeze Luna's hand just as tight. Want to thank her. The words won't come. The plane drops and rattles, making the storage compartments swing open. Items fly all over the place, and the oxygen masks drop down.

Bollocks. Never had to wear one of these before. Glad I listened to the flight attendant earlier. Quickly, I reach in front of me. I hear Luna secure the mask over her mouth and nose. The lights flicker on as she adjusts the band behind her head, then go out again.

"You got it?" she asks.

I don't. I'm struggling with the band.

"Here, I'll do it." Her fingers slip past mine, and she works fast. "The thin band is tangled," she tells me.

Without lights, it's difficult to see anything. Still, she's able to untangle the strap and place it around the back of my head. During another flash of lightning, I see her briefly.

"Thank you," I say, sounding muffled. This time, I take her hand.

It's quiet now. No one's complaining. No yelling. A few cry. When lightning strikes, the cabin is illuminated, then goes pitch-black. Gasps and screams fill the air.

Luna squeezes my hand once more. I want to wrap my arms around her. Hold on tight. Tell her we'll be all right. I'm terrified we won't be.



LUNA

Turning toward Henry, I press my face into his arm. I've only known him for a few hours, most of which I slept through, but I have the strongest urge to hug him, to bury my face into the crook of his neck and hold on really tight because I'm so fucking scared.

About a year ago, when I was driving my family up to Big Bear, some idiot cut us off, and when I slammed on the brakes, our rear right tire skidded off the road. For a frightening moment, it felt like we were going over the side of the mountain. I could see us tumbling down, dropping from an elevation of over five thousand to the forest floor below. I think I shit my pants, and so did my siblings. My abuelita never went up *para ver la nieve* with us again. That was a horrible experience. This feels worse.

Holding on to Henry, leaning into him, is actually helping. I picture both of his arms wrapped around me for comfort.

"I'm sorry," I say, looking up at him, not sure he can hear me or even what I'm apologizing for.

I can't see him, but I feel the side of his face on the top of my head when he whispers, "I'm sorry too."

There's nothing else to say. This is it. This is the end. I'm certain this is how I'll die.

I'm overwhelmed by the thought that I'll never see my sister or brothers or grandma again. They'll lose me like we lost our mom and dad. I know that gaping hole never fully heals, and I mentally apologize to each one of them because they'll have to miss me now too. Tears fill my eyes so fast.

I think of all the time wasted, all the moments I let pass ...

When my dad was killed, it seemed a part of my mom died too. A year after that, she was deported, and we never saw her again. I knew then that I *never* wanted a love like theirs

because it would one day bring pain like theirs. The one time I opened myself up, it was horrible; it was bad. But right now, I'm thinking maybe I can try again ...

I don't wanna get overly dramatic, but I promise myself right then and there not to take things for granted anymore, to take more chances, to stop being so damn afraid of living, of loving.

The fact that life can end so suddenly is such a scary reality. Just like that. From one second to the next.

The plane descends faster than I've ever experienced—even if it's only for a couple of seconds—and I cannot even explain the sheer terror I feel in my gut and the amount of regret that fills my soul. I cling so hard to Henry's hand that there'll be bruises tomorrow for sure. The thought that there might not actually be a tomorrow makes the silent tears fall.

Of all the ways I thought I'd die, a plane crash was not one of them. But if this airplane keeps sputtering and shaking uncontrollably, we're not gonna make it.

“When we get ... to New York ...” It sounds like Henry's talking through clenched teeth, but it's the mask. Or maybe it's both. The lights flicker back on, and we both look around the cabin before turning back to face each other. “You're buying drinks.”

I look up at him, grateful, and give him a shaky nod. I'm not sure if he's doing it for me or himself, but it doesn't matter. This is some scary shit. I'm able to catch the frightened look in his eyes a second before something rumbles, and then the lights go out again.

Nothing is visible, except the lightning outside the window, bursting into a blinding white glow and, just as fast, vanishing until the next round, leaving us in total darkness. Even the safety lights are gone now. The plane drops, and people scream.

“Maybe ... coffee?” I counter after holding my breath once I know my voice will remain steady. My stomach is a mess though. I don't wanna vomit. Throwing up while wearing this

mask is gonna be so gross. Talking to him is helping me stay calm.

“You’re on.”

He can’t see the small smile I give him, but picturing coffee with Henry keeps my mind distracted for a while. I focus on his hand wrapped around mine; otherwise, I’ll start thinking of Fernie, Sol, and Vinny and how they’ll have to bury me—the oldest—without having our dad or mom to comfort them. Mi abuelita isn’t the warm and fuzzy kind of grandma, quick with harsh words and even faster with the chancla. She’d tell them que se aguanten, to suck it up. It’s too horrible to think about.

“You’re buying—” I stop when lightning hits again. And again. It’s bright and then pitch-black.

After what seems like an eternity, there’s a terrifying instant of eerie stillness, and then ... nothing. We’re steady once more. The relief is short-lived because the plane does this weird rocking thing and I’m talking again.

“Pizza,” I manage to say.

The lights come back on. His hair isn’t as neatly styled anymore, which is probably my fault, but somehow, he looks even better.

“You’re buying me pizza,” I declare, suddenly feeling brave.

The plane evens out, and I hold my breath. I think everyone aboard does. Once it’s a smooth flight again, I exhale, relieved and full of gratitude that this isn’t the end.

Henry quirks an eyebrow. “How about sushi?”

Still holding his hand, I look up at him. “Never tried it.” I shrug one shoulder.

Brown eyes go wide, incredulous. “*What?!*”

The way his voice goes all high-pitched makes me laugh. I have dried tears on my face, I look absolutely disheveled—I’m sure—and I’m scared shitless, but I’m laughing. Thanks to him.

Before I can explain why I've never had sushi, the captain is on the PA.

“Good afternoon, passengers. This is your captain speaking. We would like to apologize for the unexpected turbulence. We will be making a precautionary landing shortly in Oklahoma City.”

CHAPTER FOUR

okc



LUNA

OKLAHOMA CITY IS LETTING ME DOWN. THE STORM HASN'T eased up. Which means we're stuck here until it does.

Mira, eleven minutes doesn't seem like a long time, but when it's eleven minutes of extreme turbulence, it feels like it's never gonna end. That's as long as the worst of it was. Honestly, I don't think that's even remotely accurate. Thirty minutes? An hour? Maybe. Sure as shit wasn't eleven freaking minutes.

Now that the adrenaline and fear of having been through that scary-ass ordeal together has worn off, I'm not sure where Henry and I stand. All that talk on the plane—that's all it was, right?

It's still raining, but as we reach the bottom of the airstairs, Henry shrugs off his sweater. When he swings his backpack over one arm, his biceps flex. That, along with the corded muscles of his forearms, have all my attention. I'm staring, practically drooling. I managed to control myself back on the plane when he let me borrow the warm sweater, but right now my cheeks burn red when Henry catches me ogling. He smirks, and a jolt of arousal ignites deep in my core.

Once inside the airport, he leads me off to the side, away from everyone else. "Hey, so ..."

Looking up at him, I realize he's so much taller than I am.

Brown eyes study my face, landing on my lips. He licks his own, and my mouth goes dry.

"Yeah?" The word comes out of my mouth, sounding more like a breath than anything else.

Henry's left eyebrow is arched in that dangerous way of his. I have to take a moment to clear my head.

"What if we go somewhere private?"

I blink up at him. “You mean ...” I know what he means. At least, I think I do.

“You and me, Luna.” His voice drips with something thick and warm, like honey. “Doing ... everything we want.”

He sidles up closer, offering his hand and the promise of more. Given that crooked smile, whatever that “everything” is, it’s going to be fucking unforgettable.

I have two choices: take his hand and find out how soft those lips are and if he looks as good without clothes or better. *Or* I can walk away, find a quiet corner to text my sister about what an idiot I am, and wait for the plane to take me to my scheduled destination.

I know what I *should* do. I know what I *want* to do. They are not the same thing.

When I raise my gaze to meet his deep brown eyes, my heart thuds a little faster.

“What do you say?” His accent grows thicker.

My pulse jumps when I look down at his waiting hand. Earlier, I wondered what they might feel like on me. Now, I can *know*.

That’s when I think, *Fuck it, what’s the worst that can happen? No more regrets, right?*

Inhaling, I take his hand, then breathe out a short laugh, feeling happy and excited as a lightness fills my body. His palm is so warm ...

“Where to?” I ask, trying to reel in my smile and failing completely.

How is it possible to feel bold and timid all at once?

Henry leans his other hand against the wall behind me, grinning the whole time. My heart beats wildly in my chest as I watch him come closer. When those brown eyes travel down to my lips, I go completely still. Smirking, he leans forward. Instinctively, I lean back, bumping my head on the wall behind me. He cocks his head to the side, and I realize he’s not gonna kiss me—obviously wishful thinking on my part—but rather

tell me something. As I'm trying to remember to breathe, his lips graze the shell of my ear, and warmth pools low in my belly.

"I'll go anywhere you want to go."

That gravelly voice in that accent with those words ...

My eyes fall shut. I'm light-headed ... which I'm sure is partly due to lack of oxygen for holding my breath so damn much. Henry takes his time in moving away. I don't know if I look dazed, but I must. Because what he just said, looking at me like *he's* in a daze, how does he expect me to form coherent words?

"Luna?" he whispers.

I have chills running up and down my body. The way he hovers close, the low rumble of his voice, that delicious scent of his ...

My heart is racing like crazy. My breathing is coming so fast now that I'm sure he can hear it. Warm brown eyes keep returning to my lips, and I swallow.

I need to make some sort of reply before my legs give way or I melt into a puddle right there on the airport floor. I tilt my head back to meet his eyes, and I cannot believe I'm about to say this, but I'm about to fucking say this.

"There's a hotel—"

"Let's go."



Walking toward the shuttle, I'm looking at Henry out of the corner of my eye and catch him doing the same thing. He's smiling, and I'm smiling, and butterflies are swirling in the pit of my stomach. I don't remember the last time I felt like this. It's a nervous kind of longing that seems to permeate every inch of me. I might burst at any second.

Inside, the shuttle is crowded. We stand shoulder to shoulder. Or more accurately, shoulder to biceps because he's easily over six feet. It's a quick ride, and soon, we're waiting in line to book our room. Doubt starts to creep in, and I'm having second thoughts. Maybe ... maybe this isn't such a good idea. I mean, I don't even know him!

Can we ... can I ...

Dude, if I can't even think it, how the fuck am I actually gonna go through with it?

Okay, I need to stay calm and not panic. It's true; I don't know him, and he doesn't know me, but isn't that the point of hooking up? Having a good time and then off we go our separate ways? I mean, he's the most beautiful man I've ever seen, and just the thought of being with him has my body thrumming with desire.

Fuck yeah, I'm doing this.

I text my sister first though. Because I'm not a complete moron, and you never know.

Luna: Hey, I'm at the OKC Airport Inn.

Sol: wtf why?

Luna: Plane had issues. There's a storm. I'm hanging out.

Sol: so you hanging out at the inn??

Luna: Yep.

Mierda, I gotta tell her. I type and send it before I punk out.

Luna: With a guy.

Sol takes a long time to reply.

Sol: imma ask you a question i never thought id ask you but do you mean youre hanging out with a guy like i hang out with a guy or ... are you starting some kind of book club during an emergency?

Since I've never done this, my sister can't even process that it's happening. I'd laugh if it wasn't so sad.

Luna: I'm with a guy. No books involved.

Sol takes even longer this time. Those three dots disappear and reappear.

Sol: HOLY FUCKING SHIT BRO YOU'RE HOOKING UP WITH SOME RANDO!?!?! IS HE HOT?? CUÉNTAME TODOOOOOO!! OMG LUNA IM SO PROUD!!! My big sis is growing up!

Luna: Dude, shut up. Just letting you know where I am.

Sol: Quien es??

Sol: HELLO??

Sol: Lunaaaaaa!!!

Sol: ok tell me later! be safe bro! remember no glove, no love

When I secure my phone in my backpack, Henry has our key and is waiting for me. As excited as I was before, I think he can tell I'm not so sure about this anymore.

"Hey, it's okay." Henry stops midway down the hallway. "We don't have to—we can order room service and watch the telly."

I nod, but I guess I don't look convincing enough because then he suggests, "We can go back and wait there."

I definitely don't want to do that.

"No, I'm good. Really."

He doesn't look so sure anymore.

"Come on." I take his hand, and he leads me toward our room.

Henry unlocks the door and holds it open for me. It's nicer than your average hotel room. Very clean, for one. There's the usual furniture and a TV hanging, but my eyes zero in on the queen-size bed in the middle. Vaguely, I'm aware everything is brown, beige, and orange. It has a nice desert vibe to it.

Stalling, I walk to the other side of the room to put my backpack on the desk. I hear Henry place his backpack on the TV table. I'm a little nervous to turn around because he's here

and I can feel his eyes on me. But I *want* this. I *want* him. I can actually feel myself trembling when I finally turn around.

Looking so handsome that it takes my breath away, Henry gives me a small smile. Maybe he's a bit unsure himself. Might be a little nervous too.

Meeting his gaze, I swallow, then walk over to him. Every step fills me with more and more anticipation. When he moves toward me, I can't help it; I let out a shaky laugh.

"You okay?" he asks me when we meet in the middle of the room.

"I'm okay," I reply. And I am. I want to kiss him so bad, but I hold back. Standing here with him, I get lost in the warmth of his lovely brown eyes, and it just feels right. "You okay?"

"More than okay." With a tentative hand, he reaches over to tuck a few loose strands of pink hair behind my ear. His hand is steady, and the slight trepidation is gone. His dazzling smile makes an appearance. "I'm so glad you switched seats."

"Yeah?"

He nods. "Yeah."

Ever since I first saw him without that hat on, I've wanted to run my fingers over the dark stubble along his jaw, so that's what I do. I reach up to caress the side of his face. His eyes fall shut. Mine do as well when he continues to close the distance between us until I feel the pressure of his hands on me. They're splayed along my waist as he pulls me closer.

Angling his head to the side, Henry leans in. The scrape of his stubble against my cheek makes everything slow down, feel hot and intense, like the entire world has shrunk to this small space between us. When his lips brush teasingly against mine, I gasp, unable to contain the reaction he elicits. His lips curve on one side, making him look so fucking sexy. And then, just like that, I'm kissing him.

Henry's lips are softer than I imagined. Full and warm and absolutely delicious. I hold his face carefully in my hands,

wanting to take this slow, wanting to go fast, wanting to do so many things at once.

“Henry,” I whisper between kisses.

His grip tightens at my waist.

When I catch his bottom lip between my teeth, sucking gently, I hear him moan. The tantalizing sound shoots straight through me, landing right between my legs. I can feel my body coming alive in a way I haven’t experienced in so long. It makes me desperate to touch more of him—*all* of him.

I’m not sure how long we stand there, kissing each other, touching each other, until we slow to a halt. Our foreheads are pressed together, our breaths coming fast and uneven.

“Where’ve you been?” he murmurs against the corner of my mouth.

I don’t know, but it doesn’t matter. Nothing before this moment matters. All I can do is meet his eyes and say, “I’m here now.”

“Yeah. You are.” He smirks, caressing the sides of my face. His fingers are gentle as his lips hover over mine. “I want to kiss you again.”

“I want you to kiss me again,” I reply. “And again. And again.”

Where are these words coming from? My cheeks feel warm, but his breathy laugh puts me at ease. The way my heart keeps beating so rapidly in my chest though, I’m not sure it’s ever going to slow down or recover.

“As you wish.” His lips brush past mine. Then again in a featherlight touch. Then another.

He’s teasing me, and I can’t take it.

“*Please.*” It’s all I say. It’s all I need to say.

Whatever restraint Henry was holding on to disappears, and he’s eager, unfiltered. Holding me closer, he claims my mouth with his own. It’s a slow kiss, deep and wonderfully wet. His tongue slides along mine, and I moan into him.

What I'm feeling is ... indescribable. No kiss I've had before compares. And every kiss that comes after this one will be measured by it.

Can someone be a professional kisser? Because I'm thinking there's no way he's anything else. Not with the way he holds me, not with the way his hands run over my body, leaving a trail of fire behind, yet never venturing anywhere that might be uncomfortable for me. When his hands travel down to my hips, fingers curling, he pulls me flush against his body. He's hard already.

Henry murmurs my name as his lips ghost along my jaw and down my neck. I feel the strain in his hands once more, like he's holding back. I don't want him to. I want to feel everything he's willing to give me.

"Henry," I whisper, my hand on his. "I *want* you to. I want you to touch me." I can't believe I'm saying this. "I wanna touch you too."

I don't need to tell him a second time. When he deepens the kiss, his right hand starts sliding up my stomach, along my rib cage. My breaths come faster now, but my body tilts toward him, chasing his touch.

I don't mean to whimper, but I do when he cups my breast, caressing, kneading. When I moan his name, those perfect lips find mine once again.

"Love how you feel," he whispers. "Love how you taste."

"I—you—" I can't get the words out. I choke on them, too distracted by the incredible rush between us, by the wet heat pooling between my thighs.

Henry smiles against my skin, and I hold him, running my fingers through his hair. It's thick and soft, and it feels wonderful as I pull him closer. The gentle pressure of his hands at the small of my back has me sighing his name.

I could kiss him for hours. Maybe I have already—I'm not sure.

We're standing, fully clothed, but I feel bare, exposed. With his touch ... his body so close to mine, with his hands on

all the right places, I begin to *ache*. I want *more*. Because it feels both incredible and not enough, all at the same time.

He guides my hands under his shirt, and his skin is so smooth and hot to the touch. Every bit of him I've traced—the expanse of his chest, the sinewy muscles of his arms, the ridges along his abdomen—he's delectable. I wanna explore more.

When I sit on the edge of the bed, I bring him with me. His knee is by my thigh, and I'm working his belt, trying to free that huge bulge in his pants, until he stills my hands.

“Luna, wait ...”

I stop.

Holy shit. Was I about to take off his pants? Yes. Yes, I was about to take off his fucking pants! I honestly don't know what's gotten into me.

Henry's breathing heavily, and so am I. But I'm confused by his words, and I can only blink up at him.

“I didn't ... I thought ... but I don't ...” Running a hand through his hair, he sits down next to me. “I don't have a condom.”

CHAPTER FIVE

first



LUNA

IT KIND OF FIGURES THAT THE ONE TIME I DECIDE TO BE reckless and have fun, I get beaver-dammed by the universe.

“I’m sorry,” Henry apologizes.

“It’s okay.” I fall back on the bed and close my eyes.

It’s not Henry’s fault. I’m not on birth control, and he doesn’t have condoms. Fuck. Or not.

“I don’t do this often,” he admits, falling back on the bed, too, so that we’re both looking up at the ceiling. “Or rather, haven’t in a long time.”

I don’t believe him. There’s no way this guy hasn’t fucked his way across the globe. I’m sure half of the world’s population would happily fall into bed with him. More than half. Three quarters, minimum.

“What do you mean by *often*?” I ask, pulling my hoodie and shirt down as I sit back up. My hair has fallen out of its loose bun, so I twirl it up and secure it with a hair tie. Feeling all hot and bothered and apparently not getting any right now, I throw off my hoodie.

When I look back at Henry, I find a pair of lovely brown eyes staring up at me, pupils dilated with arousal, but his smile is small and timid. The sex god from before has suddenly been replaced by a first-year college student. He looks bashful as I watch him. I even consider taking back my question.

“I’m sorry, you don’t have to answer that.”

“It’s not the question.” His lips curve at the ends as he sits up too. “I don’t mind telling you actually. I was just—” He stops himself midway.

“You were just ...” I prod.

His eyes search my face. There’s a quiet confidence about him, something almost regal that makes me sit up straighter.

When his lips part slightly, I'm mesmerized by the subtle action.

"I was thinking you're even prettier up close."

"Oh." Not quite the elegant reply I should give him, but I wasn't expecting that.

"And incredibly attractive ..." He reaches for my thigh. His eyebrows are drawn together as he leans up to kiss me.

I cradle his face in my hands. His lips are soft against mine, but before I can get lost in this kiss, too, he pulls away.

Henry sits back, suddenly embarrassed as he moves his hand off my breast. "Sorry, I—"

"Don't be," I tell him, hoping to end the awkward silence stretching between us, but we're both quiet for a while. And frustrated. *Very, very* frustrated.

"So ..." I force myself to speak; otherwise, I'd sit there, pretending I didn't want to look at him when it's all I wanna do. I wait until his gaze returns to meet mine. "*Not* often?" I wiggle an eyebrow. "*Very* often?"

Chuckling, he leans back on his elbows after he readjusts his belt. The gray shirt he's wearing strains against his chest and abdomen, shifting as he moves. The lean muscles on his torso grow more tempting when he lies flat on the bed. I think it's a ploy to distract me. It's working.

A sliver of brown skin peeks out between the hem of his T-shirt and the top of his jeans. I want to follow that trail with my tongue and see where it leads me.

"Not often."

His voice surprises me. It takes me a second to recall our conversation. And I can't help but think that it cannot possibly be true.

"No way."

Henry chuckles a little, but nods.

"When's the last time?" I ask, suspicion laced through my words.

“That I—”

“Hooked up with someone. ‘Cause I’m calling it now—it was sometime this morning at LAX, wasn’t it?”

There’s an unexpected bark of laughter from him. He shakes his head. “You think I go messing around with everyone?”

“I don’t know!” I shrug, chewing on my bottom lip. I do know that if I looked like him, I could get *anyone* I wanted. “So ... when’s the last time you slept with someone?”

His smile slowly fades until he looks stuck somewhere between reminiscing and not wanting to remember.

“Six months ago.”

“Oh.” I feel like I ruined the moment, but I can’t help it and keep putting my foot in my mouth. “Do you ... wanna talk about it?”

“No,” he states. There’s an unreadable expression again, but this time, he gives me a small smile along with it. “But thank you.”

“Okay.” I cross my arms and my legs and watch him out of the corner of my eye.

“What about you?”

That nervous laughter is mine. “What about me?”

His smile turns wicked. “*Your* last hookup?”

That’s an easy answer. “No hookups.”

“Never?”

I shake my head. “Never.”

He whistles, and I just shrug.

“My abuelita’s Mexican,” I inform him, as if that explains everything. It should, but I elaborate anyway. “I wasn’t allowed to date or go out in high school.”

“So ... you’ve never—”

“I had my first boyfriend in college. It only lasted a few weeks, but yeah, we had sex.”

“Is that the last time you slept with someone?” he asks, watching me closely.

I’m not sure why I don’t want to say it out loud immediately. I’ve been truthful up to this point, but two years is a long time. And honestly, he probably won’t be able to do anything but judge me, given the length of time.

“No, there was someone else, but that ended two years ago.”

He sits up real fast. “Two *years*?”

“Don’t look so surprised. Some of us have other things to do besides getting laid.” I’m not mad, and I make sure he hears the teasing tone in my voice. “Anyway, I thought I was about to get lucky just now ...”

He’s laughing, which is what I wanted. I didn’t want him thinking about *why* it’s been two years.

“Seriously though, aren’t guys like you always prepared?” I say.

“Guys like me?” Henry sounds offended.

I look at him like he’s a dumbass. “Yes, gorgeous guys like you.” I feel drunk.

His expression changes, and his face softens as he lies down again.

“I’m sure you have people throwing themselves at you all the time,” I accuse, rolling my eyes while he’s trying not to laugh. “See, I knew it!”

“Not *all* the time,” he corrects, clearly lying.

As he brings both arms up to rest behind his head, his shirt rides up so that his abdomen is exposed. Those defined abs are calling to me, but I stay strong and keep my hands to myself. When he looks at me with smoldering brown eyes, I have trouble swallowing.

“So ...” His voice is low.

“There are *other* things ...” I start to say, but the intensity with which he’s looking at me ... I forget the rest of the words.

Henry reaches up to caress the side of my face. His thumb travels along my bottom lip. Watching me the whole time, he sits up to kiss me, soft and sweet at first. Then, we’re falling back slowly until my back hits the mattress.

His hand is on my waist, his fingers sliding under my shirt. The warmth of his palm on my skin feels good, and I gasp. He has the nerve to grin against my lips.

I nip at his bottom lip gently with my teeth to stop him from smiling. It has the opposite effect, but he looks so fucking sexy that I’m not even mad.

“Gorgeous, huh?” He’s arching an eyebrow, trying not to look smug and failing.

“Dude, seriously?” I laugh. The playful expression on his face is adorable. “If you tell me no one’s called you that before, I’m not gonna believe *anything* you say to me ever again.”

He’s grinning down at me, stalling. “Maybe, *but*”—he emphasizes the word before I can interrupt—“no one’s said it like they were *angry* about it.”

That makes me giggle, and he laughs with me, but soon, we both grow quiet. Being this close, I can see the desire filling his eyes, and it’s addictive. Lust swirls low in the pit of my stomach, and I’m floating and falling at the same time. I don’t say anything else. Instead, I grab the front of his shirt and pull him down for a kiss.

Henry follows willingly, his hands suddenly everywhere. Moving up my thigh, around my waist, under my shirt. When I feel his arousal against my hip, a moan escapes my lips.

The heat radiating off his body is intoxicating. I want more of it. I want all of it. I tug on his shirt and slide my hands under the offensive material and onto smooth skin. My lips never leave his as I run my fingertips up his abdomen, along the hard planes of his chest, and over those strong shoulders.

He's just as eager, teasing with a gentle caress, then gripping desperately. My skin tingles at every point of contact.

Ending the kiss, his lips begin to roam freely. "Luna," he whispers against my jaw, where he bites softly and sucks soothingly by turns. Then again, when he trails kisses down my collarbone, his mouth hot on my skin. And again, when I reach down, cupping him over his jeans. He shudders and groans into the valley of my breasts.

When he looks up at me, my hand moves to the top of his jeans.

"Is this okay?" I ask, adjusting my position, turning sideways so it's easier for what I have in mind. I'm breathing heavily though, and I'm nervous, excited, and wondering where this boldness urging me on is coming from.

Henry nods, but has to clear his throat before he can answer. "Yes," he says, voice deep, almost guttural.

Taking my time, I unfasten his belt, unbutton his pants, work the zipper. With what can only be described as a reckless confidence, I slide my hand into his underwear to find him waiting.

"Luna ... *fuck*," he breathes into the curve of my neck.

I feel his chest expand with the sharp intake of air as I wrap my fingers around the thick length of him. He feels so big.

Brown eyes fall shut as I tighten my hold, and he leans against me. His breath is hot against my skin.

"Is ... this okay?" I ask with a little less confidence this time.

"*Yes*," he hums.

Then, his tongue swirls up my neck, and I move. One hand strokes him, and the other caresses the side of his face as I kiss him like it's the first and last time I will.

He starts moving, too, thrusting into my hand. I find myself enthralled by his reactions. The way his body responds when I stroke him with a torturously slow pace. How his

eyebrows come together because he's feeling really good. The way his lips part as he's panting when I speed up. And when he moans, the throbbing between my legs intensifies.

"Wait." He's out of breath. "Not yet."

"Henry ..." I groan in frustration.

If we can't do other stuff, I want to do this. But he wants me to wait, so I wait.

There's a sexy-ass grin on his face when I look at him.

"We can come together," he murmurs against my lips.

Oh my God. "How are you even real?"

He chuckles. "I want to make you feel good, Luna." The words are whispered between us. "Just as good as you're making me feel."

You're amazing, I want to say, but I'm too dumbstruck to tell him.

Then, his hand is moving again, sliding down along my body. It stops at the waistband of my joggers.

"May I?" he asks between kisses.

I am so turned on that I almost can't speak, but I manage to say yes as I lose myself in his eyes. Then, his fingers slip under the elastic waistband, and I watch his hand disappear beyond the thin fabric. My breathing hitches in my throat; I'm practically pulsing with need.

We're tangled up as much as two fully clothed people can be. My hand is inside the front of his jeans, caressing him, teasing him, moving up and down to bring him over the edge.

He's placing wet kisses along my neck, which apparently is my weak spot because I'd do anything he asked me to do right now. Seriously. Unlike his mouth though, his hand is moving *slow* ...

But Henry knows what he's doing, touching me in a way that's making me feel so fucking good.

When he kisses me again, he slips a finger inside.

“Holy shit,” I moan and throw my head back.

His hand is perfect. I love his hand. It moves just like I want him to. My legs fall wide open, giving him all the access he could want. When he slips in a second finger, my hips rise up to meet him. His thumb circles my clit, and he’s got me fucking panting.

“Henry ...”

Desperate to see him as he’s touching me so intimately, I open my eyes. His hand is moving faster now, and he’s biting down on his lower lip.

Oh fuck ...

I can’t remember ever feeling this good. My body reacts to everything he does to me. Then, he’s watching me through half-lidded eyes.

“You’re so beautiful,” he whispers.

I can’t speak. I’m so close. I can tell he is too. His body is pulled tight, ready to snap at any moment. He groans as his hips thrust faster.

Our hands keep moving, our bodies swaying together until Henry moans my name and shudders against me. I’m right there with him. His hand and my hips both keep going while that glorious feeling washes over me, pulling me under until I don’t know which way is up. All I know is that he’s amazing, and this time, I do tell him.

Feeling drowsy and pleasantly exhausted, we both fall back onto the mattress. When he leans over to kiss me, it’s a slow, languid kiss, and I feel deliriously happy.

“Oklahoma City just became my new favorite American city.” He grins, turning his head to look at me.

Then, we’re both laughing in that lazy, hazy delirium that only comes after a really good orgasm.

CHAPTER SIX

quizás



LUNA

I MIGHT'VE DOZED OFF. NOT SURE HOW LONG. AFTER TAKING a quick shower, I changed into the tank top and shorts I threw in my backpack at the last minute. I mean, I never even got undressed, but—wait, now that I think about it, I probably should've taken a shower *before*. In my defense, this whole thing ... I don't know what I'm doing!

I've never gone anywhere with anyone after knowing them only a few hours. *Never*. So ... am I supposed to leave now?

We're in a city neither of us has ever been to, which made me feel more adventurous maybe? Because I wouldn't have done this back home. No way. Add to that the turbulence we experienced on the plane, the very real fear of dying, and then just being so relieved and grateful to be alive—I'm sure that all played a part in this too.

Besides, Henry ordered food ... so it would be rude to leave, wouldn't it?

If I'm completely honest, I don't wanna go. I want a part two. I want more hungry kisses and more desperate touches. I want Henry to do everything he did to me all over again. Slower this time. And with fewer clothes on.

The sudden knock at the door saves me from my thoughts. I answer since it's Henry's turn to get cleaned up. As I'm carrying the trays to the small table, the bathroom door swings open. Henry stands in the doorway, skin dripping wet with only a towel wrapped low around his waist.

Oh.

"Heard knocking," he begins, looking flustered himself. "Thought you were still sleeping. Hopped out of the shower to answer the door."

I blink a couple of times. Those X-rated thoughts come back full force ... because, well, there's so much beautiful

brown skin, so many sleek muscles. Every bit of him is absolutely mesmerizing. Rivulets of water roll down his chest, over his insanely sculpted abdomen, until they disappear into the towel. I follow the drops of water, jealous that they're doing what I would love to be doing at that moment, kissing his skin as they trail down his body. I know I'm staring, but it's impossible to tear my eyes away.

Henry clears his throat. "Luna?"

"Yeah? I mean ... what? I mean ..." I swallow, embarrassed, feeling helpless. "I was just thinking"—*holy shit!*—"you need to give me your skin care routine because you just ... you ..."

There's a smile playing on his lips.

"You look really good." There, I said it. I can feel heat rushing from my toes all the way to the top of my head. "And I'm sure you could have easily taken on that angry husband from the plane," I finish like an idiot.

"Told you I could, didn't I?" He winks, and I'm grateful that he's playing along.

Still dripping wet, with only that small towel between me and a fully naked Henry, he comes to stand next to me.

"I'm starving."

His arm brushes past mine to get a fry. I jump as if electrocuted.

I don't know what's wrong with me. "Sorry." My hand was literally down his pants an hour ago, but *now*, I'm embarrassed?

"Don't be." He grins.

The punk-ass is enjoying watching me squirm. He moves closer, and his hands find my waist for what seems like a long time, but it's probably because I stop breathing.

"So, what happens now?" I ask, turning in place to face him. I'm surprised my voice is steady. I'm not surprised I have to tilt my head back to meet his eyes.

“What do you mean?” He studies my face.

“Here. With us?” I slip out of his embrace and move to sit on the bed. I need space.

“First”—he smirks—“we eat.”

“Okay,” I exhale. I can do that.

The food looks good. Henry looks better though. After coughing to clear my throat, I start asking more questions. I tend to do that when I’m nervous. The best part? He answers.

His first hookup was at nineteen. Inching closer to me, he asks what I was doing at nineteen. I tell him I was a sophomore in college, working two jobs—work-study at UCLA during the week and catering on the weekends.

That smile hits me. My insides flutter.

“What kind of catering?”

“The kind where I helped my neighbor with her pupusas business.”

Smile growing, Henry tilts his head to the side, waiting for me to continue.

“We’d go to birthday parties,” I elaborate, “set up our canopy and table with all the horchata and pupusas you could want. It helped pay for school.”

I’m not usually this forthcoming, but there’s something about him that feels *safe*. Besides, I’m pretty sure I’m never gonna see him again after today. Knowing that makes it even easier to talk to him. Plus, there’s no judgment in his eyes. That might be one of my favorite things about him.

“That was my goal—graduate. No one in my family had gone to college.”

He turns his whole body to face me. Part of his towel falls away, revealing a muscular thigh. “That’s definitely something to be proud of,” he says.

I don’t smile at him, but I want to.

“That someone I mentioned? We were engaged at the time.”

That catches him off guard. “Were you?” His eyes fall to my left hand, probably double-checking there’s no ring there.

“I *was*.”

A small crease appears in the middle of his forehead.

When I meet his eyes, I find genuine curiosity.

“I ended the engagement about two years ago,” I add.

He must notice the way my expression changes—maybe my tone too—because he doesn’t say anything else.

We eat in silence, and it’s a while before he asks, “Want to talk about it?”

“Not really.” I don’t want to get into it. I don’t want to waste what little time I have with Henry on anything other than him. “I will say, he turned out to be the worst kind of asshole.”

“Ah.”

“Yeah. I should’ve known though. I mean, he’s from Boston.”

Henry blinks owlshly at me.

“Trust me, all their sports teams suck.” I try to play it off as a joke, but my mouth feels icky, and I lick my lips to wipe away the sensation.

We both reach for the fruit plate at the same time, apologize awkwardly, and wait for the other to go first.

“What about—”

“What did you—”

Of course, we talk at the same time too.

“Please, you first,” he insists.

“I was gonna ask about you.”

He raises a questioning eyebrow.

“Two partners for me.” I shrug. “How about you?”

He leans back on one elbow, the towel falling away a bit, barely concealing anything. I don't let my eyes wander though. Okay, maybe a little.

“Well, let's see ...”

I pick at the fries while I wait for him to tell me his number. Not that it matters, but I'm very curious.

“Too many. Some identify as female, others as male, and as non-binary. And, uh, there's a few I never got around to asking.”

I never doubted it was a lot. Didn't think it would bother me as much as it does. I blink the thought away.

Henry looks like he's waiting for me to comment, so I ask, “What was the longest relationship?”

Surprise flashes in his eyes. Maybe I shouldn't have asked that.

“The longest was ... one year. He ended it because I moved to LA and he didn't want to be in a long-distance relationship.”

“I'm sorry.”

“I was too.”

“Do you wish that had gone differently?”

“Did at the time. Even considered not moving at all.” There's a pause as he sits up. “He asked me to stay in London.”

“Oh.”

Henry's quiet for a long moment. Eventually, he wipes his mouth with a napkin. “I chose my career.”

There's something in his tone I can't place. I nod anyway, but don't ask any more questions. He respected my need to keep some things to myself; I can do the same for him.

“My agent though ...” He exhales slowly and looks at me from under his lashes for a split second. I'm not prepared for

the pain in his eyes. “She believed it would be better for me if ... if people thought I was straight.”

He holds my gaze, then looks away.

“I *listened* to her,” he mutters, taking a shuddering breath.

Henry rubs his hands anxiously together. I’m not sure I have the right to reach out, but after a while, I place my hand lightly on top of both of his.

“I shouldn’t have,” he declares, giving my hand a squeeze. “I’m a Black man. I’m not from the States. Adding bisexual to that seemed like too much, so I went along with it, but ... I shouldn’t have.”

I don’t know what I can say that would alleviate the deep pain and sorrow he seems to be feeling, so I stay quiet.

“Never shared that.” He lets out a long breath. “I’ve not told anyone. Not even my family.”

Henry looks up at me, his eyes full of unshed tears. I’m humbled that he would confide something so private and personal to me. Maybe I make him feel safe too. Or maybe knowing this is a onetime thing makes it easier for him to talk to me as well.

“*Hate* that I felt that way,” he mutters, his voice so low that I barely hear him. The shame laced through his words is loud and clear though.

“Henry?” He doesn’t look up, so I talk anyway. “I’m sorry that agent said that to you. I’m sorry you had to go through any of it.”

He’s quiet, looking down at his hands.

“Is it okay if I hug you?” I ask.

It takes him a while to mumble, “Sure.”

I don’t hesitate and wrap my arms around him. “I’m sorry you didn’t have the support you deserve.”

Shoulders sagging, his hands unmoving on his lap, he takes a deep, shuddering breath.

“You did what you felt was right at the time. That’s okay,” I whisper and hold on tighter. That’s when I feel one of his arms slip around my waist. “It sounds like a complicated situation.” I speak into his shoulder.

“It didn’t have to be,” he argues.

“Maybe not, but if at the time you didn’t feel safe sharing that part of yourself, I think you did the right thing.”

Brown eyes flicker up to mine. He looks at me, maybe waiting for me to say more.

“I haven’t been through anything similar myself, but I have done things I wish I hadn’t. Unfortunately, none of it can be undone. None of us—not you, not me—can go back and change the past, no matter how much we want to. *But* the one thing we can hope to do is learn from it. If it was a mistake, we try not to make the same ones over again. If we made the wrong call, we try to make the right one next time.”

He takes another deep breath. “You really believe that?”

Leaning back, I nod once. “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.”

Shaking his head, he releases a humorless laugh. “Well, that sucked.” He runs one hand down his face.

“Sometimes, we need it,” I whisper, bumping his shoulder with mine.

He looks at me a long time. His closeness makes my thoughts fuzzy.

I clear my throat. “I was kinda nervous at first ...” I can’t believe I’m saying this. “But I’m really glad I’m here with you.”

The smile he gives me could light up the whole night sky.

Henry kisses my cheek. “Thank you, Luna.”

“For what?”

“For not running out the door,” he says and tries to laugh it off.

“Why would I do that?”

A rueful smile. "Because I'm sure I'm not who you were expecting."

"I'll be honest, I wasn't expecting you at all."

He's been a complete surprise. A wonderful one, but I don't voice that part. Still, I feel the heat rise up the back of my neck. I'm being strangely forthcoming ... I want to blame the turbulence again or this being a onetime thing or the intense orgasm that might've scrambled my brain, but it's possible it's all him.

I force myself to meet his dark brown eyes. Even though I'm nervous, words keep falling out of my mouth. "I can walk out of this room and know I'm better off for having met you."

Way to lay it on thick. Wish I could take it back.

"That's ..." Henry's smiling so big. "That's one of the nicest things anyone's ever said to me."

I still want to take it back. Not because I didn't mean it. I do, completely. But I should've kept it to myself.

"I'm glad I met you too," he admits. And he might sound sincere, but it's hard to believe.

"Right," I mumble and stand up.

"Hey!" He's waiting for me to look at him, but I don't. "I mean it."

"Look ..." I'm stacking the dirty dishes. "I said you're nice. Doesn't mean you have to say you think I'm nice too."

When I glance at him, I don't know if he's angry, annoyed, or a combination of the two. I look away before I can figure it out.

"You do that a lot, you know?"

"Do what?" I ask, trying not to sound irritated.

"Refuse a compliment. If you sense one coming, you shut it down. Or ignore it." I'm about to argue, but he keeps talking. "You didn't even let me say what I wanted to right now."

I bite back the words on the tip of my tongue and try not to glare at him. I do fold my arms across my chest though. “You were gonna say?”

“Come here.”

Reaching for my hand, he tugs me gently onto his lap. The heat of his body welcomes me, melts away some uncertainty, and I have the ridiculous urge to snuggle into him. It might sound crazy, but I’m completely serious when I say this is my new happy place.

“When I first saw you—”

“Dude, I saw *you* first,” I counter and stand up again.

“Luna!” he cries in disbelief, chuckling lightly. “Let me finish! Please.”

I scrunch my face. “Okay, fine.” I don’t sit on his lap anymore because, right now, I can’t look at him. If I do, there’s a very real possibility I’ll spontaneously combust out of sheer embarrassment.

Henry stands up behind me. He winds both arms around my waist, pulling me against his body. His chin rests on my shoulder.

“The first time I saw you, I thought, *She’s bloody gorgeous.*” He kisses the corner of my mouth. “And cute.” He dips his head to nuzzle my neck. “But turns out, you’re also quite easy to talk to.” His words are muffled.

My heart is beating so fast. When I look back at him over my shoulder, it only speeds up more.

“I don’t invite many people into my life,” he continues. “It’s not something I do often, and yet ... you’re here, and I feel lucky that you are.”

I have to fight every instinct. Otherwise, I’d shove him away and leave. I take a deep breath instead. Even though all this is new to me—being reckless and giving in—I stop second-guessing myself.

“I feel lucky too,” I whisper, eyes closed even though I’m facing away from him. My voice is tiny, but I said it. Progress,

I guess.

The hands on my waist slide down to my hips. His breath is hot along the side of my neck. Was he always standing this close? I can feel him getting hard behind me.

“I want you,” he whispers, his lips sprinkling featherlight kisses against my skin.

Everything—my past, this doubt—begins to fade away. He has a way of doing that. With his hands and his mouth and his thick length touching me, he’s incredibly distracting. I surrender to the growing desire, leaning against him. Henry hums encouragingly. The vibrations resonate through me.

A delicious warmth spreads throughout my body from his touch. I lean further back into him, my shoulder blades on his chest, my ass pressing into his crotch.

He moans, fingers flexing, digging into my hips. When my head falls to the side, leaving my neck exposed for his mouth, he doesn’t make me wait. He presses hungry kisses, his tongue heavenly, hot, and wet.

“Mmm ... you’re so good at that.” That’s my voice. I said that.

Henry chuckles, low and deep. Arousal dances up my spine as his fingertips slide up to caress the underside of my breasts. I reach back, sinking my hand into his hair. Moving with him, my hips have a mind of their own, grinding into that hard length until he growls my name.

“*Luna.*”

He spins me in place so that I’m facing him. There are so many things I want in that moment. More than anything, I want to touch him, his body, all of it. When I reach out, he watches me place my hands on his warm skin. I take my time, running both palms up his abdomen, exploring the dents and grooves defining his midsection.

Our eyes meet. The way one side of his mouth curves a little at the corner, my heart stops, then somersaults.

He’s so fucking beautiful.

I want to tell him. I wet my lips, but nothing comes out, just a breathy sigh.

Henry steps closer. My fingertips keep following the lines of hard muscles on his chest, over his shoulders. Going on tiptoe, I place a soft kiss on the hollow of his throat, a second on his jaw. His lips part as his gaze finds mine again.

“I want you too,” I manage to say, feeling light-headed and dizzy. I can’t think straight. I couldn’t explain it if I tried, but the way every part of me *needs* every part of him is unlike anything I’ve experienced before.

Henry flashes his dazzling smile at me. The corners of his eyes crinkle, and I’m able to breathe again.

I’m not sure who moves first, if he kisses me or I kiss him, but we’re tumbling back onto the bed, falling fast. Our lips never break apart.

As we lie side by side, I rake my nails over so many muscles I never knew existed before. His towel is gone somehow, and I feel him thick and hard on my thigh.

“Henry.” I whimper his name, kissing him with the desperation I feel.

I need his body on mine. I want the heat. The friction. I can almost picture what it would be like to have him inside.

Henry’s mouth on the curve of my neck disorients and centers me. I’m gripping his arms to steady myself, but his tongue swirls along my collarbone, and I’m gasping.

When Henry lifts my tank top, I move to help him pull it over my head. As I lie down again, I bring him with me so that he’s on top, his hips aligned with mine. I don’t even think twice. I open my legs wide and let him settle between them.

“*Luna.*” My name comes out like a strangled sound.

I’m only wearing shorts, but they’re thin enough that I can *feel* him. And I want him. Fuck, I want him. I moan his name when he rubs his erection against me.

“What’re we doing?” he rasps, his mouth on my breast, biting, nuzzling as he works to take off my bra. “We shouldn’t

...”

“No, we shouldn’t,” I agree, grinding up into him a few more times before I force my body to stay still. It throbs, aching for release. “Fuck, Henry, I *want* to.”

I can’t believe I said that. I don’t even sound like myself. I sound like a woman desperate and about to do something incredibly stupid.

I meet brown eyes. There’s something wild there, like he’s ready to follow me down this reckless path.

“I’m clean!” I blurt out.

Two years ago, I got tested. Everything came back negative. I haven’t been with anyone since.

“I’m clean too.”

Smiling at each other for the longest five seconds ever, we scramble to get my clothes off. That’s when our phones ping at the same time.

No, not yet. Not yet. Fuuuuuck!

Henry grumbles and curses, his head collapsing on my chest.

Our phones ping again. Breathing heavily, I slide from under him to get off the bed. We reach for our phones to confirm it’s the airline and it is. Our flight is back on schedule. The realization of what we almost did hits me and I dress quickly.

“Do we have to go?” Henry’s voice is muffled, but I don’t look at him to find out why. I don’t want to see him naked with a huge hard-on so that I’ll fantasize about him every damn day and—

Fuck, I just looked at him.

Holy shit.

Henry.

He’s ... exquisite. Delectable and mouthwatering.

You’re a fucking dream.

My entire body—one part in particular—demands I get back in that bed, climb on top of him, and ride him until next week. Looking at him in that moment, I think I understand what Lizzie experienced when she first saw Pemberley.

It doesn't really matter. Shouldn't think that. Shouldn't feel anything either. I tear my eyes away and finish getting ready. As fun as he's been, as special as he's made me feel, once we land in New York, we'll end up going our separate ways.

CHAPTER SEVEN

manhattan



HENRY

THE FLIGHT TO NEW YORK IS A SMOOTH ONE. LUNA AND I are seated next to each other this time—no seat switching required. Before I wonder if it's a sign, I dismiss the notion.

When I offer Luna my window seat, she accepts. Don't know how she enjoys looking out at the world so far below us. Makes me dizzy just thinking about it. Rather look at her for the same effect.

Sunlight casts a warm glow along her profile. Long lashes, pouty lips. Her pink hair cascades in loose waves over one shoulder. I want to reach over and run my fingers through it. Want to cup the back of her head and bring her lips over to mine too.

Don't be daft, mate. It's not the time or place. Needing a moment, I stand to go to the loo.

When I return, Luna's typing on her laptop. She looks focused, then pauses while she chews on her bottom lip. I smile to myself. Eventually, she gets back to typing. I want to ask what she's working on, but I don't want to interrupt. Or disrupt. End up doing neither and simply continue to admire the gorgeous view. After a few minutes, Luna must feel my gaze on her.

"You okay?" she asks without looking up from the screen. Her fingers glide along the keyboard.

"Never better," I grin.

Her fingers pause for a second, then keep going, but her cheeks tint pink. It's an undeniable fact that she looks even cuter now.

"Work?"

"Yep," she mutters. "Almost done ... not trying to be rude."

“You’re not. Besides, I’m enjoying watching you work.”

All typing stops. Immediately.

Her eyes meet mine. “Henry—”

Love how she says my name. With a softness. With a hint of wonder. As if it means something to her.

“I thought we agreed.”

I arch an eyebrow because I most certainly did not agree.

“No flirting,” she insists, voice quiet.

I chuckle. How does she expect me to honor that? Especially when she’s sitting there, looking so damn adorable.

I lean over the middle divider. “All right,” I whisper, face splitting into a grin. “No flirting.”

Luna doesn’t back away when I get close, but I see her swallow. Only tiny wisps of air exist between us.

“Good,” she breathes, and one corner of her mouth curls up.

She’s making it impossible not to fall for her. I swallow hard. Haven’t been able to stop thinking about her. Us. In the hotel room. The way she moved when I touched her, the way she looked when she touched *me*. The hunger in her gaze, that teasing half smirk. It lit something inside me that I can’t ignore—don’t want to ignore.

I shift in my seat, rubbing my palms on my jeans. Twice. I’m nervous. I’m never nervous.

Luna looks at me, an added warmth to her expression. My heart stops.

That’s why I’m nervous.

“Have dinner with me, Luna.” I’ve lost my mind. That’s the only explanation for blurting out that invitation. “Tonight,” I add, continuing to be careless. “In the city.” *And* stupid.

Frankly, this once, I don’t care.

“Dinner? Tonight?” she repeats, eyes wide.

“Yes.” I run a hand across the back of my neck. Dread and anticipation show on my face—I can feel it. “I realize you’re flying to London, but I was thinking we could grab a bite. Sushi perhaps?” I’m talking fast. Can’t quite manage to relax. “Perhaps even head into the city if your layover allows.”

She tilts her head to the side. “You’re asking me ... to hangout? With you?”

“Yes.” I chuckle, just short of cool and casual. “And doing a poor job of it.”

“No, it’s not that—” She stops abruptly, shakes her head and that last thought with it.

“I understand if you have plans—” I backtrack in case I read her wrong—read everything wrong—but she answers before I can finish.

“I don’t!” she blurts out in a hurry, then appears alarmed by her reaction. “That is ... because of our detour ... I have four hours between flights.”

And just like that, we’re wearing matching smiles. I want to reach for her hand. Lots of people around though ...

I do it anyway.

She watches me do it. Watches my larger hand envelop her smaller one. A soft blush blooms across her cheeks when I do, and I wonder if she notices, too, how nicely her hand fits in mine. She must. Judging by the look in her eye, she’s transfixed by the sight as well. Luna moves in sync with me. Lacing our fingers, fitting our hands so perfectly together.

Leaning over, I whisper in her ear, “There’s something I want to show you.”

Her gaze drops straight to my crotch. A jolt of desire rushes through me. Still, I do my best to laugh it off.

“I can show you that too,” I offer, lips quirked in amusement.

“I don’t know why I did that,” she murmurs, eyes shut tight.

“You find me irresistible, of course,” I tease, unable to keep the smug tone out of my voice.

Her cheeks go from a soft pink to a bright red.

I touch her chin. A light touch, gentle. Her breath catches.

“You look really cute when you’re embarrassed.”

“I’m not embarrassed,” she argues, pulling away from me.

“Oh, no?”

“No.”

Luna meets my gaze, then rolls her eyes dramatically. Too late for that. I’m smiling, certain I look like the cat who ate the canary.

“So, where’s this sushi place you’re talking about?”

“I think you’re trying to change the subject, Luna.”

A few seconds pass. She wets her lips. Another jolt.

“Look ...” She pauses.

I’m watching her. Waiting. Growing ravenous. My blood thrums in my veins.

“You *know* I find you attractive.” Luna says it like it’s not a big deal, like she’s half bored admitting it, but she’s blushing again, holding her breath.

“I *like* that you find me attractive,” I admit. Lust in my eyes. Wolfish grin in place.

“Maybe, but—”

“Not maybe. I do.”

This is not a conversation for a public space. Not for the cabin of an airplane at capacity in any case. But I can’t seem to control myself around her.

“Henry—”

“Luna.” I reach up to caress the side of her face.

When I trace her bottom lip with my thumb, like I did back in the hotel room, a soft gasp escapes her lips. Everything

starts to feel hazy again.

“Yes?” Her voice is a breathy sigh.

Her gaze never leaves mine as I speak. “I’m not sure what’s happening, but ... do you feel it too?” There’s fire in those green eyes. “It’s not just me, is it?” I study her face. The space between us grows charged. “Tell me it’s not just me.”

I’m so lost in her features. In the desire filling her bright eyes. Her smile is so incredibly warm and inviting. I don’t notice the flight attendant approaching until the woman is practically on top of us.

“Excuse me, Mr. Johnson. We’ll be landing soon. Please secure your seat belt.”

I’m in a daze. There’s so much more I want to say, and for once in my life, I have no idea how to even begin to say it.

“Yes, thank you,” I reply, sitting back. The seat belt goes on.

Instantly, I miss Luna’s closeness and the subtle beachy scent that engulfed my senses. If I wasn’t so tongue-tied, I might be able to say more.

“You’re missing the skyline,” I whisper instead.

Blinking, she follows my line of sight in time to see the Statue of Liberty lighting up the Manhattan night sky. Her gaze returns to mine, lingers. It pushes the uncertainty out of my mind. Still, I wonder why I revealed so much, so soon.



We’re both quiet as we exit the airport. We don’t talk on the air train or the subway ride. We simply stand side by side, not touching. Not once. When we get to Times Square, we keep our distance there too.

Despite my best efforts, things get complicated anyway. I’m recognized. It happens on the subway car. In the bookstore

and the coffee shop. Crossing the street. Someone asks for an autograph. A few for pictures. Curious expression in place, Luna doesn't say anything. It's killing me. Not knowing what she's thinking—and I can't even ask. Not with so many people around us. Someone could hear our conversation. It'd be online before either of us even knew it'd happened.

I lead her up the red bleacher-like steps in the middle of Times Square. Figured it's possible to hide in plain sight. I'm careful not to spill any of the coffee she insisted on paying for. Salted caramel latte. Love this stuff. Especially when there isn't a decent cuppa tea around.

“Two of my favorite things,” Luna declares, unleashing one of her stunningly rare and beautiful smiles. “Carbs and caffeine.” She takes a bite of the sweet bread shaped like a seashell, followed by a sip of her hot mocha latte.

I might've unlocked the secret combination. “So, that's all it takes?”

“For what?” she asks.

To get a glimpse of your happiness.

Then, she does it again. A beam of sunlight. Glowing. Radiating warmth and heat.

Always thought Christopher Marlowe's words were rubbish. *The face that launched a thousand ships*. Right. Except I believe them now. If Helen of Troy looked anything remotely like Luna of LA, a thousand ships wouldn't be enough.

“I have crumbs on my face, don't I?” There's a twist to her lips as she dusts off imaginary crumbs.

“Can I kiss you?” The words are out before I can reel them back.

Luna glances around. “*Here?*”

“Here.” I nod. “Anywhere. Everywhere.”

Her eyes sparkle, and those dimples appear. “Yes.”

The constant commotion of bodies moving serves as a cover. Some coming, others going. Ignoring everyone, everything, I reach for Luna.

Her. Lips. Are. Heaven.

They obliterate me. Shatter me.

She doesn't simply kiss me. Her mouth is insistent; her tongue slides with mine. It's warm and wonderful and wet.

It's a short kiss. Too short. The way she looks at me though? Besotted. Trusting. *Dazed*. Luna cups my jaw. Her eyes lock on to mine.

She takes a deep breath and then, "It's not just you."

Her words rush out in a whisper, and my heart leaps in my chest. I wish we weren't in the middle of Times Square. If only we were back in our little room in OKC, the entire world locked out, just Luna and me. Still, my smirk grows to a full-blown smile before I claim her lips once more. I kiss her with such desperate longing that I steal her breath away.

It's reckless. We're tempting fate.

"Sorry about that." I lick my lips, tasting the sweetness of her, the hint of coffee. "I *had* to." This desire is untamable. It's burning me up from the inside out. "Couldn't wait."

"Why do we have to wait?" she asks, her voice barely audible. "Because people know you?"

I nod.

"Let me guess ... you're a gamer on YouTube?"

"No." I laugh. "That sounds fun though."

"Influencer?"

"No, but social media is part of the problem. Everyone has a mobile," I explain. "Everyone has multiple social media accounts. Anyone can share an image or video for the world to see."

She's going to respond, but the flash to our left catches her eye. Mine too.

It's one of the giant billboards. A knot forms in my stomach. My breath gets stuck in my throat as I await Luna's reaction.

She blinks. Her eyes shift back to me. They return to the billboard.

It's my face up there. Clean-shaven. My hair styled in a temple fade. The camera pans out. I'm wearing a doctor's lab coat in one scene. Green scrubs in another. The title, *Dr. Robert Bryant, surgical resident*, appears above my picture. The final image is of me with the other hospital doctors, nurses, and staff, lined up in a row, like a football team does during the national anthem before a match.

I assume it's over when the screen goes dark, but then my face reappears. Followed by my costars' faces in an intense montage. We take turns looking angry, saving patients. We undress, make out.

NEW EPISODES THIS SUMMER! it reads.

Luna looks at me again. Then back to stare at the name next to my image. *Henry J. Johnson*.

The billboard tells everyone not to miss season two of *White Memorial*, coming this summer. The ad ends and is followed by an advertisement for new shoes that come in four different colors. When I look over at Luna, she's watching me expectantly.

"What was that?"

Her eyes hold so much excitement that I can barely contain my own. I'm not sure what I was expecting, but she looks so happy for me.

I shrug. I know I appear completely nonchalant. I'm not.

"Henry ..." She looks like she's about to throw her arms around my neck. She doesn't though. "Hold up." Luna tilts her head, as if realizing something. "This is what you wanted to show me?"

Deflating, I rub the back of my neck. Scratch the side of my jaw. Why am I embarrassed?

“Mich, my agent—a different one,” I clarify, “she sent a text while we were in Oklahoma that once in New York, I should check it out. It’s the first time I’ve been up there.”

“It won’t be the last,” Luna assures me.

“Here’s hoping.” I smile, raising my coffee like a toast.

Luna gives me a small smile in return. “I, um, this is—” She undoes her messy topknot, only to sweep her hair back up again. Tends to do that when she’s nervous, I’ve noticed. “This is gonna sound *super* cheesy”—she clears her throat—“but I’m honored that you would choose to share this with me.”

There’s a tenderness in her gaze. I don’t know how she does it, but she’s able to drown out the loud chaos around us. Not sure why I choke up. My arm goes around her waist, drawing her to me.

“Not cheesy at all,” I whisper into her hair. “Thank you for being here.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

arch



HENRY

STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF TIMES SQUARE, WE MOVE OFF THE red stairs and go across the street. Luna disappears into a clothing store while I'm waiting for the ad to repeat. Want to record it and show my family before posting it online.

It's mad, seeing myself on that huge billboard. Can't wait to send it. The replies come in immediately, even Mum and Dad's. They're all excited and happy and proud. I post it to my stories.

When I look up from my phone, the world slows. Luna's making her way toward me, letting her hair down. Pink waves flow in the breeze, cascading over her shoulders. She turns to look behind her, as if the smile spreading across my face could be for anyone else, and then she stops at my side.

"Did it run again?"

"It did, that."

A grin breaks out as she hands me a knit cap. "Got these for us. It's freaking cold."

Warmth fills me everywhere. Smiling like a daft git, I run the fuzzy material between my fingers.

"It's the only color they had though," she apologizes before yanking an identical gray knit cap on her head.

Cute is not the right word. What's more adorable than adorable?

I'm staring, unable to stop.

Luna shifts on the balls of her feet. "You ... don't like beanies?"

"I do," I stutter.

Truth is, I tend to know where people are coming from early on. Luna's been catching me off guard. Not to mention, I

can't recall the last time someone not related to me, who I didn't work with, gave me a gift.

"Thank you," I whisper, then clear my throat, slipping the knit cap over my head. It helps instantly. "Hey, up for taking a selfie?"

Green eyes scan the surrounding area. "You sure?"

"Sure I'm sure." I give one of her pink curls a gentle tug. "Come here."

Winding my arms around her waist, I hug Luna to me, her back pressed to my chest. The whole time she's trying to angle the phone to capture as much of us as possible, I'm smiling. The best part is, she's smiling too.

I realize we only just met. The thing is, that's not how it feels.

Luna snaps a few, then shows me the photos. We're both laughing in one, looking intimately comfortable with each other. In another, I'm nuzzling the side of her jaw, and she's blushing. And in my favorite, our eyes are closed, our cheeks are pressed together, and she's cupping the side of my face. The soft smiles on our faces tell the whole story.

When I ask, she lets me send them to myself.

"Now, onto the *other* thing I was going to show you."

I wink, and she's full-on blushing now as I pull her to me. Before I can keep teasing her, I spot them.

"Mind if we take a cab?" I ask, leading her away from the paparazzi across the street. She doesn't see them.



Since Luna only has about an hour before she has to return to JFK Airport, we take the subway toward New York University for sushi. When we get there, the spot I wanted Luna to try is closed for renovations.

“It’s okay.” She grins, tugging me away. “We can try something else.”

“Let me guess ... pizza?”

“Actually, I’d love In-N-Out Burger. How about King Taco or sliders from Kogi?”

“Food that’s only available in LA?” I laugh.

“Reasons one, two, and three why LA should be your favorite city.” She smirks. Her laughter rings out when I try to kiss her, but she twirls away to walk on ahead of me. “What are you in the mood for?”

You, I almost say. “I’ll find something,” I wink.

While I’m on my phone, looking for a good taco spot nearby, Luna leads us by a series of buildings and townhouses. Taking advantage of every precious minute we have, we talk the entire time.

When I ask about her family, she reveals she lost both her parents by the time she was eleven. Her paternal grandmother traveled from Mexico to take care of her and three siblings. Luna grows quiet after she mentions they’ve never met her mum’s side of the family in Brazil. We walk in silence.

“You okay?” I ask, knowing my question’s rubbish.

“Yeah,” she clears her throat, eyes flickering up to mine. *Please don’t ask me anything else*, they seem to say. Which is why when she changes topics, I wrap an arm around her shoulders and answer.

We argue about the best pastries. A type of sweet bread called conchas for her. Parisienne butter croissants for me. Then she asks about my work.

“Do you like it?” Luna asks, studying me. “Acting?”

“Do I like it?” A smile stretches across my face.

I don’t recall being asked that before. The questions I usually hear are regarding perks. Money. Fame. Who I’m dating. No one considers the other side. The loss of privacy. Intrusive fans. The paparazzi. It can be draining.

Being able to perform, however, it's incredibly satisfying, that. Rewarding. Very much worth it.

"I do."

"Which role has been your favorite? If you don't mind my asking."

"I've enjoyed them all. I mean it," I add with a chuckle when she narrows her eyes, skeptical. "Detective Prescott in *Airship Titans* though, that was fun. It was a supporting role. Steampunk era. The entire experience—"

I catch her smiling at me. That sensual curve of her lips lights a fire. Under my skin. In my pants. *Everywhere*.

Her gaze finds mine. "The entire experience ..."

But it doesn't matter. I pull her into my embrace, erasing all distance between us. Eager, I run my palms up her waist.

Luna doesn't move away and it's just us in the city. A cool breeze is followed by a pair of cyclists.

Stepping back, Luna takes my hand. "Let's keep walking," she says, and our conversation never stalls. As if we've done this before.

She asks what I'd do if I wasn't an actor. I tell her that since I can't be a footballer, I'd love to produce.

"I'd share the stories that haven't been told yet. Our stories. The ones that need to be known and talked about."

She stops walking to look at me. Something crosses her features, but she shakes it away before I can figure out what it was.

By the time we stop under the arch in Washington Square Park, I've revealed more about me than I tend to do. Here's the thing: it's easy, being around her, effortless. And I like her. I like everything I know about her. I find myself wanting to hear everything she's willing to share. All about her life, her family and background, insights that only fuel my fascination with her.

Luna's studying the marble designs above us. "I've always wanted to see this up close. It's so pretty," she murmurs.

"Sure is," I agree, my gaze tracing the delicate contours of her face.

Luna smiles, and those plump lips demand my attention. All of it. Every bit of it. The lust that's been simmering roars to life.

"Do you have to leave tonight?" The desire, the hunger are evident in my voice.

"Yeah, I—what?"

I shake my head. "Ignore me, I'm not thinking straight."

She's about to say something when her alarm sounds. Our two hours are almost up. No, I need more time.

I grab her waist. Want to press myself against her, feel her like I wasn't able to before.

Luna licks her lips. Her eyes are on me immediately after she turns off the alarm on her phone. "I should probably be going," she says, but she makes no move to go.

"Luna ... "

"Kiss me?"

Heat dances across her features as I cup her face. She's lovely. Her tempting mouth welcomes mine.

Luna breaks away to kiss along my jaw, along parts of my neck exposed above my shirt. A muffled groan escapes me. I seek and find her lips again. It's minutes. Hours. Not enough time. A gust of cold air from the Atlantic swirls past us. A reminder. A warning.

I don't want her to leave. I don't want this to end. When she breaks apart, she presses her forehead gently to mine.

"Been wanting to do that all night," she whispers. "It's all I've been thinking about."

"Don't go." I shouldn't be saying this.

"Henry ... "

“Stay with me.” My words caress her lips. She said it wasn’t just me. “I’d book a flight and go with you, but I work tomorrow. It’s something I can’t miss.”

“Henry,” she exhales, “I work tomorrow too.” I see her swallow. “But, maybe ...”

I hold her closer. “Maybe you stay?”

A small smile begins to take form, but the moment is ruined when there’s a flash of light from the other side of the fountain. Then another flash. And another.

Stupid. I should’ve been aware of our surroundings.

“Let’s go,” I mutter.

Her hand is in mine, and we rush toward the street. We need a cab. Now.

“Henry, over here!”

“Who’s the new girlfriend, Henry?”

Fuck.

It’s only ten, maybe a dozen, of them, but they’re relentless. I’m able to use my body to shield Luna from the worst of it. I think. I hope.

“Henry! Just one picture!”

She tenses in my arms. I’m fucking helpless against the series of bright flashes directed at her. I’ve never felt more powerless.

When one guy gets too close to her, I nearly lose it. “Back the fuck off!” I growl.

We escape into the secluded safety of a parked taxicab. Cameras continue to descend upon us.

“Brooklyn,” I bark, and the cabdriver pulls into moving traffic. Almost manic, I turn to Luna. “I’m sorry about that. They’re everywhere.” When I reach for her hand, she slips from my grasp. “I should’ve been paying attention. I’m sorry I wasn’t.”

She mumbles something. Sounds like she says it's not my fault.

"Luna?" I turn her chin gently until our eyes meet.

"I'm fine," she repeats, dropping her gaze, pulling away again. Sliding away too. "I wasn't expecting—I was surprised, is all."

Doesn't seem like that's all, but I don't push.

"What's in Brooklyn?" she asks.

"My house."

Her body tenses. With wary eyes, Luna scans the streets. For paps, I assume.

"We lost them. We're okay," I assure her.

Luna nods, looking skittish. Truth is, she looks like she's about to rabbit at any second.

"Stop the cab!"

Bollocks.

With a screech of tires, the driver pulls over.

"What are we doing?" I ask, paying for the ride as I follow her out.

"Subway's faster," she replies, not looking at me as she practically sprints toward the subway station.

"Luna, wait."

Jogging to catch up, I reach for her hand and she stops. When she raises her eyes to meet mine, her eyebrows are drawn together.

"I can't stay."

My heart sinks.

"Right." I try to smile. She's standing before me, but she feels so far away already. "How long will it take us to get to the airport?" I ask.

Luna shakes her head. "That's not a good idea."

Haven't known her long, but the dismissal hurt. The realization she's leaving is like a physical blow and I almost can't catch my breath.

She's going through her backpack. Not sure if she's searching for something or it's a tactic not to look at me.

"What changed your mind?" My voice sounds strained.

Time seems to stop. No cars drive by, no people walk past, not even the sun or moon continue on their endless dance in the sky. Everything waits for Luna to say something, anything.

Her eyes lock on mine.

"Maybe this was all it was meant to be. A few hours full of ... good things."

"I don't believe that."

"I have to."

"Why?" I ask. We're standing close. She's looking up at me. My hands ache with the need to touch her. How can I explain that I want more than a few hours with her? More than a few days.

"I gotta go," she replies.

This isn't happening.

"What if—"

"Take care of yourself, Henry."

"Let me walk you to the subway station."

Now I'm begging? She doesn't want you around, mate.

When green eyes look up, I see it. It's not that she doesn't want me around, it's that she *does*. Hope fills my chest and I stand taller. "May I?" I ask, closing the distance, about to take her hand.

If it's a no, I won't impose my presence on her any longer. But if it's yes ... if all I'll have is a few more minutes with her, I want to stretch them out, make them last.

Chewing on her bottom lip, Luna takes a deep breath then gives me a shaky nod, "Okay."

I'd ask her who hurt her, but I know. A worthless wanker who didn't deserve her time much less her heart.

Slowly, I slide my fingers between hers. A tiny sound escapes her lips. Flashes of her mouth, her hands, her body on me cross my mind.

We walk down the stairway together, then find an empty bench. I sit and pull her to me. Luna stands between my legs.

"Saved you a seat," I smirk.

There's a short hesitation but she lowers herself onto my thigh.

"How long will you be in London?" I whisper between us as I wrap my arms around her waist, not as tight as I want. She can stand and move away with ease if she'd prefer. Luna leans into me.

"Not long enough," she replies, her eyes on mine. Her fingertips graze my jaw, run through my beard, and flutter over my lips. "How long will you be in New York?"

"Too long."

She gives me a sad smile as we take up this moment in time together, gazing at each other, memorizing, regretting already. At least, I am.

Luna wraps her arms around my shoulders. With my face buried along the crook of her neck, I inhale her beachy scent. There's a hint of vanilla I want to taste.

The rumbling sound of the subway train approaches. I squeeze her tighter, closer. I don't want to let go. Breaks hiss and screech against the rails, and the subway that's going to carry her away from me comes to a stop.

"Henry ..." Luna's voice is soft against my ear. Her lips brush past mine for a fleeting second and then, she's gone.

CHAPTER NINE

atlantic



LUNA

HE ASKED ME TO STAY WITH HIM. HENRY ASKED ME TO STAY.
And I could've. *Should've?*

I left him standing there in the subway station looking sad and dejected. *WTF is wrong with me?* Honestly, I don't know how I managed to walk away. Like it was easy, like none of it meant much to me. My stomach rumbles with dread.

The whole subway ride was torture. Every stop, I kept wanting to exit and go back. Every time I didn't? Like a sucker punch to the gut. Someone kept moving the floor from beneath my feet. Air wouldn't reach my lungs.

Even though I assumed everything between us would likely end upon my departure, I never pictured it happening this way. A tiny, secret part of me hoped it wouldn't end at all. Definitely not tonight. Definitely not like this.

By the time I'm in the terminal, I'm shivering. I feel so fucking cold. Can't get enough air, like I'm choking on my own stupidity.

Shouldn't have left. Shouldn't have let myself get carried away either.

Fuck.

"I'm not sure what's happening, but ... do you feel it too?"

When he said those words, it sounded like he meant them. And I ...

"It's not just you."

I actually said that to him. Me. The person who tries to shove down her feelings and act like they don't exist. Like I don't have any. The person who's never even said the words *I love you* out loud. I just ... I don't share stuff like that.

Sometimes I wonder if having my parents in my life longer than ten years would've changed that. Probably. *Quién sabe?*

When the paparazzi showed up out of nowhere, sure they startled me with their constant yelling and endless bright flash of their cameras, but Henry surprised me even more. No one's held me like he did in that moment. Possessive. Protective. Like he would've fought them all off, the whole of Manhattan, in fact. Just to keep me safe.

I couldn't look at him. I was sure he'd be able to see every thought I was having and every feeling I was experiencing. That's when I realized I was way past wanting to hook up. That's when I knew I couldn't stay with him. Not in that cab, definitely not the weekend. I would've never been able to leave his side.

He was looking to have a good time and I was about to complicate it with falling—*Stop*.

We've known each other less than a day! Given that, these tumultuous and conflicting emotions raging inside me are unexpected and so very confusing. I am not one to cling or yearn anymore, and yet an almost-visceral pain fills my chest while tears continue to prick at my eyes. It wouldn't have ended well for me. I know that.

It would've never worked out. Things like that don't work out for me. I gave up on stuff like that—relationships and everything that comes with them—a long time ago.

This is what happens when I let my guard down. Bullshit like this.

Hugging my midsection tight, trying to hold myself together, I walk onto the plane. My legs are shaky and unsteady. These feelings—of not being good enough—it's not the first time I've felt them. Two years ago, *that* asshole. I don't realize tears are streaming down my face until I wipe at whatever's dripping from my chin.

When I check my phone, too many messages are waiting for me. I update my brothers and sister. *I'm fine*. A lie. *Smooth flight*. Another lie.

Shaking my head, I put my phone away, but then think better of it and text my sister.

Luna: He asked me to stay in NY.

Sol: mira mira

Luna: I didn't. I'm on the plane right now.

Sol: bro

I'm too fucking embarrassed to tell her the truth. That I panicked. That I fucking ran away. I'll tell her. I will. Later. Right now, I just can't, or I'll break down for making yet another stupid-ass decision.

Sol: are you ok?

No.

Luna: I'm fine.

Sol: mentirosa

Luna: I'll text when I land.

Sol keeps texting, but I shove my phone in my backpack.

I know I shouldn't, but I keep replaying everything that happened.

His kisses. His words. The way his eyes seemed to light up when he looked at me ...

“*Shiiiiit,*” I groan.

It was fun while it lasted though. *He* was fun. And spontaneous. And fucking sexy! Henry, fresh out of the shower, in only that towel will live rent-free in my head forever.

Stop. Please stop.

But my thoughts are not my own. I *can't* control or stop the barrage of images he conjures up in my mind. Because he was so freaking adorable. And a *really* good kisser. And he asked me to *stay*. I feel warmer, just thinking about him and his voice, that accent—

Stop. Annoyed with myself, I shake my head.

After I strap on my seat belt, I take off my shoes, not caring if they stink up the whole damn plane. No one is sitting

next to me, and I hope it stays that way. When I reach into my backpack I realize I don't have my book. *Dammit*. I must've forgotten it on the other plane. Mierda.

That was my mom's book. My dad gave it to her. Did I really just lose the last gift he gave her? Fuck. *Don't cry, don't cry*. This day couldn't get any worse.

Outside, the Atlantic Ocean is a pool of black ink. The sky is dark and clear and I don't care. Irritated with everything and everyone, I shut the window shade.

My plan is to sleep the entire flight. Doesn't matter that it's an ocean I've never crossed. Doesn't matter that I'll be arriving in a city I've never been to. None of it matters. Hopefully, when I wake up in London, I'll have forgotten everything that happened today. I don't want to remember any of it.

CHAPTER TEN

London



LUNA

AS THE PLANE TOUCHES DOWN, THE ABRUPT JOLT STARTLES ME awake. Walking through Heathrow feels strange, like I don't belong. Same in the tube. Same as when I'm walking along the rotunda outside The Savoy. I feel different. Like I'm not myself.

Somewhere over the Atlantic, I accepted I made a huge fucking mistake. I should've *never* agreed to dinner or that hotel room in OKC or held his hand. I should've never bothered talking to him either. Life is better when I keep to myself, when I don't let my vagina lead the way, and when I'm not a horny monster lusting after a hot guy. The hottest guy.

I just need to remember that. It's worked for me the last two years and I'm fine. Perfectly fine. I try to ignore the sharp ache in my chest.

I shake all thoughts of Henry away as I enter the hotel. I've heard so much about The Savoy, but don't feel an inkling of excitement. The hotel is supposed to be an experience in itself. Starting with the gilded revolving doors at the entrance to the checkered floor in the lobby to the polite faces of everyone at the front desk. I'm just going through the motions.

Before I know it, I'm up in my room with a huge window, a queen-size bed, and a small couch. Curtains seem to be everywhere. Paintings too. I'll admire it all later though. Right now, that plush comforter has all my attention.

I drop my backpack by the door, strip down to my underwear, and climb in. I'm not exaggerating when I say it's the stuff of dreams—soft, comfy, and cozy. All my plans—eating, sightseeing, drinking—go out the window, and I fall asleep in no time flat.



Waking up in London is just what I needed. Feeling rested, refreshed and rejuvenated. I love London!

Last night, I forgot to draw the curtains, so the sunlight bursts through the window, announcing the new day. When I hop out of bed, my stomach demands food. The view outside the window stops me short because *wow*. Whoever designed this place is brilliant! I'm standing inside my room in my underwear, but outside, it's a panoramic view of the Thames and the London Eye. How freaking cool is that?

Thank you, Dr. Harris!

I won't send her another thank you email for hiring me, but I really want to. Anyway, I cannot wait to be out there. I didn't pay attention to anything last night. Not the river or the streets or any landmarks. I want to walk or jog or dance alongside everything! And I will. Later. Now, I order room service, find out they take care of laundry here (yes!), charge my phone and laptop (oops!), take pain medicine for my headache, and then it's time for a quick shower.

By the time I'm done, I'm alert and awake. In a plush white bathrobe, my hair wrapped up in the whitest towel I've ever seen, and my feet hugged by fluffy slip-ons, I can relax.

The food arrives, and everything looks Instagram-worthy. Croissants and coffee, plus fruit and a side of eggs. I wish my phone were charged so I could take a picture and post it, but that'll be another day. Right now, I don't wait. I enjoy it all.

When I check my phone, there's a whole bunch of missed texts, calls, and voice mails. Mostly from my family, some from work, and quite a few from a number I don't recognize.

First, I send my family a message, letting them know I'm okay and in London. It's via our family chat, so I don't have to answer anything specific. I ignore the rest of their incoming

texts. Rude? Pues si. But there're too many questions I don't have the patience to answer.

Then, I call Jennifer at Casa Raza Books, but get her voice mail. She always answers, which is why it takes me a second to remember there's an eight-hour difference between us and she's probably sleeping. I apologize to her and only leave a short message, letting her know I made it safely to London and assure her I'll be on the lookout for Monday morning's email.

Finally, I make the mistake of clicking on one of the strange number's voice mails. Only because there're so many and I'm thinking it might be someone back home. Instantly, I recognize the voice. It's a deep, sexy baritone with a British accent. He sounds out of breath, apologizing and asking me to call him back. I hang up before the message ends.

Text messages. Voice mails. All from Henry. I contemplate deleting the thread without even looking at it. I'm tempted to delete each and every voice message as well because why even bother going down that road again?

I don't though. I simply mute him because I can't deal with this right now, and then I turn off my phone.



The laundry service is awesome! Within three hours, I have all my clothes—clean, folded neatly, and individually wrapped in paper, as if they were brand-new. Quickly, I realize I need to buy more. Joggers, hoodies, and T-shirts aren't going to cut it for a monthlong work trip. Unfortunately, I don't feel like going out anymore. The burst of energy I woke up with evaporated with the sound of his voice.

Even hours later, after I've checked my email and talked to Vinny and Sol, I can hear Henry's words clearly.

“Luna, perhaps I shouldn't be doing this, but I can't stop thinking about you. Ring me back. Please. I'll be in London on ___”

That's when I stopped listening.

But ... I want to hear the rest of his message. All of them.

For a second, I wonder how he got my number, and then I remember he sent himself the picture we took in Times Square. Against my better judgment, I look at it now. He looks so handsome, wearing the gray beanie, his arms around me, that dazzling smile brighter than the billboards surrounding us. It's a cool picture. I'm totally biased, but we look good together.

I can't believe he asked me to stay. And I can't believe I actually wanted to.

Sitting here, wanting impossible things, is stupid of me, so I change into the same clothes I arrived in. When I step outside, I do a double take because the first person I see is Maya Acosta. We met at Dr. Harris's Malibu home and immediately clicked. Since we're both writers, she's emailed some of her stuff for me to proof. Even though she's offered to look over my work, I never let anyone read anything I write until I've made edits and revisions and it probably looks nothing like the first draft, so I always decline.

She's exiting the room across the hall, wearing a cute red-and-black floral dress. She reminds me of my sister. Tan skin and amber eyes. Her shoulder-length blonde hair doesn't though—Sol has bright blue hair at the moment.

"Luna?" She adjusts her glasses. "Hi!" She smiles, obviously surprised to see me.

"Hey, Maya."

She gives me a hug and invites me to lunch.

"You lost your luggage?"

"Yup." To top everything off, my two suitcases are missing. The airport is currently looking for them. "It was only work clothes. Not a big deal."

Maya offers to let me borrow hers, but we are not the same size. At all. Not only is she much taller than I am, but she's also quite slender. I'm short and curvy. It's cool. I made peace

with my height a long time ago. And most days, I like my curves. Took a while though. Back in middle school, I'd go shopping, and nothing would fit. After coming home with frustrated tears burning my eyes more than once, my abuelita taught me how to use her sewing machine. Now, I simply alter clothes to my shape. Anyway, no way my butt or my hips would fit into any of Maya's outfits. When I tell her this, she gives me a tiny, hopeful smile.

"Does this mean what I think it means?"

"Shopping?"

"Obvio! Can I come?"

"Of course! Coffee first though. Oh and I need to stop by the production office. Dr. Harris's assistant's supposed to meet me there."

"She didn't text you? Her flight got delayed. She's still in Panama."

"Is she?" My stomach drops. *I could've stayed.*

"What?"

Did I say that out loud? "Nothing. I need some coffee."

Warmed by a hot mocha and the midday sun, we walk along the Thames. Usually quiet, Maya's in a talkative mood, telling me about growing up in Argentina—even though she was born in Miami—and her love of football.

"By the way, they call it *football* here too," she informs me. "They *hate* it being called soccer, and they'll know you're American if you do." She whispers our nationality like it's a bad thing.

"Football. Got it."

"You know, we should invite Hazel," Maya suggests, sitting on a nearby bench to catch her breath.

"Because she likes football too?"

Maya giggles. "No, because she grew up in London. Her mom's from Liverpool, and her dad's from South Korea. She'll know the best shopping spots."

That's how the three of us end up at various little boutiques not too far from the hotel. Work clothes for me, party clothes for Maya.

"Luna, what's up with those?" Hazel grunts, chewing gum while pointing at my joggers. "Going for hobo chic?"

She laughs at her own joke. Again. Some of her jokes *are* funny, I admit. Some are a bit tasteless, though she's never cruel. What sucks is, I can't even make fun of her because she just looks cool.

Hazel's straight, long black hair falls past her waist. She might be shorter than I am, but her attitude and four-inch heels make her appear way taller. Seriously though, these two women are gorgeous and look ready to sit in the front row of a fashion show or walk in one. I look ready for a nap.

After I purchase enough clothing items for my time in London, we stop for lunch. I happen to ask how they met, and Hazel answers before Maya has a chance to reply.

"I thought she was cute and asked her out, but Maya Yaya wasn't having it."

Maya narrows her eyes. "That's not true, Haze. You need to stop telling people that."

"But the truth is *so boring!*" Hazel grumbles with a laugh. Her expression is full of mischievous plotting.

"Tell it anyway," Maya insists quietly.

Not wanting to give in so soon, Hazel eats two huge spoonfuls of her ice cream. Maya chews on her salmon slowly. I'm enjoying my chicken and pesto pasta.

They're like an old married couple. I wonder if that happens to everyone who writes together.

Hazel slouches in her seat and crosses her arms over her chest. "We were freshman roommates at NYU." Her voice is devoid of life. "There, satisfied?"

"Yes." Maya grins, her thin lips curving upward as she pushes her glasses up the bridge of her nose.

“That’s not boring,” I interject.

Hazel gives me the stink eye. “As the only person here wearing a jogging outfit, your opinion doesn’t count.”

I snicker, but Maya gasps, “Hazel!”

“What? It’s a joke!”

Not amused, Maya doesn’t say anything else. The downturn of one corner of her mouth is all that’s necessary to get Hazel to apologize.

“I was kidding. You know that, right? I didn’t mean to insult you or anything.”

I nod. “I know; it’s cool.”

“See”—Hazel throws her arm over my shoulders—“we’re cool.”

It’s quiet for a while. Hazel forgets about her ice cream and scrolls through her phone instead.

“You know, I was just there,” I say because the long silence is starting to feel awkward. “NYU, I mean.”

Maya’s face lights up. “Really? When?”

“Yesterday.”

“Were you?”

“Yeah.” I nod, finishing the last of my pasta.

“Doing what?” Hazel asks at the same time Maya says, “With who?”

“Some guy,” I answer because Maya’s question has the simplest answer.

“You were doing some guy?” Hazel slams her hand on the table and laughs until she has tears in her gray eyes.

Maya gives me a sympathetic look. “I know you were answering my question, but I can understand why Hazel is being so silly.”

“Yeah, I walked right into that.” I shrug, pretending like it’s not a big deal. “For the record, I *wasn’t* doing some guy,” I

state seriously. “Doesn’t mean I wasn’t trying though.”

That has Hazel cackling, and even Maya giggles.

“Luna Wuna, you surprise me!” Hazel smirks. “So, who’s the guy?”

“Is he your boyfriend?” Maya asks more tactfully.

Henry’s beautiful face flashes in my mind’s eye.

“Oh my God, you did not just sigh!” Hazel gags.

“Aww, that’s cute.” Maya blushes a soft pink, ignoring Hazel’s retching noises. “Is it serious?”

I shake my head. Maybe I shouldn’t have mentioned it. Honestly though, it does feel good to tell someone *something* of what happened. I’ve been ignoring my sister’s texts when she asks.

“I met him on the plane.”

Both sets of eyes are on me. I don’t mention Oklahoma City *at all*, but I can feel my cheeks growing warm. Maya smiles, and Hazel throws her head back in disgust. I tell them he asked if I wanted to grab dinner in the city.

“So, what happened?”

He kissed me in Times Square, and I kissed him near NYU. We had coffee and took a selfie in the middle of Manhattan, then got chased out of Washington Square Park because it turned out, he was an actor with his own TV show who I basically ran away from because I liked him.

“Not a whole lot,” I lie. “It didn’t work out, so I went back to the airport. Oh, but I did walk through NYU.”

Hazel’s holding her head in her hands. “So, let me get this straight. This guy made you get off the plane—”

“He didn’t *make* me.”

“Did you lose your flight?” Hazel asks incredulously.

“No!”

“But you lost your luggage?” Maya accuses, putting two and two together fairly quickly.

“I don’t think that’s what happened—”

“And the little shit didn’t even take you to dinner?”

“There was no time.”

“Don’t defend him!” Hazel snaps.

I get why this would seem like it was Henry’s fault, but it wasn’t.

Hazel shakes her head. “Sounds like an asshole. Did you give him any money?”

“What? No.” I frown.

“I’m so sorry, Luna.” The small, apologetic smile Maya gives me hits the wrong way, and I feel tears in my eyes.

“Bro, you’re not crying?!” Hazel practically yells, scaring the other patrons.

Embarrassment overtakes any temporary heartache. “Dude, stop *yelling*,” I murmur through clenched teeth, trying to ignore the stares I feel boring into my back.

“Then, don’t cry over some idiot who doesn’t deserve your tears!”

“We should go,” Maya whispers under her breath.

Already having split the bill, we stand and walk out. Maya and I exit first while Hazel mutters obscenities behind us.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

wtf



LUNA

MAKING A MOVIE IS A LOT MORE COMPLICATED THAN I EVER imagined. As far as I knew, someone wrote a script, actors showed up to do their thing, and—bam!—there’s your movie.

Nope.

Not even close.

Dr. Harris and her production team have been working on this for months. There’s budgeting, scheduling, scripting, hiring the staff *and* talent. Principal photography won’t even begin for another two weeks. That means the actual filming won’t happen until then, but so much time and energy have already gone into this movie.

The coolest part though, it’s a movie based on my book—*De East LA*, my first published novel! When I stop to think about it, I still freak out. I’m currently working on the sequel, but it’s not cooperating. I was hoping to find some inspiration on this trip.

Untold Story Pictures is Dr. Harris’s production company. Depending on a few projects they have lined up, including *De East LA*, these temporary offices might become permanent. Right now, they’re half empty.

Someone on the crew got a vicious strain of the flu and ended up getting almost everyone sick, including the movie’s director, Ava Nozawa. I meet the lucky two who didn’t catch it. Natalia Castro, costume designer, and Ruby Patel, hair.

Ruby and Natalia are inseparable. They met at Dr. Harris’s dinner too. Ruby shows me pictures of when Natalia accompanied her to India to attend a family wedding a few weeks ago. They look beautiful in silk Kanjivaram sarees.

“We had the best time,” Ruby tells me.

Where she’s the sweetest person in London, Natalia’s kinda cranky, constantly giving me shit when she finds out I

speak Spanish too.

“Está malparida said it was a green Versace dress.” She’s referring to Viviana’s engagement dress in the book. Natalia glares at me while piling up her thick, short curls into the cutest, puffiest ponytail on top of her head.

I can’t help it; I laugh. I remember when I wrote that chapter. I’d recently seen a picture of Jennifer Lopez in that iconic green Versace, and I wanted Viviana to wear a similar one. She also wears a sparkly purple jumpsuit, like the one made famous by Selena Quintanilla.

In *De East LA*, Viviana loves everything Selena and J. Lo, so it seemed like apt tributes to the two beautiful Latinas. Back when I first saw Selena singing and J. Lo in a movie, I thought, *They look like us*, like me, like Sol and my tias y primas! I thought they were so fucking cool.

Writing those scenes, I never imagined it would all become a reality one day.

“Sorry, not sorry,” I actually smile.

Natalia rolls her eyes but smirks. “Girl, it’s fine. Como yo hice todo—most of the outfits anyway—it was within budget.”

Then, why does she keep complaining? When I ask her, she throws so many insults my way that I miss half of them.



Thursday afternoon drags, so Ruby and I step out for coffee. A bit of a commotion’s going on when we return. Maybe there’s a meeting I forgot about. We run into Maya in the hall.

I spot Tadashi rounding the corner toward us. Tadashi Yoshida. He’s Ava’s personal assistant and sort of a production assistant, rolled into one. I like him. And it’s not simply because he’s from LA or because he’s cute. He gets along with everyone, is hilarious, and always, *always* wears his blue Dodgers cap. How could I not like him?

Besides, he was at the same World Series game I went to with my brothers. He agrees those seats were freaking expensive but totally worth it. Needless to say, he's easily one of my favorite people here in London.

Today, his Dodgers cap is on backward, which means Ava isn't here. Before I ask about her, the last person I expect to see with him—or anywhere else—rounds the corner too.

“Henry.”

“What?” Ruby asks.

I shake my head at her, then blink a couple of times. I do a double take. A triple take.

It's actually him.

WTF? Why?! Why here? Why now? Last night was my first night in London I didn't have dream sex with him. And now, he's here?

He's walking alongside Tadashi, talking and smiling and laughing. Henry has the same expressive hands and the same confident walk I constantly find myself daydreaming about. Because, yeah, I also think about him during the day.

He's wearing a white button-down, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows—*did it just get hotter in here?*—paired with olive-green slacks, looking nice. And by nice, I mean, way more attractive than anyone has a right to be.

I remind myself to get a grip. Henry hasn't seen me yet, and I don't want him to. What if he's pissed? Hates me for wasting his time? Nah, I'm sure he probably won't care either way, but having to see indifference in his eyes? Or hear apathy in his tone? I don't wanna experience that.

Looking for a door to disappear through, I realize there are none along the hallway, except, of course, *behind* Henry. I'm not about to head straight toward him. So, as he continues forward, I'm standing there, cursing this stupid, narrow, doorless hallway. Who designed it anyway?

Maya whispers something, but I can't hear over the loud pounding in my ears. It takes a second to realize it's my heart

beating so fast. That's when my brain starts functioning again. I'll just turn around and walk back the way I came. That's exactly what I intend to do. It's called running away, and right now, I don't care.

Maya whispers something else.

But before I can ask her to repeat what she said, Tadashi calls out, "Ah, yeah, coffee run!"

I freeze.

"Yo, let me introduce you. Ruby Patel, Maya Acosta, Luna Valenzuela, this is Henry Johnson. In case you've been living on Mars, he's our Benjamin."

Our Benjamin? Oh, fuck no.

Henry turns toward me.

Oh shit, oh shit!

I can't stop myself! I can't help it! I am a weak, weak woman because I allow my stupid, desperate gaze to search for his. Time slows nearly to a complete stop. When our eyes meet, someone knocks the breath out of me. Then, I watch him trip over his own feet.

"You good, bro?" Tadashi asks, trying not to laugh.

"Yes." That deep, velvety voice. "Just trying to break in these new shoes." He chuckles, sounding like it's no big deal.

"Right, right. Those are the ones Nat just gave you."

Maya greets them both in her soft voice. Ruby, who has the biggest crush on Tadashi, rushes to his side. I'm still trying to process the fact that *he's* here, in this movie. Henry's playing Viviana's fiancé.

Fuck.

I can't even ... I hooked up with one of the main leads?! Oh my god. *Don't panic.*

Honestly, I'm just dying to look at him again, but I don't. At no point do I allow myself to turn away from Tadashi. My eyes are glued to his face as he continues introductions.

“Henry, this is Ruby, hair; Maya, screenplay; and Luna, book.”

In my periphery, I can see him. He shakes Ruby’s and Maya’s hands. The latter reminds him they met on the set of *The Pirate & the Princess*.

Then, Tadashi turns back to us. “Tell me you ladies got an extra coffee. Henry here just flew in from NYC. He’s going on *no sleep*.”

“I slept. On the plane,” he says. “It was a smooth flight. No turbulence or anything.”

Is he really talking about turbulence? His words can’t be directed at me, can they? *Don’t look at him, Luna. Don’t do it.*

“We have extras,” Ruby assures them.

Lately, we’ve gotten into the habit of buying one or two extra cups of coffee. Just in case. If no one wants them, they go in the fridge. Someone will end up drinking it later anyway.

Whenever it’s my turn to place the order, I always get a salted caramel latte. Yes, because that’s what he ordered in New York. Yes, because it reminds me of him. Yes, because I’m an idiot.

“Luna always orders an extra salted caramel latte—”

“Not always,” I cut Maya off, but I smile at her to soften the sting I know she’ll feel at being interrupted.

“That’s my favorite,” I hear Henry say.

My cheeks grow warm.

“Is it?” Maya asks, looking between us.

“What’s your favorite?” I hear Ruby ask Tadashi.

I have no idea what he replies.

Too many emotions run through me, and I cannot bring myself to look at Henry again. He doesn’t seem to have the same problem. I can practically *feel* his gaze burning everywhere it lands.

Tadashi says something else, his laughter resonating through the hallway. Ruby giggles softly.

It's probably starting to get awkward, but I haven't looked at Henry a second time. I can't. I know once I do, either a stupid smile is going to break out across my face or I might start to cry. There'll be no in between.

Henry takes a step toward me. If my feet would cooperate, I'd back away.

"Luna ... the moon in goddess form."

Wha ...

My eyes snap up to his. Why would he do that? Why would he say the same thing to me now that he said when we first met? It's obvious I'm pretending like I don't know him.

"It's nice to meet you, Luna." He smiles that dazzling smile. The crinkles at the corner of his eyes make a special appearance.

My legs are gonna give out any second.

"You too," I say, wondering why he's playing along. Why not tell everyone we met before, there were orgasms involved, and I'm a shitty person who left him hanging?

Maya gives Tadashi his drink—a double espresso. They mention something about later tonight, but I'm not paying attention. All my focus is on handing over the salted caramel latte while this gorgeous man stares at me.

How is he even here? I wonder as his palm brushes against my skin.

I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from gasping in surprise. As his hand encircles the cup of coffee, the gentle pressure of his fingers on mine makes time stand still. His touch sends a cascade of images flying through my mind. Kisses we've shared. Our time in the hotel room, on the plane, in the city.

"Thank you." He sounds breathless.

His voice draws my gaze to his lips. They're curved up at the corners, and I'm suddenly desperate for the sight of him. As I allow my eyes to take their time traveling up his beautiful face, my heart rate increases until I meet that warm and lovely brown gaze. Then, my heart stops, and my breathing stops, and I'm pretty sure my brain stops too.

It's only been a week, but now that I'm actually looking at him, his hair's longer—or maybe it's simply styled that way?—and his beard looks fuller ... and my fingers itch to touch it.

Has it only been a week?

"You're welcome," I manage to say, slipping my fingers from his grasp, but I'm smiling at him.

I don't want to be smiling at him. But he's smiling at me, and my legs feel weak, the air is heavy, and I'm definitely smiling at him.

I'm not sure how long we stand there, staring at each other, smiling like idiots. It cannot possibly be more than a few seconds, but it feels longer. I wish it could be longer.

Someone comes running down the hall. That someone takes Henry away.

"Excuse me. I'll be right back," he assures me, and he's gone.

Vaguely, it registers that it's Natalia who drags him away, and Ruby follows behind, probably to give Nat her drink.

"Maya, is it just me, or was there a little something-something going on right there?"

Leave it to Tadashi to ruin the moment.

"Nah, dude." I shake my head.

"Okay, you say that, *but* you've never given me a cup of coffee where we set the freaking hallway on fire!" he counters, fanning himself.

Off to the side, I can hear Maya giggling.

"Luna, what was that?" she asks, her eyes wide, teasing. "Lo conoces?"

I want to kick myself for being so obvious. I want to kick Henry, too, for making the situation worse. Yet ... that wasn't at all as painful as I'd dreaded it would be. He actually seemed ... *happy* to see me? That can't be right.

“What was *what*?” Hazel demands, and I've never been more grateful for her impatience than right now. “And why are you guys out here, holding my coffee hostage? Gimme, gimme!”

Hazel grabs her double espresso with a splash of vanilla. Together, we head into what we've been calling the writers' room. It's the smallest of the three offices on this floor, but the comfiest with couches lining two of the walls. The biggest office has a huge conference table and a giant flat screen mounted on the wall. The other is wardrobe, where there's a whole bunch of clothes and accessories and where Natalia might've stolen Henry to.

Even though I can hear Maya and Tadashi whispering on the couch next to me, glancing at me every so often, I ignore them. It's damn near impossible to think of anything or anyone besides Henry anyway.

Can he really be starring in this movie? When did he get here? How long will he be here? Was he actually happy to see me? Can we—*nope*. This is work. We're at work.

After about five minutes, I can't sit still anymore. I get up to warm my coffee even though it's still hot, simply to have something to do.

“Did you guys bring any pastries?” Hazel asks, and I see my escape.

“I forgot to order some,” I admit, “but I'll go now.”

I'm almost out the door when Henry magically materializes before me. His eyebrows shoot up at my nearly colliding with him.

“Hi.”

He's smiling again. Looking so incredibly handsome again.

“Hi.” Now, I sound breathless.

“Hey, Hank!” Hazel calls from behind me. She grabs my hand and pulls me out the door. “Bye, Hank!”

I stay strong and don’t look back.



Something I learn real quick is that Maya and Hazel always have plans. Always. They’re at awards shows and parties and art exhibits, networking and getting invited to the next big thing. When do they find time to write? Quién sabe.

Tonight, I agree to go out with them. I need the distraction. I don’t want to think about Henry. I don’t want to keep going over every little detail of our encounter.

Nothing helps though. Not drinks or food or dancing. He’s taken over my brain. When I get back to my room, I sleep and dream of him.



Nothing especially eventful happens at work on Friday. Since I’m still recovering from running into Henry the day before, uneventful is exactly what I need.

In the early morning, Henry has coffee and pan dulce delivered, which makes my insides bubble over with hope. I grab a yummy-looking concha but not the cuernitos or orejas. It would be a waste not to get a cup of the delicious-smelling coffee, so I do. Armed with carbs and caffeine, I go straight to wardrobe. Natalia’s outlandish stories are entertaining and distracting and that’s exactly what I need right now.



Friday night, we go dancing. On my insistence. I don't want to stay in.

Dancing's always fun. Especially at a club. Because as much as I enjoy dancing in my kitchen or with my tias at birthday parties, there's something about music so loud that it drowns out every thought.

Hazel enlists Natalia's help. "Nat *knows* how to dress people!" She nods emphatically.

Turns out, Hazel's absolutely right. The outfit Natalia put together for me? I love it! Even if it's more revealing than I'm used to.

It's a dusty-pink crochet dress with thin shoulder straps and a low-cut, bare back. It hugs my curves, especially my butt, a little too much. The color looks incredibly flattering against my light brown skin tone though.

"You look beautiful," Maya smiles. "I'm sure a certain British actor would agree."

I would ignore her teasing, but she's persistent in her quiet, determined way.

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

Hazel yells from the bathroom, "Prepare yourselves, people!" and steps into the room, posing dramatically.

Her top is a fuchsia-colored, flower-shaped design. She matches the top with wide-legged black pants that have cutouts at her hips.

"Wow."

"I know! I love it! I couldn't have chosen better myself!" she gushes. "Maya, you're next."

Maya does a little run to the bathroom. It's the most excited she's been. I can understand why once she steps out in

a nude-and-black lace midi cocktail dress with a plunging V-neck.

“Dude!”

“Bro!” Hazel exclaims.

“You guys think so?”

“Yes! Looks like you stepped out of a fashion magazine!” I tell her.

Her cheeks turn bright red, but she’s smiling. “Thank you,” she whispers us as she puts on her glasses.

Hazel grabs her purse and phone and heads to the door. “We look amazing,” she declares. “And we’re gonna have so much fun!”

In the elevator, we take, like, a million selfies. Some together and others individually, serious ones and silly ones too. By the time the elevator doors open, even I’m laughing.

The hotel lobby is crowded. Most people are waiting to eat at the restaurant. Others are either arriving to or leaving the bar.

As we thread through a sea of bodies toward the exit, my eyes begin playing tricks on me. As I head to the revolving doors, I think I see Henry walking in. With so many people standing by, blocking my view, and others wandering around to restrict my line of sight, I can’t be sure.

I’ve fallen behind Hazel and Maya, too busy craning my neck until I realize what I’m doing. Even if it is him, what does it matter? We’re not ... anything. Yesterday probably caught him off guard, and he was forced to be polite since he’ll be working with everyone there. Exhaling once, I fix my eyes straight ahead. If it is Henry, it has nothing to do with me.

A bottleneck traffic jam forms at the revolving doors. As we wait for our turn to exit, my traitorous eyes betray me, seeking him out.

Henry’s standing there in a gray suit, unbuttoned, snug fit. My heart stops. It needs to cut that out.

He's smiling wide, his confident swagger on full display. He looks so *good* with a beard. My mouth goes dry, and I force my gaze away.

Why isn't this line moving?

Maya glances over her shoulder at me. "Are you okay, Luna? You look a little pale."

Words fail me, and I force an awkward laugh. I thought I'd be blushing red. Honestly, I don't even know how I'm feeling. Unable to stop myself, I watch Henry out of the corner of my eye.

Once he clears the doorway, a stunning Black woman appears behind him. She's quite young, wearing an elegant, long white dress. With a familiarity that bothers me, she reaches for his arm, curling her fingers around his biceps. Then, he turns that amazing smile toward her.

Maybe that's his new girlfriend? Maybe he lied and that's been his girlfriend all along? I'm so focused on them that I don't notice the way out is clear.

"Luna!" Hazel practically yells my name so that everyone in London hears her. "Hurry up, bro!"

Heart pounding in my chest, I manage to look away from Henry before he catches me staring.

I walk through the revolving doors, and it's probably my imagination, but I think I hear him call my name. I don't stop though, and I don't look back either. I'm out into the crisp, cool night and into a waiting cab as fast as I can go in heels.

CHAPTER TWELVE

savoy



LUNA

IT'S LATE AFTERNOON WHEN I LEAVE THE HOTEL TO EXPLORE more of the city. Bridges and tunnels and walkways—I love it!

The literary tour the other day was fun. Learning of places Jane Austen stayed at and walking around the Shakespeare's Globe was incredibly interesting.

I hit up different tourist spots, too. Buckingham Palace. Westminster Abbey. And, Big Ben, my favorite. Who knew a huge, neo-Gothic clock tower could bring me a sense of peace?

While in line to ride the London Eye, Maya calls.

“You sure about staying in tonight?” she asks.

I'm about to reply when I hear Hazel in the background yell, “Tell her Hank might show up!”

That clinches it for me.

“I haven't gotten any writing done, but you two have fun!” I say before ending the call.

I do plan on writing. A tiny part of me also dreads running into Henry. If Hazel and Maya are out and about, doing industry-type things, like premieres, screenings, and dinners, no doubt he's out there too. The other night, they went to an awards show that he attended as well. Yeah, no thanks.

Besides, here, I get to enjoy the city from the south side of the Thames. Cool air, gray skies, and a silver tint to the river keep me company. I don't have to worry about seemingly nice, hot guys turning out to have beautiful girlfriends.

As if to make me love the place even more, it starts drizzling as I stroll back to the hotel. It's probably because we don't get a lot of it in LA, but I love when it rains. And there's something about London rain that puts me in such a good mood.

Crossing the Waterloo Bridge, like all the other tourists, I take a selfie. Yep, I post it to my Instagram too.

Once in my room, I change and head down to the gym. This place has everything, which is perfect because, lately, I've been enjoying my workouts more than usual. Focusing on each movement and holding the proper form help me decompress. When all that happens, I don't have time to think about Henry. Today, it helps me to not obsess over his new girlfriend/date/whatever.

Exhausted but full of endorphins, I'm drinking water as the double doors swing open. I know in that moment that I have the absolute *worst* luck! Henry walks in with the same woman he was with the night before. Of all the people in the world, they're the last two I want to run into and yet ...

I hate my life.

La verdad, I don't even care if he sees me or not. I turn up the volume on my headset and focus on my phone. I don't plan on looking up until I'm out those doors.

"Luna?"

Pretending I don't hear anything, I keep going.

"*Luna*," he repeats, tapping my arm softly.

Fuck! I school my expression and glance up.

"Hey." Henry smiles, but uncertainty colors his tone.

That helps me regain some composure.

"Hey ..." I reply, sliding off my headset, proud that I don't sound as breathless as I feel. And it has nothing to do with the hour-long workout either.

Okay, I admit it—Henry looks *good*. Like really fucking good.

And I know I'm stupid for even thinking it, but that beard grew in nicely. My hand twitches, wanting to reach up to run my fingers along his jaw. Add to that the white sleeveless shirt and navy-blue shorts he's wearing, which definitely do justice to the lean muscles along his arms and legs, and I'm just

standing there, staring at him. What I don't realize at the time is that he's just standing there, too, smiling and looking back at me. That is, until the woman he's with clears her throat.

Shit, forgot about her!

"Hi!" She waves both hands at me. "Henry left his manners back in the suite. I'll introduce myself, shall I?"

Why am I still here?

"Sorry about that." He regards her with an apologetic expression and wraps an arm around her shoulders. "Luna, this is my cousin, Charlie. Charlie, this is my Luna—" He chuckles and shakes his head. "My friend Luna."

"Ah ... so *you're* the famous Luna?"

"*Charlie,*" he warns through clenched teeth and a fake smile.

"What? I'm not saying anything embarrassing, like that you fancy her or anything like that, am I?"

Henry moves to stand in front of his cousin, but I can still see her grinning from ear to ear behind him. That's not even the important part. What matters is she's his *cousin*! Not his date or girlfriend, and did she just say he fancies me? Wait, back up.

"Were you headed out?" Henry asks me.

"Um, wh—yeah, I—que?"

English major here, and that's my reply?

"Mind if I walk with you?"

"Tell her how you chased after her last night," his cousin calls after us as he leads me toward the exit. "Shoving people out of your way left and right. Including that old couple!"

Looking adorably embarrassed, Henry chuckles as he rubs the back of his neck. Those crinkles appear at the corner of his eyes. Unfortunately for me, his smile is contagious. I find myself smiling along even though I'm not in on their joke.

“I didn’t shove anyone,” he’s quick to clarify while he holds the door open for me. “But there were quite a few *excuse me, pardon me.*”

“You followed me out?” I ask. I know I look confused.

“You knew I was there?” he counters. He looks as bewildered as I feel.

Shit. “I asked you first.”

His eyebrows shoot up, but we keep walking. Have I mentioned he has the best walk? I’m not just saying that. It’s cool and confident, full of swagger.

“I was hoping to talk you,” he replies, smile fading. “I didn’t get a chance to say much the other morning. By the way, did you get the coffee and sweet bread on Friday?”

“Yeah, you made everyone’s day.”

“I wanted to make yours.”

His eyes stay on me. Everywhere he looks, my skin is on fire, but I keep my focus directly ahead.

“Last night, you looked ... that dress—”

“What are you doing?” I cut him off, glaring.

“Accompanying you to your room. What floor are you on?”

“You know that’s not what I mean,” I snap as we step into the elevator together. The initial giddiness to be walking with him is quickly replaced with the dread and fear from New York.

Henry runs a hand through his beard. We’re standing on opposite corners of the small space until a group of tourists sweeps in. Ever the polite one, he wishes them a good evening and moves over to my side.

My hip grazes his thigh, and images of our time in Oklahoma City flash in quick succession. The way he kissed me, held me. The way he moved when he let me touch him so intimately ...

When I glance up, he's watching me. His eyebrows are drawn together, his lips parted ever so slightly. I wonder if he's thinking of the same thing.

The elevator doors open, and the rowdy group tumbles out, taking all the excess noise with them. Only Henry, me, and an uncomfortable silence remain.

"We need to talk," he finally answers when the doors slide shut.

"About?"

"Us."

The elevator continues up. I back away from him.

"Henry, there's no us."

"Luna, you know there is."

I shake my head.

"There isn't," I state flatly. "There can't be. We're both working on this movie."

His face twists; his brows furrow as he steps into my personal space.

"Then why won't you look at me?" he asks and I don't have an answer for him.

When the elevator doors open, I rush out on the wrong floor to escape him and my ever-increasing confusion.

Henry follows me out. "Luna ... why did you leave?"

"I thought this was my floor."

"You know that's not what I meant." He frowns, repeating my earlier words back to me.

We're in a hallway I'm not familiar with. Three women pause at their door to stare. Their focus is on Henry. They stumble past us, whispering between them.

"We shouldn't be out here," I tell him once they've left. "At least you shouldn't."

Someone else might recognize him. Plus, I just worked out. I'm tired. I'm sweaty. I don't want to deal with this. I turn toward the stairs.

"Luna, please wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Let's talk—" He pauses when a couple approaches. He smiles at them when they smile at him. "My room is this way." He motions with a tilt of his head.

Still stumbling over my own thoughts, I follow him. I'm not thinking clearly. Otherwise, I would've gone to my room. Alone.

Once we step inside, Henry locks the door. When his eyes meet mine, I forget all the reasons I shouldn't be here. All I want is to pretend everything is fine. I can do this, I can be that girl again. Doesn't matter that we're working together. I mean, he's an actor, I'm a writer. Different departments, right? I can let him wrap me up in his strong arms and kiss me like there's no tomorrow, right?

The way he's looking at me, it would be so easy to let him, but I can't. Turning away, I cross my arms over my chest, protecting myself, keeping him out.

"This way," he sighs.

His room is a suite. A hallway offers four doors to choose from. Henry makes a right into the first one.

"Do you want some water?" His voice sounds strange.

"No, I don't want any water." I stay near the entrance of the living room, even after he asks me to come in and offers me a seat.

A few minutes pass. He's sitting on the armrest of a chair, looking down at his hands.

"Why are we here, Henry?" I sound exasperated, and I know I'm being rude, but I can't help it. I'm freaking out, but ... how does that help? The best thing for me to do is listen to what he has to say. "Can you do me a favor?"

My voice startles him out of his thoughts. When he glances up at me, it's almost with a resigned expression.

“Do you have a shirt I can borrow? Maybe a pair of shorts too?”

I don't think he was expecting me to ask that of him—I'm surprised myself—but he pushes off the chair and leaves the room.

Returning with a solid black tee and a pair of gray running shorts, he says, “Bathroom's across the hall.”

I take my time changing. I need to calm down and get my thoughts in order.



Henry stands from the nearby chair as I approach. Brown eyes flicker down to my bare legs, then back to my face. He comes toward me.

My gaze lingers on the most perfect set of lips, soft and full, so *kissable* and within reach. I swallow.

“We can't do this!” I blurt out at the same time he says, “I've been thinking—”

We stop and look at each other. He smiles and I bite my lip so I won't.

“You were saying?”

“Yeah, um,” I clear my throat. “We didn't know we'd be working together back in New York—”

“Or OKC,” he interrupts with a grin.

“Or OKC,” I agree, fighting the blush I feel rising to my face. “But we know now, so we probably shouldn't ...

“Get involved?”

“Exactly.”

Okay, he gets it. Why is it bumming me out?

“Says who?”

“Everyone. Every movie. Every book—”

“They’re wrong.”

“Henry—”

“I like you, Luna.”

My eyes go wide and my throat dries up. He just said that. So easily.

“And ... I get the feeling you like me too.”

I shake my head. “I don’t.” *Qué mentirosa soy.*

Henry flashes his ridiculously gorgeous smile at me. The asshole.

“No?” He arches his left eyebrow.

He’s suddenly standing too close.

“Nope,” I lie through my teeth, but my traitorous body leans forward, trying to close the distance between us.

When he chuckles, my legs turn to jelly. I glance up at him and find him with a lopsided smirk, gaze warm and tender. My heart stutters in my chest, and stupid, silly, unwanted thoughts pop up in my head. The kind of thoughts people write poems about, the romantic notions others sing about. Crazy stuff I can’t deal with right now. It’s why I take a step back.

“Okay, I’m gonna go.”

“What? Right now?”

“Yep.”

I make it to the hallway before he stops me with a light touch to my hand. His fingers are gentle as they encircle mine.

“I’m leaving.” It comes out sounding like a warning.

“Yeah, I got that.” Henry’s thumb strokes the back of my hand. “I don’t understand why though.”

Irritated with him since he's got me feeling these uncontrollable emotions, I snap, "Because we're working together! And I don't think this is a good idea."

Henry blinks, startled by my harsh tone. "Right," he nods, releasing me. Taking a step back, he shoves his hands in his pockets.

"I didn't mean for it to sound like that," I apologize. "I just ... I'm not ..."

"It's fine," he assures me. Brown eyes flicker to mine for a second. "If you don't feel comfortable being here—"

"It's not that." It's not. At all. I *like* being around him. That's the problem. Chingado, that's the *easy* part. What's not so easy for me is voicing it. "Henry, you just ... you make me feel things I'm not used to," I admit, and I cannot believe I did. I hold my breath and try not to panic.

His shoulders relax, and he tilts his head to the side to look up into my face. "For the record, I think this—" he points from his chest to mine "—is a very good idea."

I don't know he does it, but Henry has a way of making everything feel like it's gonna be okay.

"Tell you what," he adds, crossing his arms over his broad chest. He strokes his bearded jaw as if deep in thought. "We can keep this very good idea between us, yeah?"

Between us? Like, not tell anyone? Is that even possible with someone like him?

We're working on the same movie. On the same set.

I'm about to argue the impossibility of what he's suggesting, but that look in his eyes stops me. Intensity fills his gaze. Heat and hunger and desire too. I feel like I'm about to burst into flames and only his eyes are on me. God, I want all of him on me ...

Fuck it.

"Okay."

He grins like he knew I was gonna give in without much of a fight. Slowly, as if afraid he'll scare me off, his hands come up to touch me. He stops himself before he does. "May I?" he asks, eyes imploring.

I shouldn't, but I nod, and he cups the sides of my face so carefully that the gnawing apprehension melts away. Inching closer, Henry offers me a small, comforting smile. I've dreamed of him so often that this feels familiar despite the reality. The last time I felt his breath caress my lips was days ago. In a different city. On a different continent. Right before we ended whatever was beginning between us. My heart is racing, my thoughts buzzing. Nervous by how excited I am to be near him, I want to pull away.

Instead, I blurt out, "I don't this. I *never* do this. Not what happened in OKC and not New York either."

"I don't do this either, Luna," Henry admits. "Haven't for a long time."

I let out a shaky breath.

"And, we can take our time," he assures me, eyes softening. "We'll go slow," he adds, but his impish grin says otherwise. "Do you really have to go?"

"I should," I exhale.

"Why?"

Henry decides this is the perfect moment to unleash that dazzling smile on me. Holy shit, it never fails to send my heart fluttering wildly.

"Stop looking at me like that!" I'm trying not to laugh as I return to the living room.

"Like how?" Henry chuckles, trailing behind.

I stop to glare at him. "Like you don't *want* to go slow!"

"That's 'cause I don't," he admits, then his expression turns serious. "But we will. You want to, so we will." One corner of his mouth quirks up. "L, stay a bit."

I shake my head, feeling like I can't catch my breath. "Okay," I manage to reply.

"Yeah?"

I wish I could control the way my cheeks burn. "Yeah."

"Good." He laughs right before lifting me up and over his shoulder.

Surprised, I make this weird half-laugh, half-shrieking sound as he carries me to a bedroom. "Henry, put me down!"

"As you wish."

I land with a soft thud on the mattress. Then, he climbs in after me, but doesn't pin me with his body like I hoped. He leans in, like he's gonna kiss me, stopping just short. The brown in his eyes grows darker.

"Let me take you to dinner, yeah?"

"Okay."

That seems to be the only word I know.

"Tonight?"

I nod.

Henry licks his lips. Heat dances down my body.

"Are you going to answer yes to every question?"

"Yes," I reply, breathless, hoping for one question in particular. It never comes. He simply looks at me, like he can't quite believe I'm here.

"You're so far away," I point out, reaching for him while he continues to float above me. When my fingertips graze his waist, he shudders. Sliding my hands up along his back, I feel the delicious definition of his muscles. His eyes fall shut.

"I kinda like slow," I whisper, pulling him down. I want his body on mine.

With the feel of his weight on me, his brilliant smile that's for me and me alone, everything seems right with the world again. When Henry starts kissing my neck, I wrap my arms around his shoulders.

“I can go slower,” he winks, his voice warm and inviting.

Fuck, I missed the sound, missed that look he gives me—*you’re safe with me*. Missed his beautiful mouth trailing wet kisses along my skin. Heat surges between us as I map the lean lines of his body, trying to contain myself and being completely unable to.

“Do you want me to stop, L?” he asks, breathing hard.

“No,” I whimper, too weak to deny him, too turned on to be rational. My breath is coming fast; my body tingles with anticipation. “Don’t stop.” *Ever. Please.*

Our gazes hold for a second, and then Henry’s lips crash down on mine. That familiar hunger flares to life. Heat and want and lust. I’ve never been like this. Desperate. Frantic. I’ve enjoyed sex at times, but we’re not even having sex. This is like the foreplay before foreplay. And I *need* all of him close. I want to get lost in him, be found by him.

“T’embrasser est ma nouvelle chose préférée à faire,” he whispers against my lips.

When I open my eyes, Henry’s smiling, and a deep warmth explodes from my chest. Without hesitation, I smile back because not only are his kisses addictive, his touch like fire, but he speaks French too?

I’m so fucked.

“What was that ...” I sound dazed. Probably look dazed too.

His smirk turns devastating as he translates, “Kissing you is my new favorite thing to do.”

So fucking fucked.

Gazing at him, I smile like this is the best moment of my life. I feel so utterly helpless ...

Fortunately for me, I don’t say the absurd and asinine things on the tip of my tongue. Why? Because I come to my senses? Nope. It’s because we hear someone unlocking the front door.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

lift



HENRY

“TELL ME EVERYTHING! SAVE THE SNOGGING!”

Luna looks up at me, surprise in her eyes.

It's Charlie, I mouth.

Forgot she had a key. I'm cursing her and the day she was born.

“You finally ask her out?”

Luna's eyes sparkle with mirth. I stand and help her up. She straightens the black V-neck she's wearing. Fact is, she looks good in my clothes. Can't help wonder how much better she'll look out of them.

“She say yes? She's not a nutter, is she?”

Luna arches an eyebrow. The fact that she's here? I'm still stunned. Back in New York, I was afraid I'd never see her again.

“Blimey, Henry, where are you? This bloody suite's a maze.”

“Ready to go?” I ask, offering Luna my hand. Warmth rushes through me when she takes it.

“Oops.” Charlie winces, realizing Luna's with me. “Going well, is it?”

“It was until you got here,” I tell her.

“Don't be mean,” she mutters, then takes Luna's hand from mine. “Let's leave Henry to change.”

“I wasn't—”

“You should. Trust.” Charlie sends me a warning look before turning to Luna. “Let me tell you about that one day Henry—”

“Perhaps later,” I cut her off. “We were on our way out.”

“But I just got here!”

“Which is why we’re leaving.”

Charlie pouts.

“I wanna hear about that one day ...” Luna says, green eyes meeting mine.

How can she look so cute while encouraging the most annoying cousin ever?

Charlie beams in triumph. Knowing there’s no point in arguing, I watch my cousin drag Luna down the hall and into the sitting room.



About an hour later, Luna and I head down to her room, so she can change, and then I’m taking her to dinner. Charlie stayed behind in the guest bedroom. She has a paper due. However, she did threaten to meet up with us upon its completion.

“What floor?” I ask, and Luna tells me as I step into the lift after her.

The instant we begin moving, a loud sound erupts, like metal grinding against metal. Then, we stop, the lights go out, and we’re left in the dark.

“You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me,” Luna mumbles.

My phone is out in the blink of an eye, lighting up the panel of buttons. I try different ones.

“I think this is my villain origin story.”

Turning toward her, I flash the phone light directly in her face.

“Dude.”

“Sorry.” *Real smooth, mate.* “You were saying?”

“Nothing.” She shakes her head. “Should we call the front desk?”

She’s stalling. The backup generator kicks in as I step closer. *What fragrance is she wearing?*

“What’s this about a villain origin story?”

Shrugging both shoulders, Luna’s lips are in a straight line. “Henry, we’re stuck in an elevator.”

“Won’t be for long. Besides”—I step toward her—“I kind of like this.” Just us. No prying eyes. God, I want to wrap my arms around her. It’s killing me that I can’t. Or can I? “Just you ... and me.”

She doesn’t back away when I take another step closer. Her eyes linger on my lips. I resist the urge to lick them. I don’t miss the way her gaze travels down my body. Leaves me feeling warm all over.

“What you said ... about keeping this between us?”

“Yeah?” I reply, one palm on her waist.

“You’re really okay with that?”

“It was my suggestion,” I remind her, my hand inching up her stomach and rib cage. My fingertips skim her breasts, and I discover that she’s not wearing a bra. My breath lodges in my throat.

“Luna,” I groan.

“I’m not wearing underwear either,” she teases with the sexiest smirk curving that beautiful mouth.

This woman, damn.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that,” she recants, slipping out of my arms.

That’s not it though. At least not entirely.

“Something else is bothering you.” I watch her move to the opposite end of the lift. It’s a small space. I could cover the distance in two steps, but I don’t. I won’t crowd her. “What is it?”

She won't meet my eyes. "You said you don't do this kind of thing and it's not that I think you're lying, but—"

"But you think I'm lying."

"No. Maybe." Her eyes flicker to mine, then away. "I don't know, Henry." She chews on her bottom lip, anxious. "You've been with a lot of people and then suddenly stopped?"

I push off the wall I was leaning against. The closer I get to Luna, the more nervous I feel. I don't like the idea of her not trusting me. "Ask me what you want to know, L?"

"What happened?"

Guess we're doing this. I exhale a long breath.

"I trusted the wrong people."

Her expression is solemn as she listens to me.

"Someone I dated and broke up with years ago has interfered with every relationship I've had since. He's told people things about me that I wasn't ready to share."

"Sounds like an asshole."

"Pretty much."

I debate going into further detail, but wait for her reply first.

"He got a name?"

When she asks the question she's looking down at the floor between us.

"Liam."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked. You don't have to say anything else." She walks over to me and leans against the lift wall. "Sorry you've had deal with that though," she adds, reaching for my hand.

"I decided to focus on my career. It was the best decision I could've made. I didn't realize the type of person he was until I was far away in LA."

"Distance gave you some perspective."

I shrug. “Something like that.” I lift her chin, gently tilting her head up until our eyes meet. “Let’s talk about us, yeah?”

She nods.

“While I didn’t mess up this time, L, I will. I’m going to make mistakes. So will you. It’s called being human.”

She gives me a shaky smile. I relax a bit then.

“However, please know that I don’t plan on making any mistake more than once. I also hope that, moving forward, you can give me the benefit of the doubt, yeah?”

“That ... might take a while.” She sighs again and looks away, struggling with what to say. “It’s never been easy for me to forgive or forget.” Luna avoids my gaze. “Guess I’m more of the *resent and remember* type.”

Good news is, she hasn’t told me to sod off. Bad news is, she’s still hesitant.

“A while shouldn’t be too long.”

“Maybe. But then this happens?” She crosses her arms over her chest in ... frustration? Anger? I can’t quite tell. “Henry, we’re stuck in a freaking elevator!”

At her outburst, my smile returns. “So, this is what it’s like to be involved with a writer?” I grin, teasing her.

Green eyes snap up.

“Which you could’ve mentioned.”

Not only did she write a novel. She wrote a good one too. I’d be leading every conversation with that bit of information.

“It never came up,” she argues.

I let it go for now. “Let’s see ... secretive, overly dramatic,” I continue, ticking off the qualities I’m coming up with on the fly. “Everything feels end-of-the-world catastrophic, quickly jumps to conclusions.”

Luna scoffs, looking more annoyed than offended, but one side of her mouth is quirked up. “Uh-huh, yeah. That’s me.”

I'm dying to touch her again. It takes an inordinate amount of willpower not to.

"I can assure you of one thing." I wait for her green eyes to return to mine. "There's no one else I'd rather be stuck in a lift with."

While Luna searches my face, my eyes travel to her lips. Truth is, it feels like I'm back on that first plane with her. Unsteady, trembling, afraid to fall. But I'm not frightened here.

"Let me ask you three questions, yeah?"

Her smile breaks free for a second, but she reels it in. "That didn't turn out so great last time," she says.

"I got to talk to you, so it worked out for me."

The erratic fluttering of my heart grows exponentially and I stand there, aroused. I didn't think it was possible to want anyone as much as I want her. Checking the impulse to simply lunge myself at Luna, I take a few calming breaths, but my body has other ideas, stirring with renewed lust.

Luna purses her lips. "So ...we're doing this?"

"Bloody right we're doing this," I reply and she's smiling. I'm smiling too. "I really want to kiss you," I confess.

I see her throat work, and all sorts of ideas fill my head.

"That's not a question." There's a lightness to her voice.

I chuckle then draw her to me. "May I kiss you?"

"Yes," she breathes and we beam at each other. Our lips meet, a soft, slow exploration. The kiss we share is a short one. Still, we linger close, in the same space, breathing the same air.

Luna snakes her arms around my waist. "Have I told you I really like the beard?" she whispers, tone playful.

"Pull the other one." I chuckle. Can't tell if she's joking.

She goes on tiptoes, taking her time feeling the roughness of my bearded cheeks in contrast to the smoothness of my

cheekbones. She's so careful. With her touch. With her gaze. Such a simple act. My heart is racing though. She's driving me mad. Bollocks, don't want to rush her though.

When she looks into my eyes again, my hands tighten around her waist. It causes her breasts to brush against my chest.

Breathe.

I smile down at her. "Tu es si belle. J'aime tes yeux verts brillants."

There's awe in her voice when she speaks. "What did you say?"

Her small smile sends my heart pounding.

"You are so beautiful," I translate, tilting my head forward so she can kiss me. She doesn't. But she looks at me like she wants to. "I love your bright green eyes."

A dimple appears.

"Sounds so nice." She's pressing her body to mine. "In both languages."

With tender strokes, I run my thumb along her cheek. "It's true. In both languages," I assure her, smiling before my lips are on hers again.

Luna is just as eager. I love how she kisses me. As if she wants this as much as I do. As if it's more important than her next breath.

"I missed you," I tell her while I devour her neck. She nods in agreement, I think. "Did you miss me?"

"You want me to tell you?" she moans as I nuzzle her breasts. "Or you want me to show you?" She punctuates the *you* by grabbing the growing bulge in my pants.

I don't hesitate to reply, "Both."

Looks like she's about to argue, but Luna smiles instead. Two dimples? I'm grinning. My hands are on her hips, fingertips digging gently into the swell of her ass. When I grab her and lift her up, Luna wraps her legs around my waist, tight.

With our eyes locked, our breathing coming faster, she holds my face in her hands.

“I missed you, Henry.” Her cheeks turn pink. “And it makes no sense because we just met, but I fucking missed you so much.”

I want to tell her time works different when you meet your person. But then she presses her mouth to mine. The plump softness of her lips, the way her body moves, words become unnecessary. I deepen the kiss. Curl my tongue against hers, slick and wet. A quiet whimper escapes her throat. With a self-satisfied smile, I continue tasting, savoring. My head is swimming with all the things I want to do to her, with her ...

Everything begins to blur, all thoughts disappearing in a fog of desire. When Luna sucks on my lower lip, I grind into her, squeeze her ass, desperate for more. And when my thumbs slide along the inside of her thighs, reaching that delicious heat I can't wait to sink into, she breathes my name against my jaw. I twitch in my pants, groan in response. Delirious. Happy.

My mind is lost to pleasure until a noise outside ruins the moment, snapping us back to reality. After all, we're still inside a broken-down lift.

Reluctantly, Luna unwraps her legs from me. She allows herself the satisfaction of sliding down my front to stand on her own again. Judging by her expression, she enjoys the shiver she must feel running through my body as she does so.

I grunt in protest, hating that she's suddenly so far from me. I know we can't continue making out. Not with the possibility of the doors opening any second. Turns out, we don't have to wait long. Within minutes, the doors are open, and someone is apologizing for the inconvenience.



It's just after eight p.m. on a Saturday night, and lots of people are coming and going throughout the hotel. When Luna walks off toward her room, I follow at a distance, so as not to make it obvious that we share the same destination.

I suggested arriving separately would be the best option. Knowing we'll be alone soon is exhilarating. The anticipation feels like a living, breathing thing I'm carrying around.

As Luna rounds the corner, I know something's wrong. Everything comes to a screeching halt when Maya and Hazel approach her.

Luna keeps her friends talking, their backs to me. Likely hoping they won't notice me.

We haven't discussed how public or private we want to be, and I'm not assuming either way. Which is why I grab my phone, keep my head down, and plan to go unnoticed.

No such luck.

"Hey there, Hank. You lost?" Hazel gives me a toothy grin.

Maya waves her greeting.

"Hello." I nod. "How are you?" I ask them. My eyes travel to each, lingering on Luna.

Hazel clears her throat to grab my attention back. "Where you off to?"

"Taking the stairs to the gym," I reply. "The lift is out. And you?"

"We're trying to convince Luna to come out with us."

"No, you weren't," Luna corrects her.

"Well, we are now." Hazel winks. "Come on, Luna Wuna. You can work out and write any other night!"

"I thought writers encouraged fellow writers to write?" I wonder. It makes Maya giggle.

"Whose side are you on, Hank?" Hazel narrows her eyes, fists at her waist. "Besides, writers should encourage fellow

writers to live. It's the best inspiration for writing."

Maya nods in agreement. Even Luna seems to think over the statement and doesn't outright disagree.

"And Luna here hasn't had the best luck with that."

"Dude, what are you talking about?" Luna raises a suspicious eyebrow.

I raise an interested eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

Green eyes glare at me for encouraging Hazel.

"Oh, she hasn't told you?" Hazel's eyes light up.

There's nothing she loves more than being a storyteller, I've discovered.

"Why would I tell him? Or anyone else? I'm sorry I ever mentioned it to you two."

Hazel's face drops. "That's the meanest thing you've said to me."

"No, it's not."

"Okay, it's not, but why don't you want people to know? I'd tell everyone so it would eventually get back to her—in your case, him—and by the time it does, everybody will be fully aware of the kind of asshole she—or he—is!"

Luna's angry facade cracks. Perhaps because revenge totally seems like Hazel's style.

"So, can I tell it?" Hazel asks, jumping up and down, looking like a little kid.

Luna shrugs, trying to play it off as inconsequential. "I don't think he'd care."

"He would very much care," I reply, grinning.

Luna looks torn between wanting to kiss me and strangle me.

Hazel claps. "Okay, so Luna met this guy on her flight here to London, right?"

"Really?" I try not to look too interested.

When I meet Luna's gaze, she rolls her eyes at me.

"But this guy, he tells her they should stay in New York. Even though she's supposed to be flying here."

"Uh-huh." I cross my arms over my chest, having an idea where the story is going.

"Insists they should grab some dinner in a fancy restaurant."

I nod, smile fading.

"I didn't say fancy," Luna interjects.

"She didn't," Maya confirms.

"Fine, just dinner in the city. Pretty romantic though, right?"

"Yes?" is my tentative answer.

"Wrong! The motherfucker ran off! Left her hanging!"

I look over at Luna, who's glaring at Hazel, who looks a bit crazed, waiting for my reaction. Maya is simply looking from one to the other to the other and back.

"He went crying to his mommy or some shit."

"Hazel, I didn't say—"

Hazel throws her hands in the air. "Fine," she relents. "You didn't say that, but this story would be so much better if you let me tell it like I want." Hazel sticks her tongue out at Luna, then turns back to me. "Anyway, the asshole was probably just fucking with her, right?"

"Hazel—"

"Bro, did you or did you not lose your luggage?"

Bollocks, did she?

"That had nothing to do with—"

"You lost all that time, waiting around, too ..." Hazel pouts. "Alone, in a strange city, with no money and no food and nowhere to stay."

At that last comment, Luna snorts. “I had money and food, but I can see why you like telling stories.”

Hazel takes a little bow. Maya claps for her, amused.

I’m not amused. At all. I still haven’t said anything. Don’t know what I could say.

“Just so we’re clear,” Luna interrupts, “you’re making it sound worse than it was.”

“Did something happen?” I ask, outrage laced through my tone. “On your way to the airport?”

I should’ve accompanied her.

Luna looks over at me. There’s a warning in those green eyes, but how does she expect me not to be upset?

“No, it was fine.”

My lips form a straight line, and my nostrils flare for a second. “You made your flight?”

“Yes,” Luna answers, looking like she wants to drop the whole conversation.

Maya’s and Hazel’s eyes volley back and forth between us. There’s something she’s not telling me.

“You’re right,” I tell Hazel, my jaw tight. “The guy sounds like an asshole.”

Luna’s looking at me. I don’t look back. How can I? I hate thinking of something happening to her there when she should’ve been at my house. No wonder she’s hesitant.

My gaze stays on Maya and Hazel. The corners of my mouth turn down in anger, and my shoulders are tense, even when I try to relax them.

“Can you believe that after all that, Luna was still into him?” Hazel cries, shaking her head in disbelief. “*OMG, he’s so hot!*” she adds, her voice nasally.

Even while annoyed, Luna’s cheeks turn pink. “I didn’t—”

“You didn’t have to say it.” Hazel smirks. “It was so obvious.”

“It kinda was,” Maya adds. “Sorry.”

“You practically had little hearts in your eyes.” Hazel continues with her teasing, and Maya tries to hide her smile. Luna’s cheeks burn brighter. “And you kept blushing and sighing all over the place when you mentioned anything about him.” Hazel makes gagging noises. “It was super gross—”

“It was cute,” Maya interjects.

Luna doesn’t look at me, but I’m certain she can feel my eyes on her. I wish we were alone in her room. I’d apologize and promise to make it up to her.

“You know, now that I think about it, you never gave us a name ...”

“And I’m not going to,” Luna states flatly.

I’m grinning. Can’t help it. Luna looks simultaneously miffed and adorably embarrassed.

“Have you talked to him?” Maya asks the question, and everyone blinks at her.

“She’d better not have!” Hazel cries, outraged. “Why do you want her back with that loser from New York when there’re guys here in London who aren’t assholes? Or such big assholes? Like Hank here,” Hazel finishes by pointing at me.

“Thanks?” I say, not sure it’s meant as a compliment.

“Hazel, stop,” Luna warns.

“What, you’re gonna tell me you don’t like Hank the Tank?”

I laugh at the unexpected nickname.

Unfazed, Hazel continues, “Everyone on the production crew is half in love with him already.”

Are they?

Hazel turns to me. “You knew that, right?”

“I was not aware of that, no,” I reply.

“Well, you know now.” She laughs without shame. “Anyway, Luna Wuna, I figure you’d be all in love with him

too.”

Luna’s barely able to maintain her stoic expression. I’m guessing it’s only because she’s so annoyed that she doesn’t show how embarrassed she is. But then ... then she makes the mistake of looking over at me. I’m smiling so big, trying to hide it, and failing.

“Okay, that’s it!” Luna mutters, face flooding with heat. “I’m leaving. Hope you all have a good night.”

Luna takes the few steps required to reach the door, but it won’t open. She tugs on it, shaking it, then tries the key card again. Nothing.

“Luna?” Maya whispers.

Pissed off, Luna glances at Maya over her shoulder.

“That’s not your room.”

Not quite mortified, but close, Luna looks at the number and curses silently. Turns out, her room is one door over.

Not bothering to look back at any of us standing behind her with Hazel cackling, Luna opens the door to her room without further incident. Hazel runs over to stop her from going inside.

“C’mon, bro. You know I’m just fucking with you. Making you and Yaya blush is so much fun. Don’t be grumpy, okay?”

“I’m not,” Luna sighs. “I’m just tired.”

“Be tired later. We’re going out, remember? Even Hank the Tank is coming, right?”

“I’ll go if Luna goes,” I reply, smirking at green eyes that look ready to kill me.

“See, we’re all friends here. So, change out of those tiny shorts—what the fuck are you even wearing? Never mind. You should probably change too,” she tells me. “Loungewear isn’t cute on London streets.”

“You think Tadashi will give us a ride?”

“If we pay for his food, he will,” Hazel tells Maya, then yells after me, “Meet us in the lobby in thirty!”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ride



HENRY

“HURRY UP. WE GOTTA GO!” TADASHI YELLS OUT THE CAR window.

I shake my head. He’s the one who showed up almost an hour late.

“Don’t rush them, mate. It’s raining,” I tell him. The last thing I want is Luna or her friends taking a tumble on the wet pavement.

When I look back outside, Luna’s rounding the car, her expression serious. The rear windows are tinted so she doesn’t know I’m in here yet. I sent her a text once I reached my room.

Henry: sure it’s all right if I join?

Moon Goddess: Of course. Our night was cut short. Besides, it’s probably a good idea to be with a lot of people anyway.

Henry: you think that’ll keep me away?

Moon Goddess: It will.

Henry: that sounds like a challenge

We agreed to keep this a secret. Might’ve been a mistake, that. I am a private person. Given my job, it works in my favor. But keeping things hidden—absolutely no one knowing—that’s different. Don’t think it’s for me. Won’t be able to touch her like I want. Kiss her whenever I want. Show her how I feel. It’ll drive me mad.

Luna’s arguing with Tadashi. It’s bants. Cursing in Spanish. Teasing each other. Not sure I like it.

“Not happening.” Luna shakes her head when he suggests she be the designated driver. She told me it’s too weird, driving on the wrong side of the road.

“How was dinner with the big boss?” Tadashi asks as Luna opens the door.

Before she can answer, Patrick mentions he’s convinced Dr. Harris is actually Michonne.

“Dude, same,” Luna agrees. “They’re both fucking badass.”

I’m grinning because I know this already too. Over texts while her friends got ready, Luna mentioned that dinner a few nights ago went well. All that was missing was Dr. Harris’s katana.

As Luna’s climbing into the back seat, she sees me. The change is instant. Her eyes sparkle, and she unleashes that gorgeous smile on me. Fuck, she’s beautiful.

Outside, Maya and Hazel run toward us. The soft drizzle has turned to full-on rainfall. With Luna there, I hardly notice them or it. I’m dying to touch her. Hold her close. Kiss those pouty lips.

“You know Patrick, right?” Tadashi says from the front seat.

Green eyes linger on me, and then she schools her expression. “Hey, Patrick. How are you?”

Patrick waves at her. He’s half of the hair and makeup department. Specializes in makeup. Sometimes helps with hair too.

“And you remember Henry?” Tadashi continues.

“Yeah, sure.” One corner of her lips quirks up. Damn, she’s cute. Luna slides closer. “Hi.” Her fingers graze mine.

I hold on to them. “Hey.”

Don’t know how Luna expects me to keep this between us. My other hand is aching to reach for her too. She could easily put me out of my misery by coming closer.

“Luna Wuna, scoot!” Hazel barks.

“Please hurry!” I hear Maya cry from outside. “My shoes are getting wet!”

“No one else is gonna fit in here,” Luna announces to the car.

“Why the fuck not?” Hazel growls, peeking inside. “Ah, Hank the Tank.” An amused smirk appears on Hazel’s face. “Luna, just sit on him.”

Always knew I liked her.

A soft pink color blooms on Luna’s cheeks. “I’m not gonna sit on him!” she snaps.

“I don’t mind,” I assure her.

I’m certain she can hear the eagerness in my voice. Her eyes find mine and stay there. The half smile on her face is fighting to break free.

“Luna, can I get inside, please?”

“Bro, scoot over already!”

“We’re gonna be late!”

Sorry, Luna mouths as she backs into me.

She’s wearing a skirt. I didn’t realize. The idea of having her sit on my lap in that outfit just became two times hotter and four times more torturous.

“Thank you,” Maya whispers. She shuts the door, then dries her glasses. “If I knew it was supposed to rain, I would’ve worn contacts.”

“It always rains,” someone reminds her.

Ignoring everyone, Tadashi hits the gas. “Buckle up, people!”

The acceleration causes Luna to fall back into me.

I lean in, my lips near her temple. “Have I told you, you look really cute when you’re blushing?”

I see her take a deep breath, but Luna doesn’t make a reply.

It’s quiet for a bit. Only the muffled sounds of rainfall and cars rushing by surround us. That is, until Tadashi asks if anyone’s going to Ava’s party on Friday. Patrick reminds him

it's considered mandatory for cast and crew alike even if it's never been explicitly stated.

It's the one time every single person working on a movie directed by Ava Nozawa will be in one place at the same time. Other guests are invited as well. Not only industry types, but all sorts. Designers, musicians, influencers, models, athletes. There's only one rule—no phones.

Everyone starts talking at once. They're discussing the theme. Potential outfits. Potential dates.

I hardly listen. Luna has my entire focus. She surprises me by slipping her fingers between mine. We hold hands discreetly while I look out the window and she's on her phone. When she places my hand on her thigh, I nearly choke on air. Although I maintain an outwardly serene expression, inside, I'm burning up. I slide my thumb along her thigh, enjoying the smoothness of her skin.

Luna coughs to clear her throat. "Ava's party is this Friday?"

Hazel assures her they have time to find her something to wear. "We'll ask Natalia if she has any fits you can borrow."

"The costume designer?" I wonder.

Hazel levels a glare my way. "She's giving personal stylist a go."

"That pink crochet dress she picked for Luna," Maya whispers, "I want one."

Natalia's got a good eye then. Loved that dress on Luna. Wonder if she has an open spot on her clients' list. I make a mental note to reach out. Now, I slide my hand up Luna's lower back, and she shivers.

Maya notices. "You okay?"

Hazel replies before Luna can, "Ask Hank since she's squishing him."

"I am not!" Luna rolls her eyes, but seems to reconsider and turns to me. "Am I?"

I chuckle. “No, you’re not squishing me.”

She’s sat on me before. During private moments we both enjoyed.

“Feel free to lean back,” I say, my hands on her waist. I lift her so easily and place her fully on my lap.

The effect is immediate. Her body’s warmth, her soft curves. I feel alert and relaxed at the same time. Luna must as well. Without further resistance, she sinks into me. Even exhales loud enough for Hazel to smirk up at her.

“Sorry.” Luna shifts in place, her cheeks burning red. “Don’t wanna hurt you.”

“You won’t hurt me. You’re tiny,” I assure her.

She narrows her eyes at me. “I am not tiny,” she argues; however, she stays on my lap.

When she shifts, my breath lodges in my throat since my body begins reacting to hers.

Luna moves a bit more and makes the situation better and worse. Better because I get more of her. Worse because I’m about to get hard in my pants—enough for her to feel me. Enough for her to realize what’s happening. I can picture her panicking. Trying to move away. Blushing harder.

None of that happens.

Instead, I see her lips curve into a half grin. Then, Luna shifts again. On purpose that time. She swirls her hips a fraction. To tease me—no, to torture me. She smirks, and her eyes glow with interest. The intense look sends chills down my spine and blood rushing to one place in particular.

Shit, definitely getting hard. Breathing hard too. Of course, Luna’s aware of this.

“You sure you’re okay?” she asks me, the picture of innocence.

When she licks her lips, I nearly groan. She knows I’m not okay.

“Yep,” I croak. Can’t wait to get her alone. “All good.”



We arrive at the restaurant fairly quickly despite the rain. It's only a few years old, but I've been coming here with my family since it opened. I stop by every time I'm in London. It's the only place my brothers and I all agree on.

"Everything is amazing," I tell them as we get in line, but I'm talking to Luna. This is the spot I was planning on for our first dinner out. "We'll order one of each, so you can try it all."

"What's your favorite?" she asks me.

"The goat is delicious, though I'm not certain it's still on the menu. But their ekuru? I can live on that!"

I know I sound excited—can't help it. Luna'll try food I grew up eating. Some part of me is desperate for her to like it. Same way I want her to feel about me, I suppose.

"I've never had ekuru," she admits.

"It's good," I assure her. Mum makes it with blended, peeled beans, scooped into banana leaves, then steamed. "Some of the best stuff comes from West Africa."

"Is that where your family's from?" Maya asks.

Right, not alone.

I nod. "Mum's from Nigeria. Dad was born in London, but his family came from Jamaica."

"Have you been?" Luna smiles knowingly.

I smile too. She still remembers our conversation from New York. "About once a year."

I can feel everyone looking between us. We need to work on our subtlety if she wants to keep this a secret.

"I grew up around the corner," I say to call attention away from us.

"Bit dodgy, isn't it?" Hazel asks.

“Be nice,” I hear Maya whisper behind her.

“Heard Brixton’s kinda rough.” Patrick’s voice cracks.

“It can be,” I agree. “It’s cleaned up a bit. Still fun though. And loud too.”

We move up in the line. The place is crowded. Understandably so. Like I said, the food is incredible.

Hazel suggests I have my people get us a table faster. “My people” consists of my brother Trevor, who’s my publicist; Michelle, my best friend since year ten, who’s also my agent; and Charlie, my social media manager. They can make it happen it, but I’d rather not have to ask.

After five minutes, Patrick is agreeing with Hazel.

Luna shuts them both down. “Leave him alone. You guys need to be patient.”

One mutters, and the other flips her off, but neither says anything more about it after that. I wink my thanks, and her cheeks turn the prettiest shade of pink.

When we’re seated at a round table, Luna’s directly across from me. I do my best to keep my gaze from wandering over to her, but it’s impossible. Neither of us wants to be obvious. She’s better at it than I am.

Tadashi notices. Asks me what I have going on with her. I don’t want to lie to him, but I might have to. Luckily for me, Patrick distracts Tadashi and gives me the opportunity to text Luna.

Henry: Tadashi’s onto us!

Moon Goddess: Because you keep looking at me!

Henry: have you seen you?? course I’m looking at you

When I glance up, Luna’s smiling at her phone.

My own phone rings then. I excuse myself and walk outside. When I return, the food has arrived. It becomes clear fairly quickly that everyone loves it. We’re all too busy eating to bother talking or texting.



After dinner, we end up at Tadashi's new flat in Soho. He mentions the two rooms available for rent. If I wasn't in the process of getting my own place, I'd take one of them.

In no time, there are more people and lots of alcohol. Loud music fills every space. Might be why I haven't been able to get Luna alone. Still, throughout the night, we find tiny moments to make it more bearable. Light touches here, stealing glances there ...

My fingers graze hers as we cross paths in the kitchen. Her hand slides down my arm as she steps out into the balcony. But she ups the ante when she brushes her ass against my crotch in a crowded spot at the end of the hallway.

Sorry, she mouths. Doesn't look sorry though, not if that sly smirk is any indication.

Fact is, we're slowly driving each other mad. So, when we happen to meet outside the bathroom with no one else in the narrow hallway, the inevitable happens.

"Hey."

My stomach is in knots—the good kind though. Luna smiles at me, those adorable dimples making an appearance. She seems to have lost her sweater somewhere in the last fifteen minutes. The black halter top she's wearing with a plunging neckline is cut low enough that her breasts are more distracting than usual.

"Hey."

She's smirking. "Are you talking to me or my boobs?"

"Both." I grin, shoving my hands in my pockets to help me stay in control.

Blood drums in my ears when she steps closer. Her hips are doing that hypnotizing thing they do, swaying side to side

in slow motion, and a lazy smile spreads across my face as I watch her.

All night, I've been on my best behavior, fighting the undeniable pull toward her. Don't know how much longer it'll last.

When Luna chews on her bottom lip, her gaze gleaming, traveling down the length of my body, I feel heat rush all over. That's one thing—her eyes let me know how much she wants me.

We seem to have the same thought, looking down the hall to make sure no one's coming. Satisfied that it's just the two of us, Luna begins to close the distance between us. I grab that tiny waist of hers and pull her to me the rest of the way until I feel her breasts against my chest.

We haven't done anything yet, but we're both breathing heavily already. Luna holds my face in her hands, wets her lips, and goes on her toes to kiss me. She stops. Her breaths caressing my lips.

“You having a good time?”

“I am now.”

We stay there a bit, lingering, reveling in this intimate space only we share. My eyes fall shut when her cheek brushes mine. It's all so clear to me then. I want this all the time. I don't want to have to sneak off to be with her.

“Luna, I can't do this.”

Smile fading, she pulls away. “Do what?”

“Pretend I don't want you.” I draw her to me again, both arms around her waist.

“You don't have to pretend.”

Our gazes lock.

“I do out there.”

“We're not out there right now,” she reminds me.

And she's right. We can figure that out later. She's here; we're here. With no one around, I slide one hand up to the back of her neck and guide her mouth toward mine.

It's a heated kiss, all lips and tongue and lust, ravenous and searing.

"Me encanta el sabor de tus labios," I whisper, and Luna smiles at me as I suck on her bottom lip.

"You know Spanish too?" she breathes, awe in her voice.

"Un poquito," I wink. She mentioned her grandma only spoke Spanish, so I starting brushing up on it back in New York.

"What can't you do?"

"Be patient," I reply, claiming those pouty lips.

I'm feeling greedy. Possessive. Being away from her was brutal.

"Next time, stay with me," I murmur, running my hands along her body, caressing her curves, loving how she feels in my arms. Fuck, I missed her. It's been almost painful, having her within reach, but not being able to do anything about it. To be close enough to inhale her sweet scent and not be able to touch her has been an absolute torment.

"Less talking," she suggests, sounding serious, but that sexy twist to her lips lets me know she's teasing.

I reply with a snort. "More kissing?"

Satisfied with my answer, she pulls my face toward hers again. And Luna, she kisses me like she needs it. Needs me. More than air, more than her next breath.

When I skate my hands up her body to cup the fullness of her breasts, she lets out a breathy moan, and her head falls back, exposing her throat. I accept the invitation to trail kisses down her neck until I'm licking and sucking hard enough to leave a mark.

By this time, her hands have disappeared under my shirt to glide up my stomach. It feels like a dream, finally able to

touch and feel and enjoy each other. We should find a room.

Luna presses soft kisses from my jaw to my Adam's apple. When her tongue darts out to taste my skin, I groan louder than I should.

“Shh,” she whispers, grinning with satisfaction, rubbing my hardening cock with her palms. As if that wasn't torture enough, Luna decides to spin in place, her ass replacing her hands.

Damn. I groan louder as I lean into her.

“A room,” I murmur before biting the side of her neck, then licking it smooth.

Luna gasps, arching into me, her hands on the wall for support.

Pressing wet kisses along her soft skin, I grab her hips and grind into her. I'm so hard in my pants that I'm ready to lose all my clothes. And rip hers off too.

But the sensuous moment is cut short. As I'm inching her skirt up with one hand and opening a door with the other, we hear someone's heavy footsteps approaching. In one fluid motion, Luna straightens her clothes and turns to face the end of the hall, using her body to shield me as I adjust my pants. The last person I expect to see in Tadashi's home rounds the corner to glare at us.

Fucking Trevor.



LUNA

I'm trying not to stare, but I might be staring. How can I not though? Henry looks so good. He's standing there, all broad shoulders and narrow waist and strong thighs. Shit, he just caught me staring. And now, he winks at me.

Heat rushes to my face. And other places too.

When the woman next to him touches his arm, an unwanted surge of jealousy fills my entire being. She needs to keep her fucking hands to herself.

“Jealous?”

I narrow my eyes at Hazel. Of course she caught me ogling Henry.

“No.” I'm lying. “Just curious.” That part's true.

“That's funny.” Hazel smiles wider. “Hank was ‘just curious’ about that guy you were talking to earlier.”

Don't blush, Luna. Don't blush.

“Not everyone can be you and know everyone,” I grumble to inflate her ego a bit and deflect as well.

Lucky for me, Maya joins us then. Unlucky for me, she's drunk. And she handles her alcohol even worse than I do.

“What song is this?” Maya asks, slurring her words.

We've been taking turns as DJ since the actual DJ got in a fight with his boyfriend and left. Natalia only played '80s New Wave. Tadashi had his own mix of techno. What am I playing? Anything and everything by Shakira, of course. And my latest fave—Becky G.

When I tell Maya, she throws her arms around me. “I love it!” she cries.

Everyone looks our way. Including Henry; his brother Trevor, who nearly walked in on us making out in the hallway;

and the tall, statuesque Black woman in an all-white suit, talking with them.

Hazel sniffs Maya's drink and takes it away. "How many of those have you had?"

"Lost count." Maya giggles until she notices Henry with that beautiful woman. "La concha de tu madre, is that—"

"Yep."

"Zoe Hathaway?" Maya whispers, her eyes wide.

Hazel nods, impressed. "Zoe Hathaway."

If Maya's cursing and Hazel has stars in her eyes ...

"Who's Zoe Hathaway?" I risk asking.

Maya giggles again. "You really don't know anything about movies, do you?" She hiccups and continues as if she didn't almost just fall off the couch. "You know those superhero movies everyone's into?"

I nod.

"Zoe Hathaway makes those superhero movies."

"Oh."

"Yeah."

"What's she doing here?" I wonder.

"Probably heard Henry was here," Maya suggests as she sinks into the couch. She's starting to look a little green.

"I used to think it was kinda cute how you didn't know anything," Hazel mutters, jumping over the back of the couch to sit next to Maya. "Like a lost puppy or something."

"Thanks," I drone.

"Bro, you need to know this stuff, or you're gonna embarrass yourself."

On that last piece of surprisingly sensible advice, Maya vomits.

"Fuck me, Yaya! That stinks!"



Too drunk to drive us, Tadashi helps us get Maya into his car. Then, he hands me his keys. I don't wanna drive. At least it's not raining anymore.

“You fucking Hank?”

I should pull over, get out of this weird AF car, and walk the rest of the way to the hotel. Then, I won't have to listen to Hazel's theories about me and Henry.

“No, I'm not,” I answer. Not because I don't want to, but because the universe is against me.

Tonight, we were supposed to go back to his room. His brother had other ideas, showing up, unannounced, with Zoe Hathaway. All three are off having drinks in Notting Hill, so it'll just be me alone in my room, with my thoughts of Henry and my vibrator.

“You obviously want to,” Hazel insists.

No shit.

“Is he the 007 you were texting earlier?” she asks at the same time Maya snores in the back seat. “He gives off those James Bond vibes for sure.”

That he does. I mean, he is tall, unbelievably handsome, has that sexy British accent, and would kill it in a tux.

“When did you go through my phone?” I ask, sounding bored, but I'm actually embarrassed that she knows I refer to Henry as 007.

Hazel looks scandalized. “I don't go through people's phones! I did peek over your shoulder though.”

My lips are a straight line, and I shake my head.

“Bro, you love me.” Hazel gives me her big, toothy grin from the passenger seat. “By the way, about Friday, Natalia can help. Says she's got the perfect dress you can borrow.”

I grunt my thanks because driving on the wrong side of the road gives me a headache.

“So, you going with Hank?”

That makes me laugh. We already agreed to meet there. It’ll be easier with the way the paparazzis been hounding him lately. That’s what he mentioned earlier.

“No, why would I?” I ask her.

She turns the radio down. “You’re really gonna sit there and pretend you don’t see how he looks at you?”

At the red light, I stop and glare at Hazel. “How does he look at me?”

Her shit-eating grin makes me regret asking the question. “Same way you look at him.”

“If you say so,” I sigh, stepping on the gas when the light changes.

“Well, since you’re pretending not to give a shit, I’ll invite him to join us on Friday.”

I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from smiling. Maybe all of us going together will end up being a good thing.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

kensington



LUNA

THE HOTEL LOBBY IS NOWHERE NEAR AS CROWDED AS IT WAS last Friday night. Then, it was standing room only. Right now, there's a handful of people scattered around. Which might be why the instant I step into the lobby, I spot him. I haven't seen him in a while. He's been traveling. Back to New York and then Paris.

We've talked every night though. The first time he FaceTimed me I almost didn't answer—I was so freaking tense and anxious. But Henry was so funny and sweet, he put me at ease. Felt like I was talking to my oldest friend.

Henry's sitting in an Edwardian armchair off to the side in the middle of a very animated conversation with his brother and cousin. His face is so expressive. I smile to myself while he's gesticulating wildly.

I want to stand here a bit longer, watching him, enjoying how happy and carefree he seems to be. And it isn't simply because he's so strikingly handsome, like he stepped out of a dream, wearing a dark navy suit with a dress shirt in the same shade. There's just something about a man who's confident, but not conceited. It's incredibly sexy.

As we approach, Henry happens to glance up, and whatever he was about to say is forgotten for the moment. A slow smile spreads across his face, and his eyes light up like stars.

The two seated near him follow his line of sight. They exchange a look. One's worried; the other looks amused.

Charlie shoves her cousin's shoulder lightly to get him to stop staring. Either Henry doesn't hear or he ignores her, standing to adjust his coat. He bumps his knee on the side table and apologizes to the furniture before walking over.

"You clean up nice, Hank," Hazel says, typing something into her phone.

“I was about to say the same thing,” he replies, but his eyes only leave mine to travel down my body.

I’m in the dress Natalia loaned me, a one-shoulder, calf-length lavender chiffon. He makes me feel like there’s no one else around. And it’s not just because he looks good. Like *holy shit* good. Gorgeous and dreamy and sexy are all accurate ways to describe him and yet completely inaccurate because he’s so much more than that. But when I look at him, my heart takes flight, and everything seems possible.

“Hi, Henry.” Maya waves, drawing his attention and saving us both from ourselves.

“Hey,” he says, remembering where we are. “Right, manners.”

“He keeps forgetting them.” Charlie smirks, looking at me. “Wonder why, that?”

“Hope you don’t mind, but they wanted to tag along,” Henry interrupts his cousin before she makes another attempt to embarrass him. “Hazel Park, Maya Acosta, Luna Valenzuela, this is my very annoying baby cousin Charlotte Flint.”

“Baby cousin? I’m nineteen!” she groans.

“And this guy, who dropped in from the 1920s, is my brother Trevor.”

“Why you hating?” Trevor asks, adjusting his dark gray fedora and dusting off imaginary lint from his shoulder.

“His bougie ass wants to be the only one looking good,” Charlie teases.

“I’m Henry’s older brother,” Trevor corrects.

“Not sure that matters”—Henry grins to annoy him—“since I’m taller.”

“Barely.”

“No, Hank’s definitely taller,” Hazel chimes in, assessing their height with one eye closed.

“Always liked you.” Henry winks. Then, he turns back to his family members. “Guys, these extremely talented ladies wrote *De East LA*.”

“Book.” Hazel waves her hand at me.

“Screenplay,” Maya adds, pointing between herself and Hazel.

Trevor simply nods at us. Charlie comes over to hug each one. She looks so pretty in a long-sleeved ivory romper with gold high heels. Her naturally curly hair is in a puffy Afro.

When she hugs me, she asks, “Why is Henry introducing us again?”

“We’re keeping things between us,” I whisper back. “For now.”

She arches an eyebrow at me, but doesn’t say anything else. Behind her, Maya suggests we take two cabs. If she’s rushing us, must be because she’s hungry.

“I have my car,” Trevor states.

“Trev, hon, it seats four.” Charlie circles around to pat his arm.

He shrugs off her hand. “Five actually.”

“I know we just met”—Hazel smirks—“so I’m not gonna call you any names yet, but there’s six of us. Unless Luna’s riding Hank again? His lap, I mean,” she amends, looking between us, hoping we give something away.

“What is wrong with you?” I hiss, too annoyed to care than I’m blushing.

“Two cabs it is,” Trevor declares.

Hazel and Trevor walk ahead, arguing over the potential seating arrangements. Charlie purposely asks Maya about her outfit because she loves fashion and is genuinely interested, especially about the necklace, but also to give Henry and me a couple of minutes alone. I know this because as she hooks her arm around Maya’s, she winks at us.

Henry and I trail behind. His arm brushes past mine as we walk. I'm so nervous. Excited too.

When his hand finds the small of my back, he leans in to whisper, "You look divine."

The low rumble of his voice sends warm shivers racing through me.

"So do you," I whisper back, smiling up at him. That same feverish excitement bubbles up every time he's with me. "By the way, I listened to your playlist."

Chuckling, he runs his hands through his hair. "It's your playlist." He grins. "I made it for you. So, what'd you think?"

I still can't believe he did that. A freaking playlist! Said he started it on the plane after OKC and finished it in New York, even though I left.

"I really like it."

He smiles. "Do you?"

I nod. It's fun and playful and romantic. Kind of like the cute, boyish smile he's giving me.

"Only one song kinda threw me," I admit.

His laughter rings between us. "Which one?"

"Pitbull. 'I Know You Want Me'?"

Henry chuckles, and I just watch him, totally infatuated. I want to shower him with kisses for making me a playlist. No one's made me a playlist before.

"What do you want me to say? It fits," he smiles.

Ahead of us, Charlie goes through the revolving doors. Maya follows. A few people exit before we reach them. We walk into the small space together, and my body tingles everywhere it almost touches his.

"It does fit," I agree, fighting the heat rushing up to my face.

Henry chuckles again.

"What?" I ask him.

“I’m feeling nervous,” he admits with another laugh. “Like I’m fifteen again or something.”

I know exactly what he means.

A quiet breath escapes past my lips when his hand reaches for mine. The contact is brief, tender, intensifying with each passing second. Fingers slide together slowly, softly, warm skin against warm skin. When his fingers slip between mine, he grins down at me, and I feel like I’m floating.

That’s when he sees them. Of course he sees them before I do—I’m not looking for them. Any other time, Henry would have noticed them before he stepped into the revolving doors, but he was too focused on me. He’ll admit this later.

“I’m sorry,” Henry murmurs now, tearing his hand from mine, and then he’s gone.



I’m so startled. There has to be at least thirty—forty?—cameras on Henry as he steps out of the hotel. Luckily, my head was turned to the side, which means even if anyone took a picture of me near him, they didn’t capture my reaction. Recovering quickly, I head straight toward Hazel and Maya.

“Go with your friends. I’ll meet you at Ava’s,” Henry whispered before the outside air hit us. He disappeared with his brother and cousin into a sea of flashing cameras.

“They’re so fucking annoying,” Hazel growls through barely parted lips, but her expression is serene.

Maya speaks in a low whisper. “They always want a reaction. Don’t let them know they bother you,” she adds quietly, and then her face is a mask of indifference.

I exhale through my nose and walk alongside Maya until we reach the cab. I’m still seeing spots from a few flashes aimed at us, but the majority of the people armed with cameras follow after Henry’s car.

Inside the safety of our own cab, I turn, searching the crowd for him. Cameras flash again, blinding us momentarily. Maya taps my foot gently with her own to get my attention.

“Mira hacia adelante,” she whispers behind her hand.

I face forward until we drive away from the hotel and into the crowded London streets. The two cars that were following us lose interest after a few blocks, leaving us alone.

“What in the actual fuck was that?!”

For once, I completely agree with Hazel.

The corners of Maya’s lips are curved down. “I hope they’re not following Henry.”

“Of course they are!” Hazel snaps. “Fuck.”

“Why are they following him?” I ask Maya. Hazel’s on her phone.

“Someone must have seen Hank in the lobby and called them.”

I have so many questions. A part of me feels lost, the other like an idiot, and a third was actually frightened. Hazel looks like she’s gonna murder someone any second, so I keep my inquiries to myself for now. Instead, I text Henry.

Luna: Are you ok? Somewhere safe?

007: safe and wishing you were here

007: sorry I couldn’t bring you with me. would’ve been worse for you. did they follow your cab?

Luna: Only a few streets.

007: good. we’ll be running late, headed to a club first

“No te preocupes,” Maya offers me a gentle smile and squeezes my hand. “You did good. Y el va a estar bien también.”

“Please, not right now,” Hazel mutters, massaging the bridge of her nose. “Inglés, por favor.”

Maya and I exchange amused grins and continue the rest of our conversation in English.

007: haven't lost them

007: paps suck

007: save me a dance

By the time we reach our destination, Maya's shown me pictures of all six of us leaving The Savoy, which have already been posted online. Some sites are wondering who Henry is dating. There are many theories, even Vegas odds. Others assure their readers he's still very much single. And yet there're a few that claim he's secretly dating one of two of his current costars, and some say he's dating both simultaneously.

Hazel complains about the idiocy online as we step out of the cab. "I hate the motherfucking paps," she grumbles.

Maya nods.

"So, these online tabloids can say anything they want about him?" I'm trying to process what his life might be like, and I can't even fathom it.

"Almost. And anything they want about you, me, Hazel, anyone. It's the way they present their—quote, unquote—'story.'"

"It's believed ..." Hazel deepens her voice to sound like an old-time newscaster. "There's speculation ..." She rolls her eyes dramatically. "Or they'll simply retract a story days later, but by then, the damage is done. They're garbage. All they want is clicks—doesn't matter how they get them."

"I hate to say it, but these weren't that bad," Maya sighs. "They just took pictures."

"Yeah, there're assholes out there who yell some fucked-up shit or ask stupid-ass questions, just to get your reaction. Then, they sell that picture of you with a furious face or a dumbass confused look to the highest bidder. It sucks."



We enter through the huge black front double doors and walk past the large entrance room. There's a giant portrait of Ava on a wall.

"Have you been here before?" I ask.

Maya shakes her head. "But a lot of these houses have a similar layout."

I nod like it's no big deal. It is a big deal. Dr. Harris's house was the most beautiful house I'd ever physically been in, but Ava's house is insane, too! There're no giant windows letting in the setting sunlight, and the beach and ocean aren't right outside the back door, but this house is impressive in other ways.

"I read up on it," Maya whispers. "It's four stories high, plus a basement and subbasement."

She goes on and on about the bedrooms and bathrooms, all ten of them. The kitchens—yes, plural—a gym, wine cellar, and library, which I would love to see. Maya suggests we ask Ava the first chance we get.

"Hazel, do you think—where'd she go?"

Even though she was right next to us, she's gone now. Maya and I continue past a few stragglers in the hallway and end up in one of the kitchens, which is packed. There, Maya gets stopped by an old boyfriend. I don't know if that's the boyfriend we were talking about before or a different one. I'll ask later.

When Maya assures me she actually wants to stay with him to catch up, I leave her to it. Then, I head out to the garden by myself.

The spacious patio area has large trees along the perimeter that provide privacy from the surrounding homes. The rest looks like it's straight out of a fairy tale! Lovely flowers and vines and whimsical string lights create the most enchanting garden. There's an above-ground, cloud-shaped swimming pool in the middle, a maze-like space to the northeast corner, lots of seating areas, and a swing set. People are eating straight out of the barbecue grill on the patio.

I spot Hazel near the pool, talking with Natalia and Ruby, who has her hair styled differently. Her usually loose, dark hair is in a thick braid.

Near the edge of the patio, an empty seating area catches my eye. There's a small firepit with a white love seat across from it and two cushioned chairs on either side. The flowers and soft lighting surrounding it make the space look almost magical.

I grab my phone to take a picture to show Henry. As soon as I do, Ava appears seemingly out of nowhere.

"Careful with that," Ava says as she walks past me into the garden. The movie's director is wearing a black mask with sparkly gemstones, which covers the lower half of her face, probably so no one gets her sick. "It'll get you in a lot of trouble."

Confused by what she means, I watch as Ava descends the stairs down onto the plush green grass.

"Social media embargo."

Startled, I turn around. "I'm sorry?"

"No need to apologize," a woman tells me. I see the jasmine buds in her hair as she steps closer. "I am Dayani Gamage."

"Luna Valenzuela."

"The author. Hello. Tonight, I am shadowing Ava. I will be taking photographs for her upcoming book," Dayani explains, smiling like she has a secret. "I have taken yours tonight already."

"Have you?"

"Yes. Upon your entry."

I think back, but can't recall seeing anyone with a camera.

"You and your friend were on the first floor, and I, on the third. You both looked like flower petals blowing in through the front doors."

“Can I see the picture?” I ask, eyeing the camera Dayani holds with both hands.

“Yes, of course,” she replies. “When the book debuts. Be aware: I will be taking many more photographs tonight. If you see me, pretend I am not there.” She winks, then glides away.

When I turn in the direction of the empty, magical seating area, it’s full of people.



Two hours pass, and I’ve given up on Henry showing up. I haven’t heard from him, but it hasn’t been all bad. I’ve hardly had time to be bored with everything going on.

I escaped to the library with Maya, played a bad game of pool with Ruby, and had the designer of the dress I’d borrowed tell me the shoes I was wearing were all wrong.

Since it’s past midnight, the music is turned down, and the lights are dim. After eating my weight in pastries and fruit, I return to the garden, happy to discover the cozy seating area I’ve been eyeing all night is free.

Rushing over before anyone steals it again, I claim it for myself. Incredibly comfy, this is the perfect spot to read a book.

“Seems we had the same idea.”

My eyes travel to the owner of that British accent.

“Did we?” I ask, taking in his appearance.

He’s tall with ashy-blond hair and blue eyes, wearing all black. Black suit, black shirt, black tie. The outfit reminds me a little of Henry’s. Mostly because he was in all navy, and I wonder if every guy is monochrome tonight.

“I’ve been dying to sit here, but to no avail.”

“Ah,” is all I bother to say. I’m tired and not in the mood to converse.

“Mind if I join you?” He tries again.

I’d rather be alone. Still, since I’m here with friends, I’d hate to make them look bad because of my antisocial tendencies.

“Those seats are free.”

The man takes one of the side chairs. Good. I was not about to move from the middle of the love seat. Watching me, he takes a sip of whatever he’s drinking.

“American?” he asks.

“Yes.”

“Actress?”

I make a face. “No. Are you? An actor, I mean.”

He laughs. Sounds forced. When he smiles, he looks like someone who’s been told he’s good-looking his whole life and believes it without a doubt.

“I’m Oliver Ford,” he says, taking another small sip.

I nod, having no idea who Oliver Ford is. His name doesn’t ring any bells, but he’s looking at me like I should know who he is. He seems to be expecting some sort of reaction.

When I don’t give him one, his eyebrows narrow just a fraction. Although he’s starting to look upset, I don’t care enough to ask him to elaborate, so we sit at a stalemate.

Those blue eyes stay on me the whole time. I don’t like it.

“Excuse me,” I mutter, standing, tired of sitting there politely and trying to ignore the inappropriate looks he continues to send my way.

I walk behind the back of his chair, but before I can get away, he reaches out and grabs my hand.

WTF?

“Leaving so soon?”

“Yes,” I state simply, trying to yank my hand out of his grip.

“But we’ve only begun to get to know each other.”

Why do all jerks have that same sleazy smile?

“Perhaps you’d like me to invite you to a match?”

He mentions the city, and I recognize it. This asshole plays for Henry’s favorite football club.

“No thanks. I don’t watch soccer,” I mutter in hopes that’ll piss him off enough to let me go.

The last thing I wanna do is cause a scene in the home of someone who’s not quite my employer, but close enough. Besides, if he’s as important as he claims to be, he might be the guest of honor or some shit. Why do famous people have to be such dicks?

Behind me, I think I hear Charlie’s voice. When I try to look over my shoulder, the asshole with the vise grip on my wrist yanks me toward him.

Fuck this.

“Look, dude.” I’m trying to be calm, but he’s pissing me off. “I don’t care who you are or where you play. I’m not interested. Now, let me go.”

The asshole does the opposite of what I ask and grips tighter.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

garden



HENRY

THE MUSIC GROWS LOUDER AS I STEP ONTO THE PATIO. MY steps are light, my heart buzzing with possibility. I scan the garden, the pool, and several areas of secluded seating spread throughout. Finally, I find the one person I'm searching for, doing something I did not expect her to be doing.

Luna is off in a quiet corner, alone with another man. She's standing too close to him while he sits in a chair. Instantly, I recognize him. Oliver Ford. He plays for Manchester and is notorious for dating—and sleeping with—gorgeous women.

My feet freeze. I'm blocking the doorway, stopping the flow of partygoers.

“Told you.” Trevor's speaking. There's no triumph in his tone, as if he's simply stating facts.

Ever the optimist, Charlie tugs on my arm. “Don't listen to him. You know how he is.”

She smiles, not a worry in the world. But I heard it. The doubt. The hesitation.

Luna moves, like she's about to turn around. I wait. She doesn't turn. Instead, she's leaning closer to him now.

“C'mon. Let's say hello, shall we?” Charlie smiles. Tugs on my arm again.

My feet move once more. With every step forward, the apprehension and uncertainty grow.

Trevor's talking shit now. Practically calling her a gold digger. Before he can utter one more word, my hand is on his chest. I give him a look, and whatever else he was going to say, he keeps to himself.

A few more steps, and Trevor's muttering again. Now, he doesn't buy into “the lie” that Luna didn't know who I was when we first met. I ignore him.

Oliver smiles. At Luna. My Luna.

There's a strange sensation growing in the pit of my stomach. A living, breathing monster that starts out small and insignificant but grows bigger and more furious with each step. Rage radiates from it in waves, a burning hatred for that man swirling until it feels like it's going to devour me whole.

Nostrils flaring, I break away from Charlie. Two steps in, my cousin has the sense to stop me.

"What do you think you're doing?" she hisses between clenched teeth. The smile she forces onto her face is in clear conflict with the warning laced through her words.

I don't answer, but the writhing, seething monster rages on.

"I know that look," she snaps. "You're pissed. Why though?"

She cannot believe I'm about to lose it. I'm supposed to be the calm, rational one. She expects this kind of behavior from Trevor or even our younger brother, Rex, but not me.

"Are you seriously going to tell me you're jealous of that boy?"

Yes.

My eyes are narrowed, eyebrows furrowed so that two small creases form between them. Charlie hasn't seen this look since I used to walk her to and from her private school to fight off bullies that picked on her.

"You've done lost the plot." Her expression is harsh, but her voice cracks.

The frightened tone snaps me out of the violent thoughts I was having. None of it is directed at her.

"You're right." I nod, exhaling loudly. "I'm sorry."

"I am, and you'd better be," she practically snarls. "You told me, 'They're just waiting for us to make a mistake. Just one. That's all it takes. We don't get second chances.' Remember that?"

Yes, I recall saying that.

Then, they gloat. Like they knew all along we'd mess up. Words my parents gave us when people started paying attention, when we weren't invisible to them anymore.

"Don't forget, you're not mad at me," Charlie continues. "You're not mad at her either. You're not even mad at that git she's with. Ask yourself why you're so angry." With those parting words, Charlie walks away.

She's right. Mostly. I'm not upset with her or Luna. That prat, however ...

I am furious with myself though for a number of reasons out of my control. Leaving Luna alone for hours, spending time in a club I did not want to be in, dancing with women I had no interest in, pretending I was having a great time. And on top of that, almost handing Luna over to the paparazzi on a silver platter!

Even though I know the paps can't be avoided, even though I accept that their cameras are part of my job and my life, it's unbelievably frustrating at times. Especially tonight, when I expected this night to go differently.

I might not have had much of a choice in the way things have transpired so far, but I can decide how the rest of the night goes. With that thought in mind, I head toward Luna, my brother Trevor flanking me.

As we approach, we overhear Luna sounding both offended and annoyed.

"I told you, I don't give a shit who you are!" She tries to pull away unsuccessfully. "Let go. You're hurting me."

The next moment happens fast. Trevor, too stunned by what he heard, stays frozen on the spot and is not quick enough to stop me from charging after the tosser with his hands on my girl.

Oliver's blue eyes go wide with confusion and fright when I yank him up and out of his chair. I see recognition in his face as I scowl at him. Furious, I have one handful of his black shirt

and tie in my left hand while my right hand is wrapped around his throat, tight.

“Let go of her!” I growl, my voice dangerously low, incensed.

By that time, Oliver has already released Luna’s wrist and is trying to remove the ironclad grip I have around his neck. I don’t let go, not even when he makes a gasping, gurgling sound.

Luna, worried I’ll do something I’ll regret, steps forward.

“Henry,” she pleads, holding the arm I’ve just pulled back for a punch. “Henry, look at me.”

Luna reaches for my face, guiding my gaze toward hers. Her green eyes meet mine for the first time since the hotel lobby.

“He’s not worth it,” she tells me. “Let him go.”

“He didn’t let you go,” I counter, still absolutely livid. I squeeze tighter.

“And that’s why you’re different,” she reminds me.

That seems to do it. I shove Oliver away so hard that he stumbles before falling face-first onto the patio floor. Everyone in the garden is watching.

From opposite ends of the spacious yard, a few people make their way toward us. Among them Maya, Hazel, and Charlie.

“Are you guys okay?”

“Bro, what the fuck?!”

“Henry, what happened?”

But every question is ignored, every bewildered look disregarded. I’m too busy inspecting Luna’s wrist. It already looks swollen, and I’m certain it’s going to bruise.

A different sort of fury flows through my veins at the sight. I nearly lunge at the footballer again. Trev stops me.

“You don’t want to do that,” my brother growls, his voice low in my ear.

He’s wrong. I do. I absolutely fucking do. I shove my brother off me, but Luna moves to stand in my way.

All she does is graze the back of my hand with a featherlight touch of her fingers and whispers my name, but it’s as if she shook me from the inside out. I can’t explain the calm that settles over me when her lips curve up. It’s a tiny smile, but it’s for me, and that quiets the murderous rage thundering inside.

When she pulls her hand away, I hold on.

“Does it hurt?” I ask. The concern in my voice, in my eyes, and in my touch cannot be masked. My fingers are tender and careful against her skin.

“I’m okay, really,” Luna promises, looking up at me like I’m the only person there. “You made it,” she whispers, green eyes mesmerized and mesmerizing.

I can think of nothing else but claiming that pretty mouth.

I’m certain Luna knows the exact moment I’m about to kiss her. My eyes soften, the corners of my lips curl up ever so slightly, and I tilt my head almost imperceptibly to the right. Anyone who’s not standing before us might miss the subtle changes, but she doesn’t. And as much as she might want to kiss me, too, she’s well aware most people are still looking at us, including the dickhead who started all the drama and is dusting himself off.

“Thank you, *Hank*,” she says, emphasizing Hazel’s nickname for me.

It’s strange to hear her call me that, yet it does the trick, snapping me back to the present. Reluctantly, I release her hand, nodding once, grateful for the reminder that we’re not alone. But I’m still hungry for the sight of her, and my gaze devours her countenance.

“You’re all right?”

“I am now,” Luna replies and sounds like she means it.

She still looks surprised that I'm actually there, just seconds ago holding her arm, my fingers moving delicately, skimming over the tender area. A part of me might wish she'd let me kiss her, but the rational part knows I would regret it. Doesn't matter that my only regret would be the trouble it caused her.

"What the fuck is going on?!" Ava demands to know. Then, she snaps at everyone in the garden, "Mind your fucking business. And no phones!"

They all pretend to do as they were told. Those who have their phones out quickly turn them off. No picture or video is worth a lifetime ban from one of Ava Nozawa's parties.

"You"—she points at Trevor—"explain it to me, please." It sounds like a request. It's not.

Trevor looks over to me. I nod. Any other time, he would tell this girl—because she looks way younger than him—to mind her damn business, but he knows who she is.

Ava Nozawa. Incredibly talented, in-demand director. Influential presence in Hollywood and London. And essentially what amounts to my current boss.

Trevor begins, "When we arrived, we overheard her"—he points at Luna with his chin—"tell him"—Oliver gets an index finger next—"that she didn't give a shit who he was and that he was hurting her. My brother stepped in to help."

Ava's glare turns to Oliver. "Explain," she orders.

"Fuck off," Oliver deigns to reply as he adjusts his tie and disappears into the house.

When Ava looks over at two neatly dressed, impressively muscled women standing nearby, they follow after him. Ava turns to Luna next.

"Did he hurt you?" she asks, but the way Luna is cradling her wrist tells her everything she needs to know. "There should not be a next time, but if there is, punch the motherfucker. Got it?"

"Got it."

“You should ice that.” Ava frowns, essentially dismissing her before turning her attention to me.

Maya steps forward to lead Luna into the house. Hazel’s cursing up a storm behind them.



I’m ready to call it a night. No one else is.

Luna’s still inside. Trev’s on the phone with Mich, waiting for the story to break. It hasn’t yet. Charlie’s dancing near the pool.

Dr. Harris’s lawyers assure me Oliver Ford won’t press charges, but hand me their card anyway. Ava gives me one piece of advice: don’t get hit in the face because primary photography starts next week.

When Luna returns outside, there’s soft music playing, and only the full moon and twinkling lights illuminate the garden. She finds me scrolling through my phone, sitting in the quiet corner I saw her in earlier.

“Hi.”

When I look up, my heart literally skips a beat.

“Hey.”

My smirk is a mix of relief and elation. It seems like it’s been years that I’ve seen her. She’s ... utter perfection. Her bright eyes, her warm smile. Then, my gaze travels to her wrist, and my excitement fades.

“How’re you feeling?”

“It’s fine,” she assures me. “One of Ava’s friends—who happens to work in sports medicine—offered to tape it up.”

There’s a tightness around my mouth I can’t get rid of.

“What is it?” she asks, sitting next to me on the love seat.

The space between us feels too wide, like we're an ocean away.

"Nothing."

"It doesn't seem like it's nothing," she replies, inching closer until her thigh touches mine. "Are you upset about something on your phone?"

I shake my head.

"Because that idiot was an idiot?"

My eyes snap up, watching her closely.

"If you're thinking what I think you're thinking, then you have to know that wasn't your fault," Luna begins. "At all. I should've kicked his ass the moment he grabbed my hand."

"Why didn't you?" And that might be the question I cannot answer.

Luna has always seemed so capable. Why didn't she stand up for herself and put the shithead in his place?

Luna shrugs. "Because I was dumb. I didn't want to make a scene ... I didn't want any of you to look bad because of me."

Anger shows on my face.

"Dude, not you too," she mutters. "Hazel already cursed at me in three different languages."

I raise an eyebrow. Luna mistakes it for disbelief.

"She did! In English, Korean, and Spanish, which she's always claiming she doesn't know." Chewing on her bottom lip, she shuffles closer. "Ava said she'd give me a lifetime ban if I ever let anything like that happen in her house again."

"Good."

Our eyes meet for a long time. Luna looks away first.

"How's your wrist, really?"

"It only hurts when I move it." She smirks, bumping my shoulder with hers.

I realize she's trying to lighten the mood. Truth is, she doesn't have to try very hard. She's here, at my side. That's more than enough for me.

"I'm not used to seeing you like this," she whispers, lifting her hand. Tentative fingers smooth out the crease between my eyebrows. She doesn't usually touch me in public. "I'm glad you're here," she assures me, her voice so soft.

I look up at her from under my lashes. "Are you?" I don't want to tell her I was jealous when I first saw her with that chump. But I was. I'm embarrassed now that I was. "Tonight hasn't gone at all like I wanted," I admit with a sigh.

"We can change that," she says, offering my favorite smile ever, dimples and all.

"Can we?" My breath catches for a second.

I'm not someone who rushes into anything, but with Luna, it often feels like I'm running out of time. There's so much I want to experience with her, and yet life keeps getting in the way.

Luna leans into me, her hand on my thigh for balance. Her breasts brush my arm while her lips graze my ear. Breathing is impossible.

"Wanna know what I thought when I saw you in the hotel lobby?"

"Hmm?"

We're so close that I can almost taste her. Anticipation simmers between us.

"No matter what, I'm going home with him tonight."

There's a bright flash somewhere. I only notice because Luna's golden-brown skin reflects the sudden burst of light.

When she leans back, the pink of her cheeks sends my heart flying. I know I have the biggest smile on my face.

There's another flash.

"Did you see that?" I ask, not taking my eyes off hers.

“Someone took a picture. Dayani Gamage, I believe.” She smiles, green eyes never leaving mine.

“The renowned Sri Lankan photographer?”

Another flash.

“She’s working with Ava. You know, your eyes look like warm honey in the light,” she adds.

“Do they?”

Her laughter rings out. “I don’t know why I said that.”

“Wanna get out of here?”

“Yes.”

A giddy excitement bubbles up between us, and we stand at the same time to leave in different directions in search of our friends.



The ride to the hotel is a blur. The nervous energy and increasing anticipation swirl between us and around us and inside us, like a living, breathing force. Still, we keep our distance as we enter through the revolving doors. We walk separately while making our way to the lift.

To anyone else, we’re simply two people who happen to be headed in the same direction. That’s it. That’s all. We do not speak. We do not even look at each other.

Luna steps into the lift first, and a few seconds later, I do as well. We’re alone, standing at opposite ends of the small space. Both facing forward, we wait, watching until the doors begin to close. As they do, my heartbeat speeds up, and damn butterflies soar in my stomach.

When the doors meet, separating us from the outside, we move as if by design, crashing into each other. Our lips collide with such intensity that neither of us stops to remember the video camera in the corner.

For one blissful moment, my hands are in her hair, hers are wrapped around my waist, and our mouths move slow with surging desire. The lift comes to a halt, and we break apart, smiling and breathing heavily.

The hallway is empty for once, and I don't waste time questioning our good fortune. Luna unlocks her door as quickly as possible. It's not until she's safely inside that she looks over her shoulder at me. A small smile tugs at the corner of my mouth. As soon as I walk into her room, I lock the door behind me.

Finally, we're alone.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

finally



HENRY

WHILE SITTING ON THE EDGE OF THE BED, LUNA REMOVES HER flats. Still standing near the door, I take off my coat and kick off my shoes. Our eyes never leave the other.

Even as I'm undressing, the room starts to feel warmer. Luna walks over to me, her bare feet silent on the carpet. Smiling, I meet her halfway, claiming her mouth the instant she's within reach.

My hands slide across her cheeks, and I press my lips to hers over and over, savoring the taste of her. Sweet. Addictive. I groan against her mouth.

She flashes a smile as she winds her hands around me, her palms flat on my back.

"What's so funny?" I ask, my voice husky as she draws me to her, holding me close.

"Everything. Nothing." She shakes her head. "I can't even think."

Gazing into those green eyes, I cradle her face and kiss her lips, the tip of her nose, both cheeks. I don't stop there. I kiss up her jaw, down the smooth lines of her throat, her bare shoulder, and the top of her breasts.

Luna seeks my mouth, claims it, owns it. It's hers. I'll give her everything. She doesn't even have to ask.

Her hands settle on my abdomen, then slide up to the collar of my shirt. When I start to undo the shirt buttons, she stills my hands with her own.

"Henry," she moans between kisses. "Wait."

Breathing hard, I pull away, worry etched on my face as I remember her wrist. "Did I hurt you?"

"No, I'm okay." Her breaths come fast as well. "I'd like to ..." Luna pauses, swallows, suddenly shy. Her fingers replace

mine on the second button. “Let me?”

Realizing what she aims to do, I offer her a lopsided smile, and my hands fall away to the sides. I’m standing there, waiting for her, wanting her hands on me, her lips on mine. My breathing comes faster as she undoes button after button, my chest rising and falling in tandem with hers. The need is maddening.

“Luna,” I practically growl, impatience getting the best of me. A teasing grin meets me, driving my desire to unmatched heights. The urge to touch her, the need to have her touch me. “L, please.”

She must hear it in my voice, almost feral with want, with need. Luna bites her lower lip.

“Patience.”

She smirks as she pulls back my shirt, unwrapping me like a gift, savoring the moment. The dark, silky cloth slides back, exposing my torso, baring my arms.

The hunger in her eyes grows, as does my excitement. The shirt continues down, her fingertips kissing my biceps, my forearms. Luna goes on the tips of her toes, reaching up to capture my mouth as the shirt falls to the floor.

Once her lips make contact, my restraint falls away. I grab her by the waist, drawing her flush against me. Luna comes willingly, sighing as I kiss her again and again. My arms are secured low around her hips.

Time stops for an instant, seeming to halt just for us. But we don’t notice or care. We’re completely consumed by each other, and nothing else matters.

We move slow at first, my hands everywhere. Down the length of her body. On her full breasts, her lush hips, gripping her heavenly ass.

Luna’s hands are equally demanding, running hot over my skin. Gliding along my chest, down my stomach ... lower. When she cups me over the pants I’m still wearing, everything grows more urgent. Then, I find the zipper of the dress at her side.

“I think you’re overdressed.” I grin, nibbling on her bottom lip, fingers itching to tear the zipper down.

Not wanting to accidentally ruin the borrowed dress, Luna breaks away from my lips and takes a step back. “I think you’re right,” she agrees, her smile playful. “But I can fix that.”

Both zippers come undone then—her dress, my pants. With our heartbeats racing, our eyes locked, the offending fabric pools at our feet.

The style of dress—one-shouldered—required a bra Luna did not have in her hotel room, she reveals, so she went without. Now, with the way my eyes travel ravenously from her face to her bare breasts, I’m glad for it.

“Luna ...” I whisper, my tone reverent, my gaze admiring every bit of soft, beautiful brown skin I see.

She’s a revelation. Her bright eyes and full lips, the waves in her pink hair, and the luscious curves designed to fit in my arms ... I’ve never wanted another person more.

Trying not to be self-conscious, Luna watches me watch her. Matches my appreciative gaze, the hunger in my eyes. I’m drinking her in, and yet I can’t get enough. Unwilling to wait any longer, I wrap her up in my arms.

“You look like a dream,” I whisper against her skin, meaning it.

I’m not a man who’s easily flustered, but she manages to undo me—has from the very beginning.

Eager and gentle at once, I hold her with the greatest of care. A sound escapes past her lips as I sweep my tongue along her collarbone, continuing lower to place scrumptious kisses on her flushed skin. My lips meet the slope of her breast first, then the underside. She’s delicious, skin like silk. I caress her with my hands while my tongue swirls around one brown nipple and then the other. I lick each sensitive tip before sucking gently. Arching at my touch, Luna runs her fingers up along the back of my head and pulls me closer.

I'm becoming an expert at making her dizzy with tantalizing touches, making her moan as I trail wet kisses across her breasts. I love how she shivers with anticipation and sinks her fingers into my hair.

Slowly, when our lips find each other again, she leads me toward the bed, where we both lie down—she on the mattress, me on her.

Lazy kisses give way to more intense ones, hot and demanding. We've both been wanting this, curious to learn the secrets of each other's body. Our hands roam freely, never stopping. She meets hard angles; I follow soft curves.

Wrapping one leg around my waist, Luna moans into my mouth when she feels how hard I am between her thighs. I rub up into her, making us both shudder with need. Only the thin material of our underwear stands in the way.

“Henry,” Luna whimpers. She sounds so eager; she takes a moment to catch her breath. Gazing up into my eyes, she caresses the side of my face. “Now, you're overdressed,” she teases, tugging on the waistband of my boxer briefs.

“Am I?” I laugh, turning my head to kiss the inside of her palm. “How rude of me.”

I slide back and away, off the bed to retrieve something from my coat. “Didn't forget this time,” I announce, a cocky grin in place.

Standing at the foot of the bed, I remove the last of my clothes. Outwardly, I might appear relaxed, even confident as my eyes fix upon hers, but inside, a bit of dread and anxiety gather.

Meaningless sex is all I allowed myself for a while. Trusting someone—allowing them into my life so completely, so soon—it's not something I do often. Not in a very long time either. Not until Luna. But the way she looks at me—not only with a haze of lust in her eyes, but also with an almost worshipful admiration—is both exciting and enticing. I climb back onto the bed, kneeling between her legs.

Her lips curve up, her eyes full of growing desire as they take me all in. I watch her blush fiercely, biting her lip, and the urge to kiss her is too great. I lean over her, my mouth on hers in an instant. I kiss her lips once, twice, slow and tender, pouring every emotion I'm experiencing into the kiss. Luna holds on to me with the same desperate longing, the same avid hunger.

Together, we peel off her underwear, and my hand replaces it. She's so soft, so fucking wet. I groan into her neck. I cannot wait to be inside her.

But first, I slide a finger along her seam, and she trembles. I want to follow that same path with my tongue. When I move to do just that, she stops me.

"Kiss me," she pleads, and I do, claiming her mouth, savoring her lips and her tongue.

"Touch me," she whispers, guiding my hand back between her legs.

I growl, desperate for her, but my fingers are gentle, moving in slow circles, sliding toward her clit. Luna writhes beneath me and moans my name, surrendering to what I'm making her feel.

When I slide one finger inside, she moans a breathy sigh, the sound a siren's call. My body thrums. Painfully hard, I rub against the smoothness of her thigh for some relief.

When I slide a second finger inside, her hips buck up.

"Oh fuck," she curses as her eyelids flutter shut.

I work her with my hand, in and out, driving a little deeper each time. I tease her with my mouth, with slow, wet kisses to each of her full breasts and pert nipples. Those little sounds she makes, the symphony of her pleasure, urge me on.

Luna's close; I can feel her tighten around my fingers. When she rolls her hips, I circle her clit with my thumb. A sensual moan rips from her throat. Her nails dig into my shoulders as she falls apart, gasping and arching her back as she comes on my hand.

I watch her, enraptured by the pleasure washing over her features. Her body swaying, her movements slowing. She's stunning, absolutely gorgeous in her ecstasy.

I pull my fingers out, glistening with her arousal, then slide them up her body. Her eyes flutter open, and she follows my hand.

My fingers circle one nipple, leaving it gleaming. I lick the trail dry with my tongue. The green of her eyes flares.

"So sweet," I tell her, circling the other nipple the same way, dragging my tongue around it, too, tasting her again.

Luna swallows.

"Come here," she whispers, her cheeks coloring as she reaches for me, her hands sliding up my back and down my front until she's wrapping one hand around my cock.

A broken gasp rushes out. Luna kisses me, tasting herself on my tongue.

She murmurs something between sloppy, wet kisses. Her hand moves up and down, and I shiver.

"Henry. Henry ... please."

I know what she wants. I want the same thing.

"Patience," I tease, repeating what she said earlier, but I don't want to wait either.

Leaning back, I roll the condom on so fast that she laughs at me. I'm grinning too. But when I stroke myself once, all humor falls away.

Desire flashes in her eyes. "Do that again," Luna whispers.

Wrapping my hand around my cock once more, I stroke myself, base to tip and back. She lets out a strangled sound and shifts her hips.

Elation rushes through my veins as I climb on top of her. A nervous excitement shows on both our faces as I settle myself between her legs.

Luna gazes slowly up at me until our eyes meet. My heart hammers in my chest. It hits me then. Something I've known in the deep recesses of my heart, but my brain and the rest of me needed to catch up.

"I ..." I almost say it. How I feel. How she makes me feel.

She reaches up to kiss me then, long and deep. I groan against her mouth as I begin to slide into the blissful depths of her body. It's an instance of absolute euphoria.

But I have to pause to catch my breath. To give her time to adjust to me. I run my lips up her jaw, my nose down her neck, breathing her in.

Every fiber of my body is on fire, and my heart races wildly. I open my eyes to see Luna still has hers closed. Her dark lashes rest against rosy-colored cheeks, and her lips look fuller, swollen from my kisses. She's beautiful. So soft and warm and supple underneath me. There's nowhere else I'd rather be and no one else I'd rather be with.

As if hearing my thoughts, Luna suddenly gazes up at me. A dreamy look overtakes her features, her eyes full of wonder.

"You okay?" she asks me, touching my bearded jaw.

Those three words are on the tip of my tongue, but I swallow them back and nod once before I press my lips to hers instead.

It's too soon, I remind myself.

And so I attempt to let her know how I'm feeling through my actions—with gentle kisses and eager hands and a very willing body.

When I push my hips forward, Luna whimpers, pain etched in her face. "Wait ... go slow ..." she breathes.

I do. She moans into my mouth when I move like she asked. Slow. Careful. But she's so damn hot, so tight. As I sink a little further, she curses.

"You feel so good," my voice rasps in her ear, and she whimpers in reply.

I want to fill her up. Ravage her.

I breathe instead. Focus on the noises she makes, breathy sighs, moaning my name. I love it. When I dip my head to kiss the nape of her neck, sucking gently on the sensitive skin, Luna clutches my shoulders while parting her thighs wider for me. Her fingers travel to caress the back of my scalp and up into my hair as her left leg wraps high around my waist, inviting me to sink in deeper where I stretch her in the most delicious way. Luna's having trouble keeping her breaths steady, and I'm about to lose my mind.

When I'm deep inside and we're both breathing heavily, her hips roll under me once, then again, and it's torture. Dangerous, maddening torture.

I don't rush her though. I kiss her neck and shoulders, massage her waist and her hips, giving her the time and space to adjust and enjoy and surrender.

Eyes shut tight, I groan into her neck. I'm this close to begging.

"I'm sorry, but it's your fault," she whispers.

I raise my head. She doesn't look sorry. The impish grin she gives me and the wicked gleam in her eyes say she's anything but.

"How so?" I ask, chuckling.

"You're huge," she admits with a blush.

The way her eyes go wide when she says that makes me want to laugh. Turns me on something fierce too. I lick my lips, swallowing away the swelling pride before I kiss her.

Taking my time, I pull out a bit. The sweet sounds she makes, the way she writhes under me ...

When I thrust into her, she's so wet for me, so ready. I can't help but curse into her shoulder. I thrust again, my mind going blank, then filling entirely with thoughts of her. The softness of her skin, the roundness of her hips, her hot, slick center ...

When I thrust again, our hips meet, and I know I'm not going to last long.

Luna grabs my face and claims my mouth. She kisses me eagerly, passionately, touching me everywhere she wants, as if trying to tame a raging fire burning inside herself as well. Her hands go up the planes of my back, down my chest, one hand over my heart.

We're moving. Together. I'm buried deep inside. Fuck.

With a teasing smile, she holds on to my hips, gives one side a quick slap, then slides her hands over to grab my ass. I moan louder when she does so, thrusting into her again and again. Luna rolls her hips under mine, taking me in even deeper, making me growl her name.

Moving in and out, pleasure building quickly, I watch her with lust and love—a heady combination gripping my heart, my soul. She arches up into me, her thighs tight around my waist, and I can hear her breathing getting ragged.

“Faster,” she pleads, and faster I go.

She's so close. I feel her squeezing me so tight, coaxing me to surrender. Not yet. I want to hear her whimper my name again, have her curse in Spanish once more, beg me not to stop.

Her eyes fall closed and Luna clings to me, biting her lip to keep from yelling perhaps. Her nails dig into my back when she's on the brink. My grip on her hips might leave bruises, but neither of us can think past the delicious feeling we're building together. We savor each sensation caused by bare skin brushing against bare skin, and our pace turns frantic.

“Oh fuck. Oh shit. Henry ...”

I feel her coming. That's when I grab the back of her neck and bring her lips to mine. My other hand finds her clit, increasing her pleasure. Luna cries her release against my mouth. Her body clamps tight around me.

“Luna ... I have to—”

Before I can say more, a wave of intense pleasure thunders over me, coursing throughout my entire body. The world falls away. I'm practically incoherent. Only Luna exists. She's everywhere. Her lips on my cheek, her breasts bouncing against my chest, her legs wrapped around my hips.

The powerful reaction is almost overwhelming. I groan, low and guttural, absolutely satisfied. Breathing her in, I want to revel in her intoxicating scent a bit longer. As my muscles start to relax, the sound of my heart beating hums with unmistakable happiness.

Lingering in that blissful state, tiny waves of pleasure still rolling through her, Luna shivers beneath me. Her breathing slows, slower and slower as she comes down from that fantastic high we created together.

When she opens her eyes, she finds me waiting for her. She's lost in my gaze with the same devotion I feel. I can only smile when she does, the corners of my eyes crinkling.

"London just became my absolute favorite city," she smirks.

"Mine too," I chuckle, low in my throat.

Luna arches an eyebrow. "You already liked it," she accuses, sounding breathless when my tongue traces her collarbone.

Lifting my gaze to meet hers once more, I feel light-headed and happy. "Can't help it, L. I like it more now," I promise as I dip my head to kiss her lips gently while easing out of her, our arms and legs still entwined.

All Luna can do is give me a languorous smile. "Mmm, okay," she agrees, too relaxed to argue.

Grabbing a tissue from the nightstand, I dispose of the condom. I take another handful of tissues and carefully wipe the inside of her thighs.

"Henry, you don't have to—"

"I want to," I say simply.

I know she doesn't need me to, but I want to take care of her. I want to wrap her up in my arms and protect her from every bad thing she's ever been through. Nothing will ever hurt her again.

Once I'm done, I lie on my side and pull her to me. Her arms slip around my waist so that we're lying face-to-face, skin to skin, nothing between us. When I brush back locks of pink hair, she blushes so prettily.

Lost in those green gems, I can't help but wonder if she feels it too. How we melted into each other, everything warm and tender, overflowing with euphoria, reaching something magical, eternal—something that felt a lot like love.

Suddenly, there's so much I want to say, but I'm smart enough to know I'm still not thinking straight, and so I simply hold Luna close, loving how she curls her body into mine. The energy between us slows, settles, sleepy and contented. Quietly, comfortably, we fall asleep with our hearts beating to the same rhythm.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

después



LUNA

I DIDN'T PLAN ON FALLING ASLEEP, NOT WHEN I HALF-expected Henry to be gone sometime in the middle of the night. But he's still here, one arm around me, his steady breaths warming my back.

It's such a strange thing—y maravilloso and surreal—waking up to find this gorgeous man sleeping next to me. When he moves closer, I can feel all of him, which means he's still naked too. I will myself not to blush. Not now, not in the cozy quiet that only comes after mind-blowing sex. Because, holy shit, it was amazing. Seriously. Every kiss and every touch and caress. I get chills, thinking about it.

He was right; I find him irresistible. And I know I shouldn't get carried away. I mean, this could be it. Maybe it's a onetime thing. Maybe he didn't enjoy it as much as I did.

As I'm trying to turn around, he stirs and readjusts his position. Henry's draped over me now. Both his arms are secured around my waist, one of his legs is between my own, and his head is on my chest, using my right breast as a pillow. Okay, now, I am blushing.

Pero, this is not at all uncomfortable. It's rather, unexpectedly, far too comfortable. Being naked in Henry's arms feels really nice. Ni madres, nice is such an understatement. And I know I just said I shouldn't get carried away, but the truth is, I can picture every morning like this. Every night too.

With that thought, I snuggle further into the circle of his arms. As if sensing my thoughts, Henry pulls me closer into the warmth of his body.



I'm not sure how much later it is when I wake up. Henry's facing me, his beautiful features serene in slumber.

"Henry," I whisper and wait.

Then, I tap his chest gently with my fingers.

Still nothing.

I press a light kiss to his lips.

He peers one eye open and gives me a lazy smile that sends a burst of heat through me. The gentle sweep of his hands up and down along my spine soothes the anxiety growing in the pit of my stomach.

"Hey," he whispers, nuzzling the curve of my neck and placing little kisses there. "What time is it?"

"Not sure," I reply. "But I need to pee."

Pulling back to look at me with both eyes, he chuckles, then kisses the corner of my mouth once before rolling onto his back. I climb out of bed in a hurry.



As I step out of the bathroom, showered and dressed, I leave the light on and the door ajar. It's bright enough to see that Henry's still asleep, lying on his stomach, his face half buried in a pillow. The comforter is low, revealing the dents and grooves of muscles lining his back and shoulders.

I grab my phone and text my sister.

Luna: I made a mistake ...

Sol: cuéntame

I snap a pic of Henry sleeping. His face is turned from me, hidden. I send it.

Sol: about fucking time!

Luna: How do I get him outta here?

Sol: bro, no. NO. he was that bad?!?

Honestly, I don't wanna kick him out. I wanna crawl under the covers and feel his hot, hard body next to me again.

Luna: No. Pa nada. But there's a problem.

Sol: cuál es el problema?!?

I don't wanna say. Why am I even being like this?

Luna: Creo que maybe just maybe I might maybe like him like a little bit. Maybe.

My sister takes a while to reply.

Sol: oye tranquila, youre allowed to like someone. all you gotta do is take it slow. dont over think it. todo con calma

Right.

Luna: Ok what do I do now then?

Sol: grab some dinner

Luna: It's 3am.

Sol: get breakfast

Okay, yeah, I can order room service.

Sol: if you wanna hang out today but dont wanna make it a big thing, ask him to help you carry your books

What? Carry my books? We're not in high school. And even in high school, no one carried anything outside their backpack.

Luna: ?

Sol: for your book signing. its today, que no?

Shiiiiit, my book signing! It can't be today!

I frantically go through my emails, and it turns out, it is today! I completely forgot about it. How do you forget your first scheduled book signing in London? In London of all places!

I don't know. But I just did.

Wait, no, I do know. The reason is over six feet tall, sexy AF, and currently naked in my bed.

Shaking my head to clear it, I text my sister that I have to go. Then, my focus turns to the stack of hardcover copies of *De East LA* waiting for me on the floor near the window. There's another small pile on the side table that're already signed. I grab a few off the carpet.

In an attempt to stop replaying my night with Henry for the umpteenth time in my head, I open my phone to the Notes app to go over the various greetings I've come up with. My brain has other ideas though, and I can't think past the fact that I just slept with Henry. Henry. Who'll be playing Benjamin in the movie adaptation of my book because, of course, he is.

When I look up, warm brown eyes are watching me.

"Good morning." He grins, sitting up in bed. The comforter falls lower.

I smile back. "Morning." I don't think I've ever smiled so much in my life.

"What're you doing?" he asks while he stretches his shoulders.

I follow the insane definition along his abdomen. He's ... unreal. I've only ever seen a body like his in magazines.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" His voice is rough and rumbles low from sleep. I want to wrap it around me.

"Actually, I have a book signing today," I reply with a shrug. If I don't make it a big deal, it won't be.

"What, really?" He looks more alert. "What time?"

"At two." I don't know why I'm telling him this.

Reaching for his phone, he taps and scrolls, and then his eyes seek mine. “Perhaps I can come with you?” he suggests with a lopsided grin.

Something loosens in my chest and flutters before I squash it down. “It’s okay; you don’t have to.” The way his smile falters, I regret dismissing his offer so quickly. “I mean, I’m sure you’re busy.”

Even in the faint light, I can see his eyes roaming my body. I’m secretly glad I’m wearing shorts and a tank top because ... well, actually, I’m not sure that being dressed is a good thing at all actually.

“I can reschedule,” he suggests.

Ignoring the butterflies in my stomach or how utterly captivated I am by his dazzling smile, I don’t get a chance to reply before he hops out of bed.

“Hold that thought!” Practically sprinting, he disappears into the bathroom and shuts the door behind him.

I giggle because all I saw was his butt whoosh to the bathroom and because I’m a girl who just saw a boy’s butt. Yes, apparently, I’m fifteen again. In my defense, I haven’t seen anyone’s butt in a very long time. Certainly not such a defined and well-toned one.

Chingado, Luna, get it together.

I leave the books on the floor and move over to the couch to wait for Henry.

The toilet flushes, the water runs, and I think I hear some gurgling. Henry pokes his head out the bathroom door.

“Are you getting your day started soon?” he asks.

“No.” My plan was to fall asleep next to him, in his arms, if he was up for it. And if I could stop overthinking everything. “Why do you ask?”

“Too early for a run?”

It is for me.

“I’ll cheer you on from here.”

Rubbing the back of his neck, looking a bit shy, Henry exhales quietly, then steps out, still completely, exquisitely naked. He leaves the light on and the door ajar too.

In the dimly lit room, I try to keep my gaze on his face but fail miserably. My eyes wander from his lips to his chest and all the way down, then all the way back up, pausing longer than is probably appropriate on certain parts of his anatomy. He's so fucking beautiful; monuments should be erected in his honor.

"Are you still sleepy?" I have to clear my throat twice before I can get the words out.

"No." He smirks at me as he walks around the bed to sit on the couch at my side. "I feel well rested though." That cute, boyish grin is on his face. "Quite full of energy, in fact."

"Is that right?" That high-pitched sound was not my voice, was it?

"Am I making you nervous, Luna?" He's leaning toward me, but no part of him is touching any part of me.

"No. Yes, I mean ... a little maybe," I manage to say, but I'm still smiling, feeling giddy and insanely turned on.

I want to touch all the tantalizing amount of beautiful brown skin, smooth and tempting, only inches from me. Honestly, my entire body is aching to feel him again, to run my hands down along sculpted muscles and hot skin. Maybe use my tongue too.

I force my eyes back to his.

Henry moves closer.

"How can I get you to relax?" he whispers in my ear, trailing his lips down along my jawline to linger near my mouth.

Vaguely, in the back of my mind, I'm aware he rinsed with mouthwash and has minty fresh breath, but I can only focus on the fact that his lips are so close to my own a second before he moves away. When he leans back on the couch, the wolfish grin he gives me sends heat pooling low between my thighs.

How is he able to drive me crazy so easily? All he has to do is look at me, and I'm practically salivating. It's so not fair. I want to have him panting the same way he manages to affect me.

Without warning, I climb on his lap, straddling him. His surprised expression quickly gives way to the need growing within him—I see it all play out across his features. His dark brown eyes are full of a thoroughly uncomplicated desire—he wants me. Maybe as much as I want him.

No one's ever looked at me like he is before. No one's ever made me feel like he does—desired, craved.

“Sleep okay?” I ask, running my fingers along his beard, thinking how handsome he looks.

“Best night of my life,” he says.

His hands curve along my waist, and then he's smiling that devastatingly beautiful smile. My mouth waters at the thought of kissing him again. Every inch of me is on fire with anticipation.

“You?” he wonders.

I brush my lips against his, past his cheeks, and down his throat. “Definitely top three.” My body moves without permission. Like I know him and what he likes, like I've always known.

“What're ... the other two?”

One, meeting him in LA.

Two, running into him in London.

Although, now that I think about it, those were both mornings and not nights.

I lift my eyes to his. “They both involve you,” I admit, my thighs falling wide on either side of him. My hands travel over his broad, strong shoulders and along the sinewy muscles of his arms.

Henry flashes his teeth in a smile.

Heart pounding, stomach in knots, I gasp his name when he kisses the underside of my jaw. The combination of his lips and his tongue and his teeth is insane. I shouldn't be this turned on, this fucking wet already.

Everything gets hot and hazy when I feel his arousal begin to swell. Taking my time, I press my mouth to his. When Henry returns the kiss, I start to move, a fervent longing urging me on.

I'm grinding against him, slow. Then slower.

"I have an idea," I say, sounding breathless.

Several seconds pass. Those incredible brown eyes lock with mine, making my pulse quicken.

"Do you?" he asks, his hands sliding down over my ass. He caresses, massages, and grinds up into me. "Because I like this idea."

A nervous, breathy laugh comes out. "Were you serious about going with me?"

Eyes closed, head thrown back, I writhe on top of him, tangling my fingers in his hair. There's something about him, something in the way he holds me, that makes me feel self-assured and sexy too. Maybe it's how he looks at me, like a ray of sunshine after weeks of gloomy skies. Maybe it's the way he touches me, like he'll never be able to get enough.

"I'll go anywhere with you," he replies.

Starting to feel helpless, I meet his eyes. The lust there halts my breath. The way his fingers graze the outside of my thighs, then trail up between my legs, sends my head spinning. Then, his hand is on me, and he touches me carefully, knowingly.

"You're so wet for me." His Adam's apple bobs up and down.

My eyes roll back as Henry's fingers circle and rub my clit. I swear I see stars. I can't stop the loud moan as he slides one finger inside. Heat starts at my center, radiating through every inch of my body.

“Henry.” My voice is shaky. “No more condoms?”

“No more condoms,” he replies, but he doesn’t sound bothered at all. “But I like this, don’t you?”

Opening my legs wider for him, I gasp my approval, moaning his name as he plunges a second finger deep inside. I feel a little sore and tender from last night, but not enough to stop, so he moves in and out of me at a delicious pace. If I glanced down, I’d see my wetness coat his fingers, but I can’t look away from Henry’s face. When I see him looking so handsome and dazed while he touches me so intimately, my hips move faster.

When his hard length rubs against the inside of my thigh, I reach for him. I want to make him feel good, too, but he stops my hand.

“Let me enjoy you like this,” he murmurs.

For a moment, I’m stunned. No one’s ever put my pleasure first.

“Don’t stop,” he whispers. His free hand slides into my hair, and he pulls my face to his.

Henry leans up to kiss me. His tongue, hot and wet, swirls with mine. My hips move again, and I ride his hand.

My body tenses, and that heavenly feeling grows. Whispering his name again, like a wish, like a prayer, I moan when Henry kisses his way down to my breasts. His tongue licks at each sensitive tip, and I throw my head back.

“Come for me, L.”

Sparks shoot up my spine. I love to hear that need in his voice, love to see him crazed with lust. I kind of love it that he calls me L too. Rocking my hips, nails digging into his shoulders for balance, I’m barely able to contain a shuddering moan when I come hard on his hand. Every cell in my body buzzes and tingles with bursts of pleasure.

“Fucking love seeing you like this,” he murmurs.

I curse as my head falls forward onto his shoulder. Satisfaction thrums through me in waves as I slow against

him. Even though my bones feel like jelly and my limbs are all but useless, I kiss him, sated and yet still wanting more.

“Come with me,” I moan, desperate to have him touch more of me.

His hands slide down to my hips, my thighs, squeezing, holding me to him. Everything is heightened. I’m in a dream. I can say anything, and it’ll be all right.

“Later. The bookstore. I want you there with me,” I admit, still trying to catch my breath, to slow my racing heartbeat.

A smile breaks out across his handsome face.

“There’s nowhere else I’d rather be,” he assures. “Well, perhaps right ... here,” he adds with a sly grin, his words punctuated with a deep, slow thrust of his hips.

The seductive lull to his voice, the way his body moves—Henry’s secretly a sex god. God of sex. It’s the only explanation.

He asks me something, chuckling when I mumble an incoherent reply. Smiling, Henry wraps both arms around me and kisses my temple. I can’t move or think or do anything, except sigh in satisfaction as I snuggle further into his chest. When I confirm that we have a few hours before we have to get ready for my book signing, he carries me over to the bed and holds me as I sleep.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

dorks



HAZEL

FUCKING HELL.

These two.

Luna Wuna and Hank the Tank.

It's her book signing. I got here early for two reasons—one, I support my friends, and two, upstairs is the best spot for writing. The noise, the crowds. I thrive here. Anywhere involving chaos really.

In any case, she should be preparing. But, no, they're walking around the ground floor of the bookstore. Talking. Laughing. Being obvious.

Who are they trying to fool? And why bother?

Anyone with eyes sees it. I didn't need to RSVP or buy a ticket to her book signing to know they're sleeping together. All the pap pictures posted online scream, *WE'RE FUCKING! OFTEN! EVERYWHERE!*

That or they want to. Badly.

I would tell them no one cares, no one gives a flying fuck, but since he is who he is—on the brink of becoming the biggest, hottest shit in our universe—people do care. So, if the goal is to keep their relationship a secret, they're doing a shit-poor job of it.

Case in point: the books. Every damn book Luna reaches for, flips through, or fucking glances at, Hank later purchases.

Then come the flowers. It's clear they're from him. Bro is way too invested in her reaction. And Wuna is fucking swooning.

To top it off, he buys a copy of her book and waits in line with everyone else for her to sign it.

Hate to admit it, but they're disgustingly adorable. Gross little shits.

It's a good thing the Tank is there though. No offense to Luna or her book—doesn't matter how good it is—those thousands filling the bookstore and streets outside are there to see him. London's own Hollywood heartthrob—that's one of the article links I sent her. Another is a meme—a picture of them sitting side by side on the small stage. Mic in hand, Luna's answering a fan question while Hank's hanging on her every word. The caption reads, *Find yourself someone who looks at you the way Henry Johnson looks at his favorite author!*

Favorite author? Riiiiight.

By the end of the night, all the social media attention has Luna's book sold out in the whole of London and trending online. Not bad for her first solo event in the city. With his surprise appearance, Hank is trending too. Everyone loves the guy. Fact of the matter is, the signing goes better than even I could've written it—and I'm fucking brilliant. No lie.

No doubt it's good for our movie. Not sure how it's going to play out for them though if one or both aren't ready to go public. All I know is, they don't have a lot of time to figure it out.

CHAPTER TWENTY

house



HENRY

IT STOPS RAINING WHEN WE ARRIVE IN CHELSEA. REX AND Trevor are with me. We're getting the keys to my new place. Now that I can afford it, I'd rather rent, especially on a small film like *De East LA*. Being at a hotel gets expensive for the production. Plus, I prefer the privacy.

The house is beautiful and spacious with five bedrooms and six baths arranged over four floors, three reception areas—don't know who needs that many—and two separate entrances.

This place is a world apart from the small rental I could afford in Barbados while filming *The Pirate & the Princess*. Then, it was one room with two sets of bunk beds. When my parents visited, they slept on the pullout sofa bed in the living room. There was always a line for the one tiny bathroom in the house. Given that we were right on the beach, however, the cramped accommodations were worth it.

My only issue with this new arrangement is Luna's staying at the hotel.

Before I can continue that train of thought, the doorbell rings. It's probably Rex. I wouldn't be surprised if he already lost the key I had given him ten minutes ago. Turns out not to be my brother, but a courier with the sealed scripts Mich wanted me to look over.

Time was, Mich used to have to call, email, bribe, beg, do everything legally imaginable in order to secure an audition. Small role, tiny role, one line—she fought to get me through the door. Now, they're calling her. Wooing her. Sending gifts, offering scripts. It's mad.

“You'll be spending the night in then?”

I nod in response to Trev's question without looking up from my phone. He follows me into the kitchen. A notification on the screen has all my attention. It's a message from Luna.

My Girl: The food's soooooo good!

A smile breaks out across my face. I'm surprised she's texting. Especially since she's in the middle of an early dinner with Dr. Harris.

Henry: How good?

My Girl: I'm about to steal Dr Harris's plate ☐

My Girl: Never mind, she got back too soon ...

Trevor clears his throat. "You ever hit up Mi-Cha?"

"What?" Why is he bringing up my costar? "No. Why?"

My Girl: Doing anything later?

I'm about to type, *You*, when Trev clears his throat again. He's glaring at me when I glance up.

"Gimme a sec," I mutter as I reply to Luna's message.

Henry: come over

My Girl: Where?

"So, you meet a cute girl and can't talk to me no more?"

Trevor's always being overly sensitive.

"And I'm not being overly sensitive."

"If you say so." I smirk, heading up to my room.

"About Mi-Cha—" Trevor starts to say, but I cut him off.

"Look, mate, I'm with Luna."

Eyes narrowed, Trev smacks his lips in annoyance. "Is she with you though?" he counters and shoves his phone at my chest.

On the screen is the cover of *UK Weekly*, the worst tabloid in London with the headline, *WHO'S LYING?* Then, in smaller print, it reads, *The Doctor versus the Striker!* Half of the cover contains a still of me from *White Memorial*. I'm in a white lab coat, looking pensive. The other half features Oliver Ford, frustrated after missing a goal.

My face drops. I scroll through the article, furiously searching for any mention of Luna.

“She’s not referred to by name.”

I look up from the screen to meet my brother’s sharp gaze. “You sure?”

“If they so much as implied it,” Trevor snaps, “I’d be having this conversation with her.”

“Luna didn’t leak this.” I know she didn’t. “If you recall, lots of people were there.” I toss the phone back. “What’s their angle?”

“They accuse you of trying to steal Ford’s girlfriend.”

“What? That’s not even remotely accurate.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“Of course it—”

Trevor points a finger at me. “Leave it. This story won’t hurt you.”

Hate when he does this. Hate people thinking of Luna with Ford even more.

“We should issue a statement,” I insist.

“Not happening.”

“The press—”

“Don’t be daft.”

I run a hand down my face. I don’t have to like it, but he’s right. Besides, Luna’s not featured in the story. I continue up the stairs, leaving Trevor on the landing. He calls after me.

“You’re getting carried away, brother.”

I won’t argue with that, but older brothers are infuriating. Always thinking they know everything, which is why I end up arguing. “What’s your problem with Luna anyway?”

“I have a problem with anyone who wastes your time and takes away your focus.”

She does neither of those things. In fact, when I want to miss half of the meetings he sets up so I can hang out with her, Luna's the one insisting I attend them.

“*You have to be in ‘The Room Where It Happens.’*” My girl references Hamilton, one of my favourite musicals.

How can I not get carried away? If I said any of this to Trev, he wouldn't listen, not when he's in one of his moods.

“She's moving in,” I announce. I had not realized how much I wanted that to happen until I said the words out loud.

Trevor's nostrils flare. “Get your goddamn head out of your ass,” he growls.

I ignore his outburst. “I'll let Rex know in case he's going through another nude phase.”

Trev pinches the bridge of his nose. “We're letting anyone move in now?” he asks, trying for a different approach.

It almost works. I stop to glare at him, then make my way down the steps I climbed. “She's not just anyone.” She's Luna. Talented and smart and fucking beautiful. I can't stop thinking about her.

I cross my arms over my chest. “You read her book yet?”

I know the answer to that question already. No one reads more than Trevor.

“The script is better,” he mutters, readjusting his watch—an obvious tell that he's lying.

I should call him on it, but I don't.

“We'll agree to disagree on that one,” I wink at him—he hates when I do that. Then, I turn back to my phone as I disappear to my room.



LUNA

Maybe I should've let Henry pick me up. I'm usually pretty good on the tube, but I haven't been to Chelsea yet, and I took the wrong exit. What's he doing there anyway? We could be back at the hotel, getting naked ...

Puede ser que, I'm letting my lady parts lead the way again, but I just don't want this day to end. Because dinner with Dr. Harris was so interesting and she insisted I attend the table reading this week! Plus, that might have been the best book signing ever! De veras. Even with so many people, I wasn't nervous. It was insane how many were there to see him though. Henry Johnson.

Which is so weird. I can't reconcile that famous guy, who hundreds were screaming and crying for, with the man who, hours before, had fucked me so good. And I'm on my way to get seconds. Possibly thirds and fourths.

It's not just the amazing sex though. Having Henry at my book signing was ... I don't even know the word for it. I felt excited to have him close, but calmed by his presence as well. He also sent me flowers. A beautiful bouquet. With a cute note.

Every night should be like last night.

Thank you for the amazing morning too.

Then, when he started talking about my book, discussing his favorite parts—holy shit—it gave me chills.

For the first time in a long time, I'm experiencing that giddy anticipation that only comes with a new relationship—wait a minute.

My thoughts come to a screeching halt.

Sobering up, I sit up in my seat. Is that what's happening? Because that's what it feels like ...

No. I'm not looking for something serious. I'm sure Henry isn't either. One amazing night, followed by an exceptional morning, doesn't change anything. Of course I'm experiencing this ... this high right now. It's been no sex for two years. Plus, I've never had sex like that.

My whole body came alive. He touched me with the same desire I was experiencing. And he surrendered to the moment as much as I did.

But I realize everything with Henry and about him is shiny and new. It's the first time hearing a story. It's the first time sharing stories too. It feels nice. I know this. And yet I'm already under the spell of this newness.

007: dessert?

If I don't stop smiling—yeah, I'm not gonna be able to stop.

Luna: I'll take anything chocolate.

007: do I count?

I just spit out the sip of water I took. Luckily, no one is near me.

007: in case you were wondering caramel's my favourite flavour

I want to do something besides smile at my phone, but that's all I seem capable of doing.

At my stop, Henry's there, waiting for me. I feel like I'm floating as I make my way toward him. He's wearing a navy sweater that stretches across his broad shoulders, black jeans that hug his muscular thighs, and black boots, which add an inch or two to his height. With his dark shades and the sexiest smirk I've ever seen, my lady parts are swooning.

“Think it's a good idea to be out?”

“Yes.” He grins, taking my backpack to sling it over his shoulder. “You're here, thus it's a very good idea.”

He takes off his shades so that his handsome face is clearly visible, defeating the purpose of him wearing them.

“Did you forget what happened at the bookstore?”

I’m looking up at him. The warmth in his brown eyes sends a rush of heat dancing through my body.

“We wanted people there, didn’t we? Besides, didn’t post my current location on Instagram.”

When he cups the sides of my jaw and neck, I lean into him.

“Only you know I’m here, L.”

I think he means to brush his lips lightly against mine, but I keep him there a little longer. My teeth sink into his plump bottom lip, and he smiles before giving me exactly what I want.

Henry grabs my chin, and there’s more lips, more tongue, more heat, and I lose all sense of time. Might’ve been five minutes or five hours—I’m not sure. All I know is, I’m left blushing and breathless.

“Forget caramel. You’re my favorite flavor,” he whispers against the corner of my mouth.

Don’t smile. Don’t smile.

“You can’t say things like that.”

He laughs, and I drink in the sound.

“Even if it’s true?”

“Especially if it’s true.”

His lips are almost on mine again, but we hear the hushed tones of people whispering behind us. He might’ve been recognized.

“Let’s get out of here,” Henry murmurs, wrapping his arm around my shoulders.

Outside, the soft drizzle quickly turns into heavy rain. Henry keeps his arm around me, my body fitting perfectly against his as we huddle close under the umbrella to keep dry.

When I comment on the empty streets, he mentions something about a derby.

“Good thing too.” He grins, pulling me into his chest.

He places a soft kiss to my temple. Even on this cool night, my cheeks go warm. When I look up at him, that heart-stopping smile is on full display.

“Where are we going?” I ask.

“You’ll see.”

We walk on. The scent of fresh rain and cherry blossoms is lovely, but Henry smells even better. I want to bury my face in his neck and inhale this unique scent of his. I want to savor the enticing heat that radiates off his body too.

Henry stops to look at me. “Tired?”

“Not at all.” I smirk. “Just looking forward to dessert.”

Grinning at me, he gives my hip a squeeze. I don’t know where we’re going, and I don’t care. Para nada. The thought that I’ll follow him anywhere he leads me should scare the shit out of me, but right now, I’m feeling anything but scared.

Could it be that I’m letting my guard down? Or am I just fucking horny? Honestly, I don’t even know anymore. All I know is, my world explodes with so many different feelings and emotions whenever he’s around. It’s both thrilling and terrifying.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

desk



LUNA

SMILING, HENRY TAKES MY HAND, AND WE CONTINUE THROUGH a fancy neighborhood. Narrow, clean streets. Elegant, well-maintained homes. A place where cherry blossom trees line the sidewalks. When he winds an arm around my waist, warmth surges all around, as if someone turned up the world's thermostat.

Looking like he has a secret, Henry leads me to the front of a huge white house. It's three stories tall with lots of windows. Wisteria curls around the iron railings and up toward the roof. The entrance is a purple door. It all looks expensive.

"Who lives here?" I ask, keeping my voice low. There're hardly any sounds. I'm afraid I'll wake up the whole neighborhood.

"I do."

I raise a questioning eyebrow, but my confused look doesn't last long. His smile makes me smile. *Este me tiene loca.*

"I'm renting while filming."

I look up at the house again. It's probably as big as Ava's. Impressive, sure, but that also means he won't be at the hotel anymore.

"You don't like it?"

I hear the disappointment in his voice.

I'm about to tell him it's not the house, but the fact that his room won't be an elevator's ride away from mine when he adds, "Come in and take a look."

His voice. Deep. Low. Sultry. I bask in it as I step inside his new place.

The tour starts well enough with Henry sharing a bit of the house's history, but we never get past the first floor. Never get

farther than the first room we walk into. The office, just off the living room, has a big, comfy couch against the northern wall and a huge oak desk in the middle.

Although everything Henry's saying sounds interesting, I'm having trouble focusing on when the house was built or renovated or remodeled. He mentions all the furniture and floors have been deep cleaned, and I nod without understanding because I don't mean to be rude, but try as I might, I cannot tear my eyes away from him.

Not only is he looking so incredibly handsome, his lips so soft, the curve of his smile so fucking sexy, but his eyes are also bright and full of affection. A tiny, itty-bitty part of me is also still somewhat jealous of all the attention he was giving other people at the bookstore, attention that he couldn't give me. It's stupid, yeah, I know.

Jealousy might be a silly and useless emotion in most cases, but that didn't stop me from experiencing it. Having to inhale slowly through my nose and exhale through my mouth more than once to try and stop from letting it get to me. Which is why, now that I have Henry all to myself, I am not about to let any more time go to waste.

It's actually a little embarrassing how easily I lose control around him. Every time, all the time, it seems.

Just now, before Henry can even turn on the light in the office, I practically fling myself at him, sealing my mouth to his, unable to stay away any longer.

Something inside me is given new life when he holds me with the same desperation, when he kisses me with the same aching need, like he's been waiting for this too. Maybe he has. Maybe as much as I have.

Henry's hands grow rough, possessive along my body. My fingers are clumsy on the buttons of my blouse. He helps, undoing the top two as he's kissing his way down my neck, lips trailing down to nuzzle my breast. When his teeth scrape my skin, his tongue and lips soothe it.

Together, we stumble over to the desk, and we hitch up my skirt. Henry shoves his pants down faster than I thought possible. His erection, thick and veined, springs to life, and my mouth waters at the sight.

Henry lifts me onto the desk, and I reach for him. Fingers circling his length, I stroke once, twice. He groans, a strangled sound.

“Luna.” His voice is pained, desperate. As if he needs me, wants me. Now. “L, what’re you doing to me?”

Satisfaction curls through me. “Payback”—I smirk, my hand moving with teasing strokes—“for driving me crazy in the bookstore.”

Pleasure dances across his features as a deep chuckle escapes him. Henry grabs my hips, pulls me against him, lets me feel how hard he is. The sound I make is a half gasp, half moan.

When he leans forward, his breath caresses the shell of my ear. “I can drive you crazy here too,” he promises, tearing off my underwear.

They’re soaked clear through, and I would be embarrassed with anyone else, but Henry simply gives me that seductive smirk as he pockets them.

“Keeping these.” He winks.

A lazy laugh escapes me. I’m in a daze. All I know to do is pull him to me. Then, his glorious mouth moves along my jaw. A condom materializes out of thin air, and he slips it on. We’re moving fast.

His palms glide up my body from my hips to my waist to my breasts. It’s a light touch, like his breath caressing my lips. I need more and spread my legs wider for him.

Warm brown eyes glow, and his nostrils flare as he looks down between my thighs. “I want to taste you,” Henry whispers, licking his lips.

That’s ... I feel feverish. He’s about to kneel in front of me. I’m throbbing. I want him to, but I stop him.

“Later,” I beg, wrapping my legs around his waist, pulling him closer.

I rub up against him, making us both shudder.

There’s something wild in his eyes now.

“I need you, Henry,” I manage to say.

He grins, caressing the side of my face. Our gazes hold for a split second, and then he captures my mouth, his tongue stroking mine.

I feel his hard length at my entrance. Hot kisses land on my neck as Henry slides inside slowly, careful, on and on.

Fuck.

“You feel so good ...” he says.

He feels incredible. But that one word is not enough to describe him. Amazing and wonderful and phenomenal all put together maybe. Still, I need to look away. It’s almost too intimate to gaze into those warm brown eyes, to allow him to look into my soul, while he enters my body.

“...Like you were made for me.”

When my heart leaps in my chest, fluttering ever so gently, suddenly full of hope, I ignore it, pretend it didn’t just happen. I shut my eyes tight. Instead of second-guessing myself, I place one hand on either side of his face, and before he can say anything else, I pull Henry down for another kiss.

He moves then. With me. Into me. Further. Inch by delicious inch. Deeper. I’m moaning now. Because this is what I want, Henry and me, hot and sweaty, moving against each other, with each other, half crazed with lust.

His every touch makes my body burn with desire. And every time he thrusts, I can’t help but cling to him a little tighter. My hips buck up, and I arch into him.

This is all I want. I don’t want to think or hope or any of that. I want what his body is giving me right now. The feel of him, the heat. His skilled hands, his thick, hard length. This I can handle.

“Henry ... again,” I whimper, and my voice sounds foreign, reckless. “More,” I breathe against the soft skin of his neck.

Give me more, I think. Give me everything.

As if able to hear my silent pleas, Henry plunges into me hard, thrusting fast. It’s hot and sweaty in the office. His hands on my hips are not gentle. A possessive edge to them takes over. When he nuzzles my neck, he bites gently and sucks hard.

“Mine,” he breathes as he thrusts.

I hold on to him to keep from shattering.

Henry kisses his way down my chest, along the outer curve of my breast, all teeth and tongue, and I’m panting. He licks my nipples, sucks them into his mouth and I shiver, opening my legs wider for him.

Henry drives inside, pounding into me, telling me how good I feel. His body is pressed to mine; his palms are warm against my skin. That dangerous combination of emotions and desires hits me hard.

I can’t explain it, can’t put into words the all-consuming need suddenly swirling inside every part of me, coursing through my veins, demanding to be his. Henry’s in every way. Here and everywhere. Now and forever. His. In every sense of the word.

For a moment, my thoughts frighten me, and I can feel panic begin to rise to the surface. Before I can get lost in my own head, Henry’s lips find mine. He caresses my body with gentle touches, uses those beautiful lips to make me light-headed with the desire to call him mine as well.

The way he’s holding me, with such tenderness, with reverence ... like I’m all that matters ...

I blink, and the way he looks at me—with complete and utter devotion—sends chills down my spine. My heart trips, stumbles. No words flow from his lips, but I can see it on his face—he wants to say them. And I cannot deal.

It's too much. These thoughts, these feelings ... they're too much.

I break away, pushing him off me, ending the contact to feel cold and empty. Breath ragged, Henry looks confused, watching me as I shimmy off the desk.

My eyes seek his as I turn around. "Let's try something." I smirk, bending over the desk.

Looking at him over my shoulder, I wiggle my ass against his cock. Because it turns out, sex is easy for me. Sex I can do. What I don't want to do is complicate what we have with things like feelings and emotions.

"You're incredible," he tells me, voice hoarse with need.

Leaning over, his chest on my back, he kisses the corner of my mouth before claiming my hips.

Henry pushes upward, stretching me, sinking even deeper than before. He repeats the sensuous motion, and I'm clawing at the desk. It's good. So fucking good.

Thrusting into me, he groans in pleasure, guttural, satisfied. Rocking his hips in and out, deep and deeper.

The sounds we make—grunts and moans, skin slapping skin, the symphony of sex—fill the room. With his hands on my waist, he pounds into me, fills me completely. Soon, he has my legs spread wider, my feet off the floor, and I'm crying out his name.

It doesn't take long for me to collapse forward onto the desk, lost in my cresting orgasm. My world narrows to the impossible pleasure claiming my body.

"Henry ..." I pant as tiny ripples of sheer bliss roll through me, one right after the other while he's still grinding into me.

Henry slows and slumps against my back, shifting his weight to one arm. He's breathing heavily and uneven against my shoulder.

"That was ... that was intense."

When he pulls out, I turn to face him. He didn't get to finish, but that's easily remedied.

"Let's try something else." I grin, going on tiptoes to kiss his lips, bite his chin, lick down his throat as I lift his shirt off.

In a tangle of limbs, we lose all our clothes on our way to the couch. Henry stumbles back onto the soft cushions.

Moonlight streams in through the window, casting a blue hue to everything, including our bare skin. Even though it's dark in the office, he watches me the whole time. I can't keep my eyes off him either.

Smirking, I climb onto his lap. Large hands run along my waist, up to cup my breasts and down to caress my hips. He nips at my lips, sucks on them, too, while I hover on the tip of his cock for a second.

When I take him inside, he growls my name, and I try to breathe. Henry meets my gaze as I let my fingers travel down to his stomach. His muscles clench.

"Move for me, L."

I do. My hips rolling, grinding against his. He feels so fucking good.

"Just like that."

He pushes up into me with slow, delicious movements. And he touches me like he can't get enough. Henry's mouth is hot, and I savor the taste of him as his tongue twines with my own. I love how our lips fit perfectly together. Love how our bodies do too.

Henry works his mouth down to my chest. Brown eyes watch me as he licks my breast, and I tighten around him.

"Love how you feel in my arms, L. Love this tight pussy around my cock."

That voice. His accent. I fucking love him talking to me like this.

Feeling so good, I toss my head back. Henry cups the back of my neck, bites down gently, sucks hard enough to leave a

mark. His.

“Fuck.”

When my hands delve into his hair, his lips worship my breast, licking and caressing. His tongue is thorough and insistent and perfect. It's like a dream. Everything with him feels that way. My head starts to spin, and I ride his cock hard and fast until pleasure is soaring through my body, shattering, devastating. I bite down on my lip to keep from screaming.

Slowing on top of him, blissfully dazed, I need a moment to catch my breath. Barely coming down from my high, already, I want more. I never used to be so greedy, so insatiable. When I open my eyes, Henry gives me the sexiest lopsided grin.

“I love when you come on me.”



HENRY

Her lips twitch lightly, and a rosy flush colours her cheeks. She looks so pretty when she blushes.

I brush back a few loose tendrils of her pink hair. I wanted to do the same thing in the bookstore, but couldn't. Too many people.

No one here now. Just us.

I run my hands up her thighs, enjoying Luna's smooth skin, her lush curves and tiny waist. When I think back to all the smiles she shared that weren't for me, I sink deeper into her. Green eyes flutter shut.

Earlier, she felt so far away even though we were standing in the same room. As I watched her, my arousal kept mounting, my frustration kept growing. Now, I thrust up, and her thighs spread wider. I'm buried deep in her wet heat, filling her. She writhes on top of me, sinks her fingers into my hair.

"L, look at me."

She rolls her hips once more. The rumble of my pleasure makes her smile, slow and wide. There's the hint of a dimple—no, two dimples. It's my smile. The one she only ever gives me.

Her eyes flutter open.

"You were driving me crazy today too," I admit, caressing the sides of her face.

Those dimples reappear.

"Good," she says, going up onto her knees, lifting herself away from me, letting me slide almost all the way out.

Her beautiful breasts are at eye level, and I place wet kisses on them, one and then the other. She gasps as I suck a nipple into my mouth.

“Henry ...”

Her hips hover above my lap, only the tip of my cock surrounded by her sensuous heat, but when I twirl my tongue around her breast, she takes me inside, letting me plunge all the way in. Damn. Her pussy’s so wet and tight and hot.

No more words flow between us, just sighs and groans of pleasure as she grinds against me. I cup her breasts, kneading the soft flesh, teasing her nipples with my fingers. That’s when she starts bouncing on my cock, and I’m going to fucking lose it.

I don’t want to come just yet, not without making her fall apart at least once more. The way she gives in, surrenders completely, I can’t help take satisfaction, knowing I drive her crazy too. It’s the best feeling in the world, making a goddess like Luna reach the pinnacle of pleasure.

Gripping her hips, I flip our position so that we’re lying down now. Her back is on the couch, and I’m on top.

“Not good?” she asks, withdrawing a little.

“Too good,” I promise, kissing her in that leisurely, sensual way I’ve noticed she likes. It leaves us both breathless.

I move slow and deep at first, sinking in, all the way. When I look down at her, her green eyes are soft, and her smile matches my own.

“Luna.” My Luna.

She whispers my name, touches my lips. I could stay here forever.

We move together. Luna meets me thrust for thrust. Her fingers slide from my shoulders up the back of my neck, into my hair, and she pulls me down for a kiss.

We find our rhythm quick, our movements gaining speed.

Mine, I can’t help think with every thrust.

Mine, I nearly growl when she arches her back and opens her legs wider for me.

I drive inside, hard, fast.

Mine. My heart and soul, my body and my mind, all in complete agreement. *Mine.*

The heat of our bodies has a dizzying effect. We fit so perfectly together. I've never been so in tune with another person before. Words are unnecessary.

The exquisite pressure builds. Our hearts race in unison; our breathing comes in rapid bursts. Luna whimpers as pleasure floods her with every thrust, until it's overflowing and that delicious feeling claims her again.

"*Henry,*" she cries as I feel her tighten around me, coaxing me to follow.

My fingers ghost up along her waist. The words I always want to say to her spring from my heart, radiating throughout my body. But I hold back, kissing her instead, loving her completely without voicing it aloud.

I groan into her neck, her nails dig into my back, and blinding ecstasy rushes through me as I chase her over the edge. My muffled sounds of satisfaction are painted on her skin. How good she feels. How sexy she is. How fucking beautiful.

While I'm lost in absolute bliss, the words I've never said first before, the ones I've been holding back, slip out. "I love you," I whisper and then go completely still.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

words



LUNA

“I LOVE YOU.”

I think I heard wrong, but I know I didn't. It makes my heart sing and sink, all at the same time. I give no outward reaction, and Henry doesn't say anything else.

Three little words.

Words thrown around so carelessly, so often, but that would mean so much here—especially here—in the shared space between us. My mind is reeling.

Can he possibly ...

No. If he did say ... that ... it doesn't mean anything.

Everyone loves everyone during sex. I try to remind myself of this.

Henry simply got caught up in the moment.

For a split second though, when his entire body stiffens and he stops breathing, I'm terrified he'll say it again. Terrified by how much I want to hear it. Louder maybe, more clearly so there's no mistaking what occurred. But that doesn't happen, and I force myself to relax again. Even make a joke, telling him that the ground shook and I thought I was back in LA.

He chuckles, sounding relieved, and I know then that he did say it, but hadn't meant to.

Good.

That's good.

I smile at Henry and ignore the way my heart plummets in my chest.



After I finish my shower and slip into the gray hoodie and socks Henry left for me, I head down to the kitchen. Since he only had one set of clean clothes in his travel bag, he gave me the top while he took the bottoms. I could easily wear my own blouse and pencil skirt, but his clothes are way comfier.

The kitchen is airy and well lit. White walls, white cabinets, lots of counter space, and an island in the middle with four stools on one side.

At the stove, Henry's scrambling eggs while making waffles for me and pancakes for him. Silently, I watch the low ride of his gray sweatpants with fascination. I take my time admiring the sleek, defined lines of his body as he moves around the kitchen. Whoever said guys looked hot in gray sweats was absolutely right. Although I'm pretty sure Henry looks good in everything.

I keep replaying what he said. How he froze as the words left his lips. I tell myself it doesn't matter. Nothing's changed. I'm not looking for ... that. And now, I know he's not either. This is good.

Why doesn't it feel good then?

I shake those thoughts away when I hear Henry hum along to the music playing.

"Can I help?" I ask, walking over.

He grins at me over his shoulder. "You can keep me company."

I stop directly behind him, slipping my arms around his naked waist. As I press a series of kisses along his shoulder blades, my hands explore his body. He's addictive, and I like touching him.

"Luna ..." He leans back into me.

“Yes, Henry?” I whisper as my right hand disappears beyond the waistband of his pants.

I don’t expect him to moan as loudly as he does.

“You said ... you’re hungry.” He manages to form coherent enough words despite the sliding motion of my hand.

“I am.”

That’s all it takes for Henry to turn off the stove and give me his undivided attention. Half an hour later, we’re both on the office couch, a sheen of sweat covering our bodies, feeling unbearably relaxed. That is, until we catch a whiff of something burning. Then, we have to open all the windows to air out the smoke filling the kitchen because neither of us bothered to turn off the waffle maker.



Sitting on the kitchen counter, eating breakfast at midnight, while music plays in the background, Henry and I are both fighting back smiles. Warmth bubbles over me, and I curse myself for being so ridiculously infatuated with him. Everything he does, I find adorable. The way he scrunches his eyebrows when he’s talking about his upcoming projects. When one corner of his mouth curls up as he tries to follow along my convoluted ramblings on books. When I tell him my dream is a huge library with a rolling ladder.

“A library?”

“A big one,” I say and watch him jump off the counter to stand between my legs.

When his hands ghost over my thighs, my heart sputters.

We stay like that, close, chest to chest. His touch burns my skin in the best way. That raw desire simmers in his eyes as I trace solid muscles with my fingertips. Taking my time, I sweep my hands down his torso, along the delectable definition of his abs, down the carved V that disappears

beyond the waistband of his gray sweats. I make a sound in my throat, and Henry flashes a lopsided smile.

“You were saying?”

“Um ...”

“A big one?” he offers, smug smile in place.

“Right.” I clear my throat.

He’s closer now, eyes on my lips, his hands gliding up to my hips.

“Like the one in *Beauty and the Beast*, remember?”

Honestly, he’s so distracting. I’m not sure what I’m saying half the time. Still, he listens as I go on, nodding, laughing, encouraging.

Henry gets excited about the roles he’d love to get one day—spy, complex antihero, the chosen one. Then, he mentions once more the possibility of producing. It never fails that he becomes even more animated than usual. His facial expressions and his hands help him convey his enthusiasm. Until I mention one of his movies.

“Wait.” He leans away from me, but I wrap my legs around him to bring him close again. “You actually watched *The Pirate & the Princess*?”

“Yep.” After lunch with the girls the other day, I went back to the hotel and watched it on my laptop. “You’re really good.” *So talented and incredibly sexy!*

As Captain Clayton, he had locs and a goatee. I fight the blush I feel rising.

“Can I ask you something?” I take a sip of water.

“You can ask me anything,” he replies.

“It’s not about the movie.”

“L, you can ask me anything.”

I chew on my bottom lip for a second. “I probably should’ve asked this before, but how old are you?”

Henry arches an eyebrow. “Why?”

“What do you mean, why?” I laugh openly without reservation, and it feels good to be able to do that.

“Why are you asking?” His big, bright, beautiful smile is contagious.

“Because I don’t know.” My face warms, and I fumble with my hair. “I mean, I haven’t googled you or anything.” That doesn’t mean I haven’t been tempted to.

“Why haven’t you?” he asks, tilting his head to get a better look at my face.

Avoiding his gaze again, I sigh dramatically. “I wanted to learn everything about you from you.”

He seems to like that answer. “Fair enough.” He grins, grabbing my waist and erasing the distance between us. “I, on the other hand, couldn’t wait.”

“What do you mean?”

“I googled you.”

I wrinkle my nose. “Why?”

“Because you fascinate me, Luna. Because you’re very careful with what you share and I want to know everything.” He smirks. “Because I was hoping to find pictures of you, preferably in a two-piece.”

That makes me laugh. “So, that means you know my birthday?”

He nods with an air of superiority.

“But I don’t know yours.”

He shakes his head, amused.

“Fine, I’ll look it up.”

I hop off the counter with the intent of retrieving my phone. Before I can take one step though, Henry tugs on my hand, pulling me to him until I’m pinned against the counter.

His body is hot and hard against mine.

I’m looking up at him, going for annoyed, but my body betrays me, leaning into him, smiling up at him too. Smirking,

he wraps both arms around my waist.

“I’m twenty-five.”

My eyes go wide. “I’m twenty-five too.”

“You are.”

“Does that bother you?”

“Should it?”

I shrug. “You’ve dated more. Maybe you like being the older one? Or the much younger one?”

“No.” He chuckles.

“So, when’s your birthday?” is my follow-up question.

“Why? You getting me a present?”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe?” His laughter rumbles through me.

“I mean, you’re making me work pretty hard here,” I argue, but lean into him all the same.

As his hands find my waist, he lifts me onto the counter as if I weigh nothing. When I’m sitting up here, we’re almost eye level.

“Well?” I arch an eyebrow.

All he does is grin at me. But then his hands glide up and down my bare thighs. I watch him watch me. In the back of my mind, I wonder how long it’ll take him to notice I’m not wearing underwear. He kept the only pair I had. Luckily, his hoodie is long enough to keep my butt from freezing on the cool counter.

“I got all day,” I assure him, closing my eyes and resting my head on his chest.

Henry places a kiss along my temple as he wraps me up in his arms, smiling the whole time. I haven’t felt this level of happiness ... ever.

No pressure, no expectations. We can just ... be. Except earlier, when he said—

I stop that train of thought.

“In that case, I’m not telling you.” Henry chuckles, his arms secured around me. “And that means you’ll have to stay here forever.”

That same feeling from before ... my heart singing and sinking ... the words he whispered against my skin echo in my mind. It’s not something I want to focus on because, lately, it’s all I want to think about.

I pull away from him to hop off the counter again. “It’s late.” I force a smile onto my face. “I should probably get going.”

“It’s not that late.” He looks over at the time on the microwave. It’s a quarter past one. “All right, it’s a little late,” he amends. “If you’re tired, you can stay here.”

“Spend the night?”

“We should make it a habit.” He grins, unabashed.

While I’m tugging on the sleeves of his hoodie over my hands, he looks like he wants to say something more.

“You know, I was thinking—”

“Are you sure that’s okay?”

Chuckling, we wait for the other to go first.

“You were thinking ...” I prod.

“Yeah, I was thinking I can finish showing you the house. If you go back to the hotel, you’ll have to return in a few hours anyway.” His tone is playful. “Doesn’t make a lot of sense to go back and forth, that.”

I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from smiling. “So ... where can I sleep?”

“As it happens, there’s only one bed.”

“In this huge house?”

A wide grin blooms, and he shrugs. “Guess you’ll have to share with me.”

Amusement dances across his features. I wet my lips, unable to keep them from curving into a smile.

“Technically, there’re five rooms, and it’s possible each room has its own bed,” he explains, making his way over to me.

“Uh-huh.”

“Plus, there’s the couch in the office, which we’re already very well acquainted with.”

My ears feel warm. Warmer still when Henry stops with his bare chest on mine. Then, he palms my hips, slides his hands down to my thighs, and lifts me up.

“Not sure where I was going with that,” he shrugs.

When I throw my arms around his broad shoulders, his grin explodes. I usually have to tilt my head back to look into those pretty brown eyes, but not right now. We’re eye to eye, and I see it then. That want, that need mirrored back to me.

I pull back a little and let my hands fall to his chest. I need to feel the steady beat of his heart to remind myself he’s real.

“Where are you sleeping?” I wonder out loud.

“Wherever you are.” He has the cutest smile on his face. “If you’re okay with that.”

A tingly warmth starts deep inside me, radiating throughout my limbs. “I am definitely okay with that.”

Once we clean up the kitchen, Henry takes my hand and leads the way upstairs, where we get ready for bed. He slips off his sweatpants, and though I hesitate, I pull the hoodie over my head.

Even though it’s a little cold, the hunger in his eyes warms me up. Both completely naked, we meet under the covers.

“Do you have plans tomorrow?” he asks.

The smile he gives me sends butterflies swirling in my stomach.

“I do,” I whisper, sliding into his waiting arms.

Henry's face falls. "Oh, what time?"

"Not sure." I stifle a yawn. "This really cute guy is showing me his house."

Henry turns off the light, then slides an arm around my middle, drawing me close against his chest. I snuggle further into the warmth of his naked body.

It feels incredibly intimate to lie with him like this. We're not pleasantly exhausted after sex or eager to touch and please one another right before. This is different. The trust is there; the feeling of being safe is too. We're just as close, but this is quiet and sweet and tender.

Tears sting my eyes as Henry finds my hand and laces his fingers with mine. When he places our interlocked hands over my heart, the fluttering in my chest grows quiet and pensive.

Everything was light and playful only moments ago. Now, being here with him, wrapped in his arms, it somehow feels essential, like breathing. A warm, cozy feeling, for which no words exist, fills every part of me. It's intense and calm at once, burning me up yet soothing me as well.

It feels a lot like peace and home and ... and love, a tiny voice in the back of my mind whispers.

I shake the silly notion away.

I'm not looking for love. Neither is Henry, I remind myself.

The thought that, *sometimes, a person finds exactly what they're not looking for* floats through my mind, but I push it away.

"Good night," Henry whispers into the crook of my neck, placing soft kisses behind my ear.

"Mmm ... good night."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

trabajo



LUNA

FOR A SECOND, I FORGET WHERE I AM. THE ROOM IS TOO bright to be my hotel room and not dark enough to be my room back home. When Henry mumbles something in his sleep, his arm warm and heavy across my middle, I smile into the pillow.

I'm in his house. In his bed. In his arms. The happy, sleepy feelings I'm enjoying, in combination with the warmth radiating from his body, lull me back to sleep.



“Luna,” Henry whispers, kissing my shoulder. Both his arms are around me, his body curved behind mine, all warm and firm. “Your alarm,” he murmurs into the back of my neck.

I'm so relaxed, so comfortable, but the low rumble of his voice is like an injection of instant arousal.

“Okay,” I answer without giving it much thought as I snuggle into the hard planes of his body.

I wiggle my ass against the erection greeting me to the new day. The sound of his groan unleashed against my shoulder sends heat pooling low in my belly.

I turn around, about to reach for him when I remember why I set an alarm. “It’s Monday!” I sit up at once and am quickly reminded it’s cold and I’m naked. “Table read’s today.”

Henry pulls me down on top of him. One of his hands sinks into my hair; the other’s around my waist. Those perfect lips lavish wet kisses along my neck, my collarbone, going down, down ...

“Doesn’t feel like a Monday,” he murmurs against my breasts.

Large hands coast down to my hips. When I reach between us, wrapping my fingers around his thick length, I feel the rumble that starts in his chest and ends with a growl in his throat.

“But if you’re right, I can’t be late.” He doesn’t sound too concerned though.

A pair of powerful hands grab my ass, and it takes all my resolve to stop him.

“Henry”—my palms are flat against his chest, holding him back—“you gotta go.”

“Now, you’re kicking me out?” he chuckles.

“Yep,” I say, turning away, tossing the blankets aside.

I slip out of his embrace and make it to the edge of the mattress before Henry grabs my waist and pulls me back to the middle of the bed.

With a startled noise of surprise, I smack his shoulder, but can’t help giggling when he showers me with kisses. Flames spark in my stomach.

“Henry—”

“Luna,” he murmurs from somewhere near my belly button.

He’s playing dirty. I’m okay with that.

“You’re gonna be late. I’m gonna be late too.”

It doesn’t really matter if I’m late though. He, on the other hand ...

His tongue swirls around my right hip bone, teasing the sensitive skin, while his hands caress and squeeze my ass. Another wave of desire rushes through me.

When I moan his name, I feel his smile against my skin.

“We’ll be quick.” He grins, and I almost give in.

“Henry ...” I lift his face with both hands. I will not be the reason his work suffers. “We gotta go.”

“Promise we won’t be late.” He winks, climbing back on top of me. “Want to try something?”

Henry looks so excited by the prospect, which in turn makes me excited too. I blink up at his wolfish smirk and have to squeeze my thighs together.

“Okay.”

Smiling, he presses his lips to my collarbone. His hands are on my waist, sliding up my rib cage until he cups my breasts. The heat of his mouth has me whimpering, and when he sucks my nipples, one right after the other, I curse out loud.

His eyes on mine, Henry pulls away from me to lie back on the bed, and I follow. I love riding him, love raking my fingers across his hot, smooth skin, love feeling the hard, lean muscles that give his physique such amazing definition. I’m about to straddle his lap when he stops me.

“Over here, L.”

I don’t—oh. I see what he’s thinking, and I get nervous again. I’m not sure I can do that.

“Henry, I haven’t—”

“If you don’t like it, we can stop,” he says simply, smiling at me.

My gaze travels over his body, focusing on how his impressive length stands tall. Henry fists his cock, and I whimper without meaning to.

“We can do both.”

My mouth goes dry, and I can only whisper his name.

“Come here.” He grins, and I let him guide me, positioning my body for what he has in mind.

He’s still lying down, but now, I’m on top, on all fours. My knees are by his shoulders, on either side of his head. My hands are by his hips, which is actually perfect for what I’d like to do.

“Let me taste you, L.”

Oh ... I ... fuck. I wish I could have seen his face when he said that, but maybe it's better that I didn't. Why does he have to have such a sexy voice and a sexy accent, and now, I'm nervous because I can't possibly...

When the alarm on my phone goes off again, I climb off him to get it.

“Let's try something else?” I offer, afraid I hurt his feelings or made him angry, but Henry simply gives my thigh a playful squeeze before reaching into the top drawer for a condom.

Then, he's on top of me, kissing me, his hands everywhere I want them to be.

“Are you going to the table read?” he asks, his hot breath along my neck driving me crazy.

A noise from my throat has his fingers possessive at my hips.

“Yes,” I breathe.

Over the weekend, Dr. Harris insisted I attend.

He pulls back to look at me, and I caress his face.

“Good.” He smirks, kissing me one last time with such fierce desire that it leaves me reeling in the best way possible. “I won't be able to sit with you, but I want you to think of me and *this* while you're there.”

Before I can ask, I'm on my hands and knees again. This time, Henry's behind me, grabbing a handful of my hair. He pulls my hair taut until I meet his gaze reflected in the full-length mirror I failed to notice last night.

“That's right, L. Eyes on me.” The grin on his face is ravenous.

When he gives my ass a quick slap, it jiggles, and he groans. Then Henry fists his cock, brushing it against my swollen clit, that deep ache between my legs intensifies, and I whimper, desperate for him.

“You’re drenched.” A low growl rumbles through his chest as he slides inside, deep, so deliciously deep. “Fuck, Luna, this pussy,” he moans, and I watch his face, mesmerized.

All I want to do is please him, make him feel as good as he makes me feel, so I thrust back, but he holds my hips.

“Tell me what you want.”

He knows.

“I want to hear it.” His voice is gravel.

I clench around his cock. “Fuck me, Henry,” I beg, and then he does—so fucking good too.

If anyone were to ask my name, I wouldn’t be able to give it.



Security stops me at the door, asking for my name. I think of Henry only a few hours ago, and a deep blush rises to my face. I snap out of it when I’m told I’m not on the list.

“What do you mean, I can’t go in?” I ask.

Maya and Hazel are with me. All three of us step off to the side so we’re not blocking the entrance.

“It might’ve been Billy,” Hazel mutters as she’s typing something on her phone.

“What?” I’m confused. Billy is Dr. Harris’s personal assistant. Maya looks confused too. “Why would it be Billy?”

“She thinks we’re sleeping together,” is Hazel’s curt reply.

I blink. “What? And why does she think that?”

“Not important.”

“Oh, I think it is important,” I insist.

Hazel puts her phone away. “She wasn’t going to believe I hooked up with Yaya.”

“Why did she need to believe you hooked up with anyone?”

“Bro, don’t try to understand crazy,” is Hazel’s advice.

“Her crazy or your crazy?” I ask, getting more irritated by the minute.

“Could it be that she simply forgot?” Maya suggests, always willing to give someone the benefit of the doubt.

“You go on ahead,” I tell them, smiling the most carefree and joyous smile I can muster when, out of the corner of my eye, I catch Billy looking our way.

Whatever’s going on with Hazel and Dr. Harris’s assistant, I’m not giving the latter the satisfaction even if the former did lie to her.

“I’ll see you guys later.”

“You’re not coming inside?”

Indulging in the sound of his voice, I turn to find Henry’s handsome face full of concern and worry.

“Just got here?”

“I’ve been on the lot, catching up with the crew. You’re not coming to the table read?” He repeats his question.

He’s wearing the gray hoodie and sweatpants we were sharing at his place. But unlike then, he also has on a white T-shirt and white Jordans. One eyebrow is arched high, and his lips are pressed in a thin line as he waits for my reply.

“Looks like I’m not.”

For a fraction of a second, his eyes narrow, but then one side of his mouth quirks up, and my heart does that annoying fluttering thing it tends to do around him.

Henry leans down to whisper in my ear. “I like the hair.”

I tilt my head back to look up into his eyes. He cannot be serious. My hair’s down in loose waves, and I’m such a sucker because I can’t stop smiling at him. Why would he think it’s a good idea to pay me a compliment with others nearby?

“Do you?” And why am I encouraging him?

“Very much.” He smirks.

How does he manage to look so adorable and so freaking sexy at the same time? Like, that shouldn’t even be possible.

“The shirt too,” he adds with a wink.

His dress shirt. The dark navy one he left in my room after Ava’s party. I knew I shouldn’t have worn it.

“I see you’re over that loser from New York,” Hazel interrupts, eyes bouncing between Henry and me.

“Do you mind?” I snap.

“No, not at all.” Hazel gives us a big, toothy smile. “Continue.”

Taking pity on me, Maya swoops in to help. “Hi, Henry! See you inside,” she whispers and then takes Hazel’s hand.

Together, they disappear into the private room where the table read will take place, leaving us alone outside.

“Called it!” we hear Hazel declare from inside.

“I can’t miss this,” Henry apologizes with a deep sigh.

“I know. I wouldn’t ask you to.”

“But I have an idea.” His voice is low. “We’re allowed to invite guests.”

Brown eyes sparkle as he watches me. When he licks his lips, my feet move forward of their own accord, closer toward him. *Why was he so far away to begin with?* I wonder.

“Come in with me?”

Heat floods my cheeks. The possessive edge to his tone sends shivers running down my spine. It reminds me of last night. In the office. On the desk. The way he gripped my hips, devoured my breasts, and fucked me until I saw stars. And this morning. Henry kneeling behind me, me on all fours, his hands on the curve of my waist.

“Love fucking this tight little pussy,” he moaned in my ear as another orgasm ripped through me.

Focus, Luna.

I clear my throat and it takes every ounce of restraint I possess not to reach for him. All I want to do is claim that mouth, run my hands along those tempting muscles, and feel his body close to mine.

Before I can reply, Natalia comes running out of the room. Why is this girl always running?

“Oye, Luna!” Natalia skids to a halt. “Sorry, I was trying to catch you before you left.” Her eyes travel between me and Henry, probably wondering what she walked in on. Luckily, I managed to keep my grubby paws off him. “By the way, Henry, they’re getting ready to start.”

“Are they?” He looks at his watch. “I should get going then.” He grins at Natalia, then turns to me. “You sure I can’t convince you?”

I don’t need convincing, but I can practically see all the questions popping up in Natalia’s head. It would be the same thing with everyone else if I walked in with him. I would rather avoid all that.

“How about I let security know you’re coming in, yeah?” He gives me that gorgeous, dazzling smile that makes my knees feel weak. “Just in case you change your mind.”

When he tips his head and adds a two-fingered salute before stepping into the room, my stoic mask falters. Natalia clears her throat. The sharp sound helps me compose myself. My legs still feel shaky though.

“What’s up?” I speak before Natalia can, the whole time resisting the urge to watch Henry’s cute butt as he walks away.

Natalia smirks. “I could ask what you got going on with that beautiful man, pero tengo algo más importante. Mira, nena, I need your help.”



Four long tables are set up in the shape of a square, and it seems everyone is there. The cast, the production team, and part of the crew.

I'm sitting on the west end of the square, between Maya and Natalia. I feel like I did back when I was a kid on Christmas Eve, waiting for midnight to open presents.

Dr. Harris welcomes everyone, Ava explains her vision for the film, and Billy is shooting daggers at me, but I don't care. This is so fucking cool!

Watching Henry, watching the entire cast, basically performing their lines, infusing so much personality, rather than simply reading the words on the page—which is what I thought was gonna happen—makes this whole movie situation feel real in a way it didn't before. I actually get a little choked up. After all, they're reading my lines. Words I wrote. Bringing to life characters I created.

Henry notices. I shouldn't be surprised, but I am. There's a tenderness in his eyes. That, along with the sympathetic smile he offers me, has a calming effect.

As the minutes go on, I see people taking notes. Maya and Hazel make suggestions to the dialogue, and Tadashi has issues with the pacing. Constructive criticism and feedback are given back and forth, and eventually, a new, updated script will be the result.

Only after a few hours, the table read is complete. Everyone claps with excitement, and a few linger behind. Henry's one of them. Maya and Hazel do too. Natalia drags me outside.

Since Siri, the actress playing Viviana, lost a lot of weight, all her outfits need to be done over. All of them. On movies with huge budgets, the wardrobe department can consist of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of individuals, but this is a small production, which means Natalia makes up the entirety of wardrobe. However, with principal photography beginning later in the week, she has to be on set. Since I mentioned that my abuelita taught me, like all my siblings, to sew when we were younger, Natalia's taking me up on my offer to help.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

drunk



HENRY

THE MEETING GOES EXTREMELY WELL. BREMONT WANTS ME for their next ad campaign. And they're going to pay me a lot of money for it. Mich and Trevor want to celebrate. I don't. After a week of filming from sunrise until late into the night, more phone interviews than I've ever done in such a short period—including one for a three-page spread in British *Vogue*—and having meeting after meeting with potential brand endorsement deals, I'm done. All I want to do is call Luna, have her meet at my place, and cuddle in bed.

I don't say this to Trev, however. I don't say this to Luna either. Instead, I accept the offered car that'll get me home faster.

It's a quiet ride. Longer than the tube, but I'm able to rest my eyes. I don't have to move or talk to anyone or have to pretend I'm anything other than what I am—exhausted.

My phone vibrates. It's Mich. She and Trev want to finalize my itinerary for Paris.

My reply is short and to the point, "Set it up, and I'll do it. Thanks, Mich!"

I trust her and my brother. My career is where it is because of them.

As I doze in and out of sleep, my thoughts drift to Luna. Her smile and her eyes. Her laugh and that body. Dips and curves that have me wanting to ask the driver to turn around toward The Savoy.

We had lunch yesterday in my trailer, courtesy of craft service, but that hour wasn't long enough. Haven't been able to spend another night together. Not in over a week. An entire week.

Monday, it was a movie premiere, party, and after-party. Tuesday, her friend Hazel got so drunk that she needed to be

looked after. Wednesday was a new gallery exhibit—Gen Windrush by Juno Jones. She’s a childhood friend of Hazel’s, an up-and-coming artist from my borough. Kept thinking Dad would have loved to attend. Yesterday, Natalia needed wardrobe assistance. And tonight, I’m heading home while Luna’s out.

The car stops in front of my place, and I drag myself inside. I’ve already grown accustomed to it. The space, the tranquility, the privacy. I like it much better than the hotel. Except, of course, Luna’s over there.

I’m tempted to invite her over, but decide against it. She’s out with her friends, and I want her to have a good time. A few minutes ago, she sent the cutest selfie. Her pink waves are straight, her lips are red, and she’s wearing Maya’s large sunglasses.

My Girl: What do you think? Yay or nah?

Henry: wow ☐

Picturing those pouty red lips wrapped around me, I save the picture to my phone. It’s the first pic she sent without my asking.

Henry: have I mentioned red is my favourite colour?

My Girl: Is it? I’ll keep that in mind...

I’m smiling, knowing that even while out, she’s thinking about me.

My Girl: Btw thank you for the flowers!

I’ve sent a bouquet every night I haven’t been able to see her. Trev says it’s a waste of money. I disagree. The flowers keep her company while I’m unable to.

My Girl: They’re beautiful!

My immediate thought is they’re not as beautiful as she is, but I don’t text that.

Henry: you brighten up my day, I want to brighten yours too

Three dots appear and disappear. A few minutes pass.

My Girl: I wish you were here.

Fuck, me too.

Henry: when can I see you?

My last text goes unanswered. I make it as far as the ground-floor sitting room. There, I collapse onto the sofa and doze off until the doorbell rings. No one knows where I live, except my brothers and Charlie. Mich hasn't had a reason to stop by, and my parents are out of the country. They won't be back until summer, after the school year's over.

But ... Luna knows.

I sprint to answer the door, only to be disappointed to find my younger brother. Rex walks in, holding a bouquet of flowers and a small, gift-wrapped box.

"You are not *amazing*. They're lying to you." Rex throws his head back and laughs loud, his locs flying away from his face. Dumb kid has a great laugh, like he's never had a single thing to worry about. "I'm the dishy one in the family."

Knowing who the flowers are from helps assuage my growing anger toward my brother.

"You opened the card?"

"Of course!"

I snatch the envelope from his hand.

"I'm telling Mum," Rex winks.

He used to be the biggest crybaby, running to our mother, complaining about every little thing that Trevor and I did or didn't do to him.

"You do that." I smirk, and Rex throws an arm around my shoulders.

It used to annoy me to no end that we were the same height. Especially because with his locs and boots, Rex appears to be taller. Now, I'm mostly over it.

"Bruh, I had to make sure there wasn't a bomb in there. Or poison! Can you imagine the headline? Handsome Youngest

Johnson Brother Lets Decent-Looking Actor Brother Die in a Poison Bomb Explosion! I don't think Dad would care, seeing as I'm his favourite, but Mum might be upset."

Shoving my brother off, I read the card.

You're amazing! Me encanta estar contigo!

You should know that you brighten up my day too.

—L

I feel like I'm flying. I don't even remember how I got to the kitchen.

Me encanta estar contigo.

I love being with you.

"Why are you smiling like that?" Rex walks into the kitchen, still carrying the flowers. "What does *me can't star contagious* mean?"

I shake my head, but withhold any laughter.

"Dude, you took those Spanish courses, just like Trev and me."

We were all going to be world-famous footballers, playing for Barcelona. When Paris Saint-Germain became our focus, we took French.

"Dude?" Rex smirks. I ignore the look. "Who's L though? What's in the box?" Rex shakes it near his ear. "Can I open it?"

"Give me that!" I place the bouquet of red roses in the center of the kitchen island. Then, I open the small box and find a new set of AirPods.

"Ooh, I'll take those! You already have a pair!"

Had. Past tense. Not anymore. Lost one earlier in the day. It was strange, not being able to get lost in the music between takes. It helps me relax and prepare while shooting. I happened to mention it to Luna.

"Who's sending you gifts on a random—what day is it today?"

“Friday.”

“Who’s sending you gifts on a random Friday night, mate? Do I know him? Or her? Or them?”

Out of everyone in the family, Rex was the first to not give a shit about who I dated. Mum told me she would love whoever I loved—even though that hasn’t been the case. Privately, Mum could not stand my last girlfriend, though publicly, she was always polite. Dad took a while to come to terms with how I identified, and Trevor took even longer. Charlie assumes everyone is fluid until they tell her specifically that they’re not, so she said she wasn’t surprised.

“Who you texting?” Rex asks, grabbing some juice from the fridge.

“Cups are to your left,” I remind him.

Henry: thank you so much! I’m opening the box right now

My Girl: You’re welcome!

Henry: how’s your night going?

My Girl: Food is meh, drinks are so good tho

Luna sends a picture Natalia took of her holding a huge strawberry margarita. Her pink hair is back to natural waves—so straightening it didn’t last long. She’s wearing a white cardigan I’ve never seen her in, and one side of her mouth is quirked up.

“She’s fit! Is that L?”

“Dude!” I shove Rex away, then slip my phone in my back pocket. “Bloody hell, why’re you looking over my shoulder?”

“Dude again?” Rex scoffs. “Since when do you say du—ohh!” He finally catches up. “It’s the American, innit?”

Rex never gets tired of asking questions. Never shuts up either.

“I’m going out,” I tell Rex as I text Tadashi that I’ll join him at the pub after all.

We used to catch a match every chance we got. Lately, I can't bring myself to cheer on Oliver Ford anymore. Don't think I ever will.

"Meeting some friends," I add. "Want to come?"

"Will the mysterious L join us?"

"No."

"How about the cute American on your phone?"

"No." I don't bother explaining they're one and the same.

"Sure. Why not? Trev going too?"

"No."

"Is that all you can say?"

I grin. "No."



Midway through the match, Rex hooks up with a girl with two sleeve tattoos, and I don't hear from him until the next morning. Tadashi drinks one too many pints and passes out at the table. All his friends are fans of the opposing team, but it doesn't bother me. Like I said, I'm still working through things.

Too distracted by everything going on, I don't feel my phone vibrate. When I finally get Tadashi into a cab to ensure he gets home safe, I check my phone. Quite a few missed texts. Most of them are from Hazel.



It's half past eleven when I knock on Luna's hotel room door. Hazel answers. For the first time that I can recall, she actually

looks sorry.

“She’s drunk.”

Luna’s drunk?

“Is she okay?” I ask, attempting to keep my concern to a minimum.

“Yeah, but she keeps asking for you.” Hazel smirks. “Let me tell you, that got annoying real quick. So, instead of us having to listen to her talk about you and ask for you”—Hazel snorts when I scratch the back of my neck; I’m not embarrassed, but I am far more pleased than I should be—“we decided it was better to simply call you.”

I chuckle. “How much did she drink?”

“That’s the thing.” Hazel’s grinning as she steps aside so I can walk in. “Natalia said she only drank two margaritas. I don’t know what the fuck they put in them. Unless she’s that much of a lightweight.”

Well, I saw the size of those margaritas, so this isn’t a surprise. Add that to the fact that she *is* a lightweight—she admitted it herself—and that she didn’t eat anything since the food wasn’t great, and her being drunk makes sense.

As I walk farther inside, I catch sight of a pair of bare feet dangling off the edge of the bed. When Maya sees me, she apologizes too.

“You sure you’re going to be okay?” Maya asks. “It’s not that we don’t want to take care of her—”

“I don’t wanna take care of her,” Hazel interrupts.

“It’s not that,” Maya insists, giving the other woman a warning look. “But Luna hasn’t stopped asking for you.”

“We’ll be okay,” I assure them.

I’m fighting back a smile. There’s no point really.

The aforementioned drunk sits up immediately when she hears my voice. Her whole face lights up as I’m walking over. I’m certain no one has ever been happier to see me than Luna is in this moment.

“Hey!” Her dimples make an appearance.

“Since when does Wuna have dimples?” Hazel asks Maya as they both stare at her.

Green eyes look me up and down, quickly growing hazy and full of lust. “Where you been?” Her words are slightly slurred. “Have you always been this cute?” Luna asks, eyeing me suspiciously.

Shaking my head, I bite back a smile. Hazel groans, and Maya blinks.

“I missed you.” Luna pouts as she stands on the bed, muttering about my being tall.

I know she’s drunk, but hearing her say she misses me makes my heart speed up. If her friends didn’t know about us, it’s fairly clear after this.

“Look, I’m the tall one now,” she giggles, standing on the edge of the bed.

When she takes a step forward, I’m barely fast enough to catch her before she hits the ground.

Off to the side, Maya covers her eyes when she thinks Luna’s about to fall face-first onto the carpeted floor. “I don’t think I like drunk Luna,” she mutters, her voice louder than usual.

“I love drunk Luna!” Hazel declares. “She’s hilarious! Now, if she’d only shut up about Hank for a second. No offense.”

“None taken.” *Wonder what she’s been telling them.*

With my arms still around her, Luna presses her body to mine.

“Are we gonna have sex now?”

I choke on air before surprised laughter erupts from my throat. Maya’s face turns a shade of pink. Hazel tries not to bust out laughing and fails.

“You need to sleep this off,” I state simply.

Luna's going to be beyond mortified when she sobers up.

"I didn't know you wore earrings," my adorable drunk says, sitting on the floor and making me sit with her so she can inspect the plugs in my ears. "Wait, these aren't earrings."

"Why are we not recording this?" Hazel asks no one in particular.

Luna's pouting now. "Henry?" She's tracing the outline of my lips with her fingertips.

"Yes, Luna?" I grin, helping her sit on the bed.

"I want that big di—"

"Shit, girl! TMI," Hazel cries before Luna embarrasses them even more.

I'm torn between wanting to laugh and feeling sympathy for her friends. They did not need to hear any of that.

Hazel's shaking her head. "Bro, we're out."

"If you need anything," Maya begins to say, already heading for the door, her face bright red.

I nod politely. "We'll be fine," I assure them. No point in pretending otherwise.

"Am I that annoying when I'm drunk?" Hazel wonders.

"Sometimes," Maya sighs and nods.

"How are you still my friend?" Hazel asks, looking disgusted before she yells, "See ya, Hank!"

I leave Luna on the bed to walk them out.

At the door, Maya turns to me. "I feel bad."

"Please don't," I insist.

"Yeah, don't, Yaya. That's what boyfriends are for," Hazel tells her, midway down the hall already.

"Still, some drunks are a handful. Luna seems to be one of those."

The smile on my face cannot be contained, not after being called her boyfriend. "You guys took care of her the first half

of the night. I got the second half.”

Maya nods. “Please call if she doesn’t fall asleep soon. I would hate for you to have to deal with her being—”

“Fucking annoying!” Hazel yells from around the corner.

“Difficult.”

“I’ll be sure to do that. Thank you,” I tell her before closing the door.

“I’m not drunk,” Luna mutters from the bed.

“That’s hardly debatable.”

Luna continues to battle with the buttons on her dress. I watch her, happy, amused.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to seduce you,” she replies, still unable to unbutton the first button.

My chuckle is low and throaty. She doesn’t have to try hard to do that, even while she’s drunk.

“Are you hungry?” Food should help with her current state.

“Yes! Are you hungry too?” The buttons are forgotten. “ ’Cause I got something you can eat.” She smirks.

Fucking hell.

“Here.” I clear my throat. “Drink this water while I order something.” I need to make sure she’s all right before anything else.

Room service is going to take thirty minutes. Before it arrives, I convince Luna to take a shower.

“You’re not gonna shower with me?” she whispers as I’m taking off her dress, which turns out has a zipper in the back. The buttons on the front are merely decorative.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why not?”

“Because this is about you, not me.”

“Well, I think it’s a very good idea.” She leans into me while I try to take off her bra. It’s a red lacy thing I’m tempted to remove with my teeth.

“Oh yeah, why’s that?” My voice cracks when she rubs her covered breasts against my chest.

“Because you’ll be naked.” Luna presses the rest of her beautiful body to mine. “And I’ll be naked.” Her soft hands find their way under my shirt. “And I love when we’re naked together.”

Ignoring the jolt of electricity that runs through me at her words, I bite back a laugh.

“You don’t wanna be naked with me?” She pouts, trying to pull my jumper over my head.

“Luna.”

“Yes, Henry?” she counters, dropping her voice an octave in a poor imitation of what I suppose is my accent.

“Is that how I sound?”

“Yes.” Luna smiles at me as she works on taking off my belt. “All deep and sexy ... I love it. Just the sound of your voice makes me wanna have sex with you.”

Damn. I’m trying to be respectful. I’m trying not to get turned on by all her naked glory or all the things she’s saying. I’m trying really hard not to be that guy.

But she is not making it easy. Not with the way she’s touching me or kissing me or talking to me. Pretty soon, she’s going to start making me blush.

As she works on my belt, Luna’s green eyes are teasing and pleading, insisting I give in. While she’s telling me the things she wants to do to me, with her hands and her mouth, it doesn’t take long for my body to react. When she tells me all the naughty things she wants me to do to her, my resolve goes from barely there to nonexistent.

Her fingers struggle with my jeans, and I still her hands. I need to make sure she’s all right first. Big green eyes flutter up to me, accompanied by the cutest pout.

“I want Pemberley ...”

The name sounds familiar. “Pemberley?”

She nods, looking down at my crotch. It jumps to attention.

“Did you name—”

“This big monster”—she slides a hand up my thigh to cup me—“Pemberley? Yep, it’s the perfect name.” She’s grinning from ear to ear.

Don’t know if it’s meant to be silly or sexy or what, but I tangle my fingers in her hair and bring her mouth to mine. Her pleased moans fill the room, and before I know it, my jumper’s gone. My shirt’s gone too. That’s when someone knocks on the door. Room service.

I need a cold shower, but there’s no time.

Throwing on a shirt, I adjust my belt. “I’ll be right back.”

Luna’s pouting again. She should not look so damn cute.

“Where you going?”

“To get our food.”

“I’ll go with you!”

Only in her bra, she would probably kill me if I let her answer the door like that.

“Tell me about Pemberley,” I suggest.

“Oh, okay.” Giggling, she lets herself fall back onto the bed. I hear words like *large* and *handsome* and *delightful*.

Truth is, my ego inflates about tenfold.

As I set the food on the table, green eyes follow me. Smiling in a way that lets me know exactly what she’s thinking, Luna saunters over to where I stand. As I watch the seductive sway of her hips, my mouth waters.

“Let’s get naked, Henry.” She smirks, then looks down at herself. “I’m almost naked! Let’s get you naked,” she amends, snaking her arms around my waist.

Fuck. I clear my throat.

“Let’s get you a shower and food first, yeah?”

Her smile disappears. “You don’t want me?”

“Of course I do.” I step closer, caressing the sides of her face. “You’re all I want.”

“You’re all I want too.” She smiles again, dimples and all, as her gaze meets mine.

My heart stutters in my chest. As much as I love hearing her say that, I’m wishing she weren’t drunk. Still, for her to have said it at all ...

“You’re so pretty, Henry.” Luna beams. “Why aren’t you kissing me?”

“That’s a very good question.”

Deciding that nothing else is going to happen until I kiss her, I do just that. Watching her flush with pleasure as I pull her toward me, I fit my lips to hers.

Luna moans against my mouth, rubbing her luscious body against mine. I sink my hands into her hair because if I touch her soft, smooth skin, I won’t be able to resist her advances.

She’s the one who pulls away first. “You gotta be naked too.”

“You have to eat something first. There’re waffles.”

This gets her attention. “Did you get pancakes for you?”

“I did.”

Smiling at me, her dimples on full display, she places a soft kiss on my chin. “Okay, let’s eat first. You’re gonna need your energy.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

relish



LUNA

FROM NOW ON, SI NO COMO, NO TOMO. BECAUSE THE LAST few hours are a freaking blur. I don't know when Henry got here or when Maya and Hazel left or why I'm wearing his beige cardigan over my bra and nothing else. I'll ask these questions later because after waffles, fruit, lots of water, and a clearer head, I only want one thing.

I stand and take Henry's hand. "You staying over?" I ask, leading him to the bathroom. A bit of liquid courage might still be in my system.

"What do you think?" He smirks, kicking off his shoes before tugging me into his arms for a series of kisses all over my face and neck and shoulders.

This man's got me giggling like a schoolgirl. Which is why, instead of trying to come up with something cute to say, I wrap myself around him to quiet the sensations coursing through me. It doesn't work. If anything, I'm feeling more. More excited. More nervous. More aroused.

"Come on," I say, pulling back to help him out of his clothes. "You said something about a shower."

He chuckles while we undress, and then he's the one wrapped around me. Those hard muscles and strong arms surround me like a warm blanket. I'm in my bra and he's still wearing jeans as we step into the shower because I can't wait anymore.

"I'm supposed be taking care of you," he groans while I run my hands over his firm body.

The taut muscles are unreal. If his eyes were open, he'd find me utterly riveted.

"We can take care of each other," I counter, the words whispered against his chest.

Peppering kisses from one pec to the other, I continue gliding my hands up the enticing lines of his stomach, then down his Adonis belt, leading to the very noticeable sign of his arousal. When I look up, I catch the intensity of his gaze.

The water is warm, our skin is slick, and Henry pulls me to him, roughly almost. But his lips are gentle against mine. At first. Then, I'm kissing him like we haven't seen each other in years, not a few days.

"Fuck, Henry, I missed you," I moan, slipping my tongue in his mouth. Yep, still a bit tipsy if I offered that sentiment of my own volition.

With a wolfish grin in place, he presses me up against the cold tiles. The shock of the cool, hard surface behind me and the heat of his body in front is almost too much.

"Did you miss me?" I beg, desperation in my voice. And yet I don't care how I sound. I want to hear him say it. I need to hear he's desperate for me too.

I'm able to breathe again when his mouth is on my neck, his hands are squeezing my ass, and his cock is hard against my hip.

Those big hands slide lower, to the back of my thighs. When he lifts me up, I know I look deliriously happy.

"I missed you, L," he murmurs between teasing bites and kisses. "So much. So fucking bad. Every moment you're not with me, I miss you."

A shiver of delight runs through me as he tastes and marks my skin.

His, I think at the same time I hear him say, "Mine."

While I'm struggling with his jeans, Henry takes my bra off.

"Bed," I order as his tongue swirls along my breast.

He takes my nipple in his mouth, and the noise I make would've made me blush once, but not here, not with him.

“Love the water on your skin, L, in your hair, dripping off you,” he growls, nipping and licking the sensitive peak. “I want to taste all of you.”

My heart is racing; my face is flushed.

“Henry, bed.” I cradle his jaw and meet his gaze. “I don’t want you slipping while you’re fucking me.”

That dazzling smile spreads across his face, and I know I won’t need to tell him again. He shuts off the water and steps out, still carrying me in his arms. We make our way to the bed, leaving a trail of water droplets along the way.

I fall back on the plush comforter, but he doesn’t follow.

“Henry?”

He’s standing near the edge of the bed. “You said you wanted me to ...”

His eyes travel down the length of my body, setting my skin on fire. When his gaze settles between the apex of my thighs, I swallow—hard. My breaths come faster because I do ... I do want that.

“I want to,” he says, his smile hopeful. “Been wanting to.”

Heat blazes through me at the husky tone, paired with his words.

“Oh.” I didn’t know that. All my bravado from before has melted away, sobered. Anticipation and an urgent need to have him touch me have replaced it.

“May I?” He’s serious now. “You haven’t wanted me to before.”

I didn’t think he’d noticed.

“I did. I mean, I do,” I mumble, my voice barely audible.

Mortified, I keep my gaze on the ceiling. I hate this part—sharing something so personal. With my insecurities on display, I leave myself open to ridicule and judgment, except Henry’s not like that.

I exhale a long breath. “No one has ever ...”

I'm too embarrassed to tell him I've never been the recipient. My first boyfriend and I were right out of high school. We were a pair of shy, inexperienced kids who weren't together long enough to venture out beyond one position. Then, that fiancé I was engaged to was a selfish asshole who said he didn't find the idea of giving oral sex very pleasant. So, I'd go down on him, but he never—not once—returned the favor.

I push away the feelings of shame and inadequacy that threaten to ruin this moment. "It's not something that's happened before."

"Luna?" The deep, soothing quality to his voice is why I'm able to meet his eyes. "We don't have to. Whatever we do here"—he points between the two of us—"has to be something we both want."

The smile he gives me ... there's nothing but genuine sincerity. Nothing else is hidden there. Nothing clouded. No disappointment. Just him and me and the reminder that we're in this together.

I melt a little. Okay, a lot.

Releasing a shuddering breath, I nod. "I want you to."

"Good." He licks his lips.

Not wasting any time, he peels off his jeans and climbs on the bed, between my legs. His hands are eager along the outside of my thighs, showing his excitement. With great care, he lifts my right leg. Henry smiles down at me and presses a kiss to the inside of my ankle, my calf, then behind my knee. His beard scratches and tickles, all at once.

Those perfect lips sprinkle soft kisses along my skin. When they travel the inside of my thighs, desire pools low in my belly. Hands, mouth, tongue—all of him seems to be on me. And Henry's just getting started. Wet kisses accompany the sounds he makes, like he's enjoying this. His magical tongue charts a path toward the most sensitive part of me.

My heart is beating so fast; it feels like it's going to run away. Henry's not in a rush though. He tells me as much. Says

he wants to enjoy every inch of me.

“To fantasize about you, Luna”—his soft lips are on my hip bone—“to try to imagine what you might taste like is one thing.” His warm mouth continues its torturous path, and I’m throbbing. “But to know from experience”—his eyes flicker up to mine, and raw desire burns in them—“it’s something else entirely.”

I’m trembling. His voice and his words are seared into my flesh, my soul. They’re a part of me now. I fist the sheets at my sides to keep from shaking.

His dazzling smile makes an appearance. My insides flutter violently. Then, while his mouth is so close and yet not close enough, I almost beg him to hurry.

“How wet are you?” he breathes against me.

That husky voice—fuck. Este cabrón sabe. He knows what he’s doing to me.

I whimper or moan—I don’t know. All I know is, I want to sink my fingers into his thick hair and bring him to me, bury his face between my legs to ease the almost-painful ache building there.

“Let’s find out,” he grins, and then his mouth is on me, hot and mind-numbingly perfect. My hips buck up into him—hard.

“Oh shit, Henry, I’m so sorry.” I cover my face with my hands.

“Did I hurt you?” he asks.

I shake my head, unable to meet his gaze. “No, I’m okay. I ...” I peek between my fingers to find him smirking, brown eyes twinkling with delight, while he rubs his jaw. Mierda.

“I was afraid I might’ve hurt you,” he says.

“No, I ...” My whole face feels like it’s on fire, and I wanna hide. This is completely new and felt so fucking amazing! The fact that Henry seems as excited as I do makes it a million times better. “I’m sorry. It’s just ... not what I expected.”

His mouth quirks. “Good?”

“So good.”

“I should’ve warned you,” he apologizes, placing a kiss on the inside of my thigh.

Something feral flashes in those brown eyes, and I gulp.

“Consider yourself warned,” he smirks, looking so fucking sexy that I’m about to lose my mind.

That’s when he places a kiss where I want him most. I try to steady my breathing, but his strong hands on the outside of my hips and the wet warmth of his mouth *on* me are my undoing. His lips touch me first, then his tongue. He’s kissing me, lapping at me, and I’m already panting and moaning his name.

The pleasure of every brush of his lips, each flick of his tongue, has me breathless and cursing in English and Spanish. My hips rise a fraction, just to feel more of him, heat rushing through every part of my body.

“You’re fucking delicious ...”

Ohmigod! His voice, that growl ... I’m not gonna survive this. Can you die of too much pleasure?

That’s when I make the mistake of looking down at him. His beautiful face is buried between my thighs, moving up and down. Feeling him and watching him ... delirious shivers cascade through my whole body.

I love it! I can’t get enough. Please don’t stop!

Needing to touch him, I brush my open palms over his scalp, sinking my fingers gently through the thick strands. “Is this okay?” I ask, the words barely coherent.

“Mmhmm,” he mumbles between my legs, licking me, tasting me, his moans the loveliest sounds.

His head continues up and then down. I’ve dreamed about this—Henry between my legs. His beautiful mouth sucking and licking by turns, making the most obscene slurping noises until I succumb to the pleasure he gives me. And it’s finally

happening, and it's better than any dream I've ever had. My eyes fall shut as I enjoy it, savor it, loving every single second of Henry devouring me. I run my fingers through his hair while that decadent pressure grows.

I moan into a pillow as my hips move up to meet his mouth again and again. He kisses my pussy and swirls his tongue around my clit in slow, teasing circles until I'm practically incoherent. When he sucks gently, I think it's the best I can feel until he slips a finger inside.

“Holy-fuck-Henry-shit!”

He'll laugh with pride about it later, how he made me curse and scream his name, had me moaning until my throat was raw, but not right now. Right now, my pleasure is his pleasure, he says, and when his mouth and his fingers bring my first orgasm, satisfaction runs through him so powerful that his hips grind into the bed to help relieve some of the pressure.

With my legs over his shoulders now, I arch into his mouth again. My hips twitch up a little, just to give him better access, and it's so fucking good. He works me with expert care, with languid strokes, until I come again, crying his name, and then a third time with spent, silent gasps.

Needing to catch my breath, I lie there, deliriously satisfied. As I regain my bearings, I see Henry's exceptionally talented mouth curve into an almost-arrogant smile while he kisses his way up my body.

“You deserve an award for that,” I say, too relaxed to realize I never meant to say it out loud.

With a smug, lazy laugh, Henry slips on a condom and settles himself on top of me.

“Not done yet.” He smirks, his voice a seductive rumble.

Dipping his head, he captures my lips with his own. I taste my own pleasure in his mouth. My body flushes with a giddy warmth as I hold him close, winding my arms around his neck, legs high around his waist.

Mio, I think, completely enamored with him.

Kissing his jaw, the corner of his mouth, his cheeks, and his nose, I can't get enough. He's chuckling as I shower him with kisses.

Henry gives me that dazzling smile before giving me all of him. He groans my name as he slides inside, deeper, stretching me so good. Heat unfurls inside me, and I bite down on my bottom lip to keep from saying something I shouldn't.

"L, you okay?" he asks, and I can only nod.

Unable to speak, I stroke the side of his face.

He's a dream. Being with him is amazing. Too amazing. A tiny spark of fear springs in my heart, and I have to squash it down. I don't know why I get this way, where I want to flee and hide—where I'm worried something bad is just around the corner, and in order to avoid that, I'd rather cut my losses now.

I grab his face and press my lips to his in a desperate kiss. I don't want to think. I only want these sensations he creates. When I give his ass a little smack to get him moving again, it makes him laugh.

I always end up thinking of all the horrible things that can happen so that if and when they do happen, those negative thoughts are reinforced because, hey, I knew it. I knew it was gonna occur. It was inevitable. But I don't wanna do that right now. I don't wanna push him away. I want to bring him closer and let him in. I think I have already. That's why I try to ignore that voice in the back of my head, taunting me.

I'm startled by the strange and strong desire to voice these emotions, to look deep into his eyes and say the words I've never shared before.

No.

"Henry?" I whisper his name, and warm brown eyes meet mine.

The frantic drumming of my heart reverberates through me. It's a moment I read about, one I've written about, but never experienced firsthand. I never knew a person could be this beautiful.

I know he can see it in my face, what I'm feeling ... about him. And I want him to know. I want to give myself over to him completely. But then something crosses in his expression, something so open and vulnerable, and I wither, unable to meet his gaze anymore.

I bury my face in his neck. Henry doesn't let me hide.

"Why are you keeping those gorgeous eyes from me?"

My heart thuds in my chest. When I look up, what I see there makes it hard to breathe.

"Henry ..."

"Love when you say my name."

There's a faint tremble running through those broad shoulders before his lips are on mine again, this time more demanding. He drives inside me, his hands on my hips, and I'm close again.

"Come with me, L."

And I do, pleasure rolling over me as I follow him into blissful oblivion.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

trailer



HENRY

THE ISSUES WITH THE LIGHTING ON SET IS THE REASON I'M lying on the sofa in my trailer, resting my eyes. My phone pings.

My Girl: Have you had lunch?

There's a goofy smile on my face.

Henry: not yet

My Girl: Got it. Omw!

Now? Can't wait to see her.

Before Luna can knock on my trailer, I open it. I'm smiling as I take her hand and the bags of food she's carrying to help her inside.

"There's Skittles—"

My lips are on hers as soon as the door is closed.

I kiss her, short and sweet at first. However, as is often the case with us, it quickly takes a turn, heating up fast. Hair and makeup are going to kill me if they find out, but when Luna runs her hands through my hair, I don't stop her. Not when she's moaning into my mouth, sliding her tongue with mine.

We spent the entire weekend together. It was the best forty-eight hours of my life. I did have to attend a presenters dinner on Saturday night. However, when I got home, Luna was there, in my hoodie on my bed. She was working on her laptop, waiting up for me. It was the most amazing sight.

Right now, she pulls away. "Wait," she murmurs against my lips.

This can't wait. This need, this craving for her, dictates my actions. I pull her to the sofa with me so that she's straddling my lap. I'm hard against that devastating heat. With my fingers digging into her thighs, I grind up into her. The little

gasps she makes as I nip and suck on her neck only fuel the fire raging through me. I suck a little harder, grip a little tighter, and she melts against me.

I want her to ride me again, like she did yesterday. I didn't think it was possible to be more taken with her than I already had been, but when she flipped our positions, I watched her, spellbound. Seeing her on top of me, riding my cock in the early morning light, I was mesmerized by the way she moved, by her luscious body, her exquisite face. Watching the way my body disappeared into hers, I was utterly enthralled by the way she made a place for me inside her.

More than anything, I want her to make a place for me in her heart as well. The thought had me delirious with all the things I wanted to say to her. In my eagerness, I kissed and tasted and ravaged her, leaving bruises that claimed her as mine. The turtleneck she's wearing today covers the marks, but not the passion we shared.

“Henry ...”

It felt like a dream, the way we were able to take our time exploring each other's body. Adoration fueled every caress, each touch a promise. It was almost like the physical manifestation of my heart speaking to hers, trying to awaken her senses to that unique song of love.

I stop. Green eyes meet mine, and my heart stops, too, stutters, beats against my chest. *I love you*, it sings.

“You have to be on set soon, right?”

I nod, trying to catch my breath.

“I was gonna tell you something ...”

“That you couldn't wait to see me?” I ask, secretly hoping the question makes her blush, and it does.

But I'm also curious. She doesn't usually show up in my trailer so early. Luna only stops by after I'm done filming, not before.

“A little,” she replies with her body leaning into mine. She kisses one corner of my mouth, then winds her arms around

my neck.

“Only a little?” I sound offended.

In one fluid move, I switch our positions so she’s lying with her back on the couch and I’m on top of her. Luna laughs in surprise, but her legs part for me.

“Can’t have that,” I grin, hands in her hair, lips savoring hers.

We don’t have a lot of time. We both know this and take advantage of every second. I’ll finish filming late into the evening, and then I’m flying to Paris. I won’t be back for two days.

“What if you come with me?” The words are murmured against her soft skin.

She’s already working on my belt. “Do we have time?”

I laugh, a low, throaty sound. Love how eager she is, how much she wants me too. Almost as much as I want her.

“I meant to Paris,” I elaborate.

Her hands freeze on my fly. “Paris?”

Embarrassed, she laughs, too, burying her face in my chest.

“What do you think?” I ask, my expression hopeful.

We’ve practically traveled together already. From LAX to OKC to JFK. But this time, it would be something we planned, not fate throwing us together.

“We can visit Shakespeare and Company,” I suggest, caressing the side of her face.

“The bookstore?”

I nod. “And La Closerie des Lilas as well.”

Her smile is radiant. As she looks up at me, I can see she’s about to say yes even if she has no ticket, nothing packed, no hotel reservation. Because she’ll be with me. The knock at the door stops her.

“That might be your brother,” she informs in a hushed tone. “He was looking for you on set. That’s why I ran over to warn you.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing,” I say, kissing the tip of her nose before I’m up and helping her to her feet.

Once I answer the door, Trevor storms in. His eyes land on Luna.

“Great, you’re here. Saves me the trouble of tracking you down.”

I look between them. “What’re you talking about?” I grab the bag of Skittles Luna brought and cross the narrow trailer to stand near the sofa with her. Feels like we’re in trouble for some reason.

“I assume you heard my message already?” Trev asks.

I barely contain my eye roll. “Yes, I got it.”

He glares at me, then at Luna.

“And you don’t think this is a problem?” he barks.

This time, I do roll my eyes, certain I look as annoyed as only a younger brother can look when his older brother is irritating the crap out of him. “No.”

“Henry, man, come on.” Trevor narrows his eyes to slits. “As your publicist, I’m telling you, it *is* a problem. You cannot do shit like this.”

Pouring some of my favourite candy into the palm of my hand, I offer Luna knowing she’ll pick the green and yellow ones. “It’s not that bad.” I say, tossing the other colours in my mouth.

He looks like he’s on the verge of yanking out his hair in frustration. Trevor reaches for his phone instead. He unlocks it and hands it over.

“That doesn’t look bad to you?”

The caption reads, *HENRY IN LOVE IN LONDON!*

It's a grainy photograph, taken from the security camera footage of me and Luna. We're in The Savoy lift after Ava's party. Hearing about it is one thing, seeing it though ...

I angle the phone to allow Luna to view the screen too.

When I try to gauge her expression, I can't. Her eyes are on the screen, and she's chewing on her bottom lip.

I keep scrolling. The entire feature is on us. Six whole pages. Included is a passing mention of my previous known relationships and speculation on who Luna might be. Many pictures of the same kiss in the elevator are shown. There's even a pie chart with percentages, guessing who the Mysterious Woman is between various actresses, singers, or social media influencers. The cover is the most damning.

In the pixelated picture, my hands are lost in Luna's pink waves. Hers are secured around my waist. Our mouths are fused in a heated kiss. It's fortunate the lift ride is a short one; otherwise, our hands and lips would undoubtedly venture toward more private destinations.

Luna's phone vibrates, and it's Hazel. I'm not surprised. Luna shows me the text.

Hazel: Bro, have I taught you nothing?!?!

Hazel includes a link to another tabloid site. There's another full-page picture of us kissing. It's the same angle as the one Trevor showed us, but the colors are off. Her dress looks pink, not purple.

In the bottom right corner is a close-up of Luna smiling in the lobby. She's turning to the side so her whole face isn't clearly visible, but that smile is an unmistakably happy one.

Luna nudges the phone over to me.

HENRY JOHNSON'S NEW GF? it reads.

"Luna"—every trace of good humor leaves me—"I'm so sorry."

Trevor snarls or groans or makes a sound equally disturbing. "Bloody hell! Why you apologizing to her? She should be apologizing to you!" He crosses his arms because

he's furious now. "She has you acting like some silly schoolboy! It's one of the stupidest things you could do!"

I stand up. "I don't get the problem. We sue them like we have before." My voice is steady.

"The damage is already done!" Trev turns to Luna. "You need to sign an NDA."

Visibly confused, Luna looks over at me.

"A nondisclosure agreement," I explain. "And you don't need to sign anything."

Trevor runs a hand down his face. "Is this about book sales?"

Her head snaps up. "Excuse me?"

"Book sales have increased, haven't they?" Trevor accuses, glaring at her.

Luna crosses her arms over her chest. "Yeah, they were up last week."

"Really?" My eyes haven't left her face. Taking a seat at her side again, I hope she can see how proud I am. "Luna, that's awesome!"

"Thank you." There's a shyness in her small smile. "It is pretty cool. Jennifer just emailed last week's numbers earlier today."

"We'll celebrate in Paris!"

"No, you won't!" Trevor barks, ruining our good mood. "What do you mean, celebrate? Do I need to show you more tabloid websites?" He turns his gaze back toward Luna. "You didn't answer my question—"

"Watch your tone," I warn, standing.

"Is this about you selling more books?"

That's absurd. Luna looks like she's about to get in his face because that's the most asinine idea ever. She manages to keep her composure.

“No.” She stands up too. “What’s happening here”—she meets my eyes for too short of a time—“has nothing to do with my book.”

Trevor shakes his head. “You cannot be this naive.”

“Hey”—I raise my voice—“don’t.”

I realize my brother is only looking out for me in his overprotective way. However, I won’t allow him, or anyone else, to treat her with disrespect.

“You think all this ... you think I’m with Henry to boost book sales?” Luna looks disgusted as she says the words. “Que hombre mas pendejo.”

Guess my brother pissed her off.

Trevor massages the bridge of his nose before replying, “Why are you with my brother?”

“Are you serious?”

I reach for her hand. “L, you don’t have to answer that.”

The look she sends my way is unexpected. “I don’t mind answering at all,” she assures me, then turns to face Trevor. “You want the truth?”

“Always.”

“Have you seen your brother?” Luna asks, tone angry. “That’s a rhetorical question. Listen, you might not be able to appreciate Henry like the rest of us can, but I’ll tell you ... he’s unbelievably, incredibly, ridiculously good-looking.”

Trevor’s face changes into one that smells something bad. I cover my mouth to keep from laughing.

Luna continues, “I’m not exaggerating when I say he’s the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen.”

Forget hiding my reaction. I’m grinning from ear to ear.

“And I don’t just mean on the outside.”

My heart’s about to leap out of my chest. Luna cannot meet my gaze even though she feels me looking at her. I know

she knows because she's messing with her hair. It's what she does when she's feeling shy around me.

"Henry has such a big heart and a brilliant mind." Green eyes flicker to mine for a split second before she continues, "He's fun to be around, and"—her cheeks are pink, and I realize she must be beyond pissed off to reveal so much—"his kisses are like volcanoes erupting."

My chest swells with pride.

"Plus, he has the sexiest voice—"

"All right, stop," Trevor mutters, massaging his temples.

I stand a little straighter, popping Skittles in my mouth enjoying Trev's obvious discomfort.

"That was disturbing on so many levels," Trevor mutters.

Luna glares at him. "You asked."

"I'm sorry I did."

"You're sorry?" She frowns, still furious, but soon, sorrow replaces the anger. It's why I bring her into my arms. "I've told you things I haven't even ..." Luna inhales and exhales once. Only then can she face me. "How about you pretend you didn't hear any of that?"

A lot of people don't like to feel vulnerable, but Luna tries to avoid it completely. Sharing all that couldn't have been easy for her.

"How about you keep going?" I smirk, trying to lighten her mood.

"Please don't," Trevor mumbles, holding up his hands.

"Look, I don't know what your problem is, but I'm not looking to hurt Henry." Luna crosses her arms over her chest.

"Prove it."

Pursing her lips, she shakes her head. Then, she and I talk at the same time.

"I don't need to prove anything to you," she snaps at the same time I say, "What are you on about?"

I'm smiling at my girl, knowing she would've actually been accommodating if Trev had simply asked instead of accusing her.

Trevor all but ignores my question. "You wouldn't be doing it for me," he states.

I don't like the sound of that one bit. When I meet Luna's eyes, I know she doesn't either.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

trouble



TREVOR

HENRY FLEW TO PARIS. LUNA STAYED IN LONDON. HE'S pissed off, and I don't give a flying fuck how she feels, but things got sorted. That means the situation is contained, and further PR damage has been avoided.

At least for two days, it is.

Once Henry's back home, it's the same shit all over again. My idiot brother wants to be out and about with his "girl." That's what he's calling her now. Doesn't matter how or why or where or when I attempt to explain why it's a bad idea. Every point I make is refuted. Every last one.

At least she has the sense to want to stay home. Seems to want to avoid the spotlight. I don't buy it. Why get involved with someone like Henry otherwise? Especially when it will benefit her brand?

Then, there's that room upstairs. I don't know what my brother's up to, but it requires a lock and key. If he's not working or with Luna, he's up there. Building something perhaps. He used to build all the time back when we were kids. Bird house, dog house, Mum's garden. He was as proficient with a saw and hammer as he was with a football. The kid's got talent, no doubt. Once he discovered acting, everything else ceased to matter though. He's doing the same thing with this girl. It's a problem.

Anytime I complain about her, I know what's coming. Know exactly what my brother's about to tell me.

"You need to be nicer," Henry exhales.

Right on cue.

I arch an annoyed eyebrow. "You need to be smarter."

"I am being smart. She makes me happy."

It's shit like that. Why is it always shit like that?

“You’ve known her a month!” Inhaling deeply, I cross my arms over my chest to keep from strangling the dumb git.

“I’ve known her longer than that,” Henry insists. “We met back in LA.”

He might be telling the truth. After all, it’s been a while since he’s been involved with anyone. After the disaster of his last relationship, he stopped messing around and got serious about his career.

It’s been brilliant. No distractions. No stupidity. His work is all that drives him. Mich thinks Henry’s performance in *White Memorial* could mean an Emmy. The role of Benjamin, if done right, it’s a guaranteed Oscar nomination. Perhaps even brings home the trophy.

The trouble is, he’s lost the plot. Too focused on his goddamn girl. Been buying her gifts left and right. Blimey. I don’t tend to worry, but I’m worried. Books. Flowers. He wants to take trips with her.

“Look, man, you like her? As your brother, I say, that’s great. Good for you. But I’m not just your brother, and I gotta tell you, this isn’t the right move.” I run a hand along my freshly shaven jaw, agitation marking my movements. “Take it slow.”

“Why?”

“What’s the hurry?” I take a deep breath. “Why not give her a chance to prove she’s here for you, nothing else?”

Irritated, Henry rolls his eyes.

“She’s not pregnant, is she?” I grumble.

That stupid smile that sprouts on Henry’s face tells me he wouldn’t mind if she were. Thank God he shakes his head.

“She’s not pregnant. Luna ... she’s not like anyone I’ve ever known.”

Bloody hell.

I run a hand down my face. This kid and that heart of his. He’s always been way too emotional and far too sensitive for

his own good. He's never gotten attached this quickly though.

"Brother, if you're happy, I'm happy." I nod.

"But ..." He's smirking.

"But love and lust get confused easily, especially early on. Take it slow. That's all I'm saying."

Henry doesn't agree, but I can tell he's weighing my advice.

"I'm not promising anything."

"You don't have to." Not bothering with anything else, I shake my head all the way to the kitchen.

"I'm asking her to join me at the premiere."

I pause mid-step, take a deep breath, and remind myself I am not a violent man. My brother is testing me though.

"Not the *White Memorial* premiere," I growl.

The Oscars, Met Gala, Cannes, and attending the Big Four Fashion Weeks are the places to be. Henry's nearly there. He's been invited to present at other awards shows, and we're in talks with Burberry at the moment. There's no doubt all the doors will be open for him if the second season of *White Memorial* is as big of a hit as the first one. Or if his *De East LA* role is what I know it can be.

"Yes," he replies with that annoying shit-eating grin. He's jogging up the stairs, and I'm following him. "We're going to the Globe tonight," he adds over his shoulder. "I got tickets."

"Bloody hell, Henry, what'd we just discuss?" I bark.

He smirks as he walks away and I'm left wondering *why* I decided to become a publicist in the first place.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

writing



HENRY

THE FRUSTRATION ROLLING OFF OF AVA IS PALPABLE. IT FILLS the set like a thick fog and makes everyone divert their eyes, pretending to look at their phones.

The reason? Siri's unhappy with the scene. Again.

“Back to One!”

Everyone resets to the beginning of the shot. Siri and I will run into the house from the soft drizzle that started outside. She'll speak first.

“Line,” she calls out, letting everyone know she doesn't know what she's supposed to say.

“Cut!” Ava growls, hopping out of her chair.

“Stand by!” Tadashi yells.

We hold our position. Seems we'll resume filming shortly.

Truth is, it is a difficult scene. Siri's character Viviana, is coming to terms with the loss of her parents, trying to reestablish a bond with her estranged brother, while planning a wedding to Benjamin, my character.

As Tadashi discusses matters with Ava, I approach Siri.

“Are you all right?”

The animosity on her face surprises me.

“Stay away from me,” she hisses, storming off in the opposite direction.

“Pardon?”

She keeps walking.

Not sure where that came from. She's not the first costar I've had where we have little to nothing in common. However, she is the first to harbor an obvious disdain for me.

While the lights are being reconfigured for the scene, Siri stalks back toward me. “Sorry that was rude. Don’t know if you know this, but I was low key in love with you for years.”

I was not expecting that and can only blink at her.

“Anyway,” she continues, “now my boyfriend’s being all dramatic and shit. Doesn’t want me talking to you, but whatevs.” She rolls her eyes. “I told him I heard you were gay, you know, so he’d calm the fuck down and—”

Her words get cut off by someone walking into the tungsten lights and the loud crash of shattering glass that follows. Her words, her dismissive tone, they bother me.

I know better than to react, than to take offence. Charlie would make this a teachable moment. Trevor would tell her to sod off. Rex would probably try to sleep with her. I usually let things go. For some reason, I can’t this time.

“I’m actually bi,” I state simply.

“Oh.” She looks at me a long time. “That was shitty of me,” she whispers as she backs away until she leaves out the side door.

“Where is she going?” Ava cries.

I run my hands through my hair. This is going to be a long shoot.



LUNA

Henry got us tickets to the Shakespeare Globe. A couple weeks ago I saw the structure from the outside and visited the gift shops, but to see a performance live? With Henry? Fuck yeah, except it's not gonna happen tonight. Henry's still on set and I'm in his trailer. Curtain call for *Twelfth Night* was over an hour ago. Ni modo.

While I'm waiting for him, figured I'd use this time wisely, but it's useless. I've tried everything I can think of. Nothing's helping.

Working on my laptop? Nuh-uh.

Phone Notes app? Nope.

Pen and paper? Tampoco.

I've run out of words. My brain won't supply any new ones. The fate of my characters is undetermined. Book 2 is a bust. I am a fraud.

Maybe it's the amnesia? I sit up in bed. Is that what's throwing me?

I used to watch telenovelas with mi abuelita every night and that was one of my favorite tropes. The accident, the loss of memories, all the misunderstandings and confusion. I love that shit! So I really don't think it's that. Es otra cosa.

Lying back on Henry's bed, looking up at the smooth gray ceiling, trying to figure out where this block is coming from, I doze off.

"Luna?"

Mmm ... my favorite sound—Henry's voice. It's like he wrapped me up in a warm blanket on a cold winter's night. Gave me a hot mocha coffee to drink and *Como agua para chocolate* to read. Maybe *Pride and Prejudice*. Or *Persuasion*.

I feel him slide into the bed behind me. He wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me toward his body. Then, he buries his nose into my hair.

“I’m sorry filming ran long.”

My eyes are heavy and when I open them, it’s dark inside his trailer. Henry’s fresh from the shower and I wish I’d stayed awake to join him.

“It’s okay,” I mumble, rubbing my ass against him. I was in the middle of a very good dream starring a very naked Henry. He was standing before me and I was on my knees looking up at him ...

“What time is it?” I ask, swallowing when he starts kissing my shoulder.

“Too late to watch the performance.”

“That’s okay. How you feeling?”

He nuzzles into the curve of my neck, his hands gliding along my hips.

“Tired,” he murmurs behind me. “Frustrated. Disappointed.”

“Wanna talk about it?” I try to turn over, but he’s holding me tight.

“Not right now.”

Something happened on set. Something bad.

“Henry, que paso?”

“Let’s talk about it later?”

I wait a beat before I reply, “Of course.”

“Thank you.” His low voice rumbles through me. “The only thing that kept me going was knowing you were here waiting for me.”

He loosens his hold and I turn. His handsome face takes my breath away.

“Hi,” I smile.

“Hey.”

His warm breath sweeps past my lips. My throat constricts.

“Wanna talk about it now?” I run my fingers through his beard.

Henry chuckles, shakes his head no, then kisses me, effectively distracting me.

“How was *your* evening?” he asks, holding me close, his lips on mine. “Writing go well?”

“Not really,” I sigh.

“How can I help?” he whispers, placing featherlight kisses along my jaw. His hands slide from the small of my back to squeeze my ass.

“Let’s have a night out, yeah?” He gives me a quick kiss before rolling us off the bed.

“You sure? You had a sucky evening,” I counter as he helps me up. Henry’s usually upfront about everything. I’m afraid there’s something bothering him that I don’t know how to help with.

“Want to wash the day away,” he tells me, wrapping his arms around me and when I’m here in his warm embrace, his strong arms encircling me, I’ll do anything he wants. “Besides, I heard writers should be encouraged to live. We can do both.” That husky tone, along with his teasing smile, should be illegal.

He wants to go out, so we’ll go out. I smirk up at those pretty brown eyes as I wrap my arms around him too. “Where should we go?”

Henry chuckles, light and full of energy. Before I can repeat my question, he spins me to press me against the wall, kissing me like he’s never gonna let go. Delicious shivers run through me when he grabs my hands and pins them above my head. Then, he dips his mouth to mine.

“Some of the *Twelfth Night* cast are going out for a pint,” he says between kisses. “You’re coming with me,” he adds before I can try to get out of it.

“How much time do we have?” I ask, flipping our positions so that he has his back against the wall.

Henry smiles against my lips. “Enough.”

Slipping my hands under his sweater, I’m greedy and impatient, exploring his skin. The firm planes of his abdomen, the hard, hot muscles of his chest.

“We have to be quiet though.”

Outside people walk by, some going to their trailers, others heading home. Security patrols often at night too.

As Henry pulls his sweater off, I work the buttons on his pants. My whole body feels like it’s going to explode from the anticipation. The throbbing between my legs probably has my underwear soaked already. I don’t care though. I want Henry. In my mouth. Now.

“Can I?” I ask, kissing my way down his body, past that sexy vee that disappears into his boxer briefs to a pair of powerful thighs. I’m desperate for what’s waiting between them.

I kneel before him, watching his face as he processes what’s happening. Henry swallows, his Adam’s apple going up and down. “You shouldn’t look at me like that, L.”

“How am I looking at you?” I ask, sliding my palms up his thighs.

His gaze is fixed on my mouth as he runs his thumb along my bottom lip and then the top one, just as slow.

“Like you can’t wait to wrap these pretty lips around my cock.”

A warm chill runs up and down my body at his words, at the way *he’s* looking at *me*.

Nervous and impatient, I pull his pants all the way down, and then his boxers follow. Pemberley springs to life before my eyes, long and thick and perfect.

“This what you want?” he asks, wrapping his hand around himself, pumping a few times.

I lick my lips. “Yes.”

Heart racing, breath spiraling, I meet his gaze. “You’re what I want.”

That’s not what I meant to say. Not out loud anyway. His eyes are locked on mine and I need to distract him before I ruin the moment.

Smirking, I open my mouth and stick out my tongue. I lick him from base to tip. Brown eyes fall shut, and his head rolls back against the wall in a loud thud. The need for silence is forgotten.

I lavish wet kisses along his length, and Henry gasps. I lick him again and again until I reach the head. My tongue swirls around the tip, making his hips twitch. There’s just something about seeing him breathless, eyes shut tight, enjoying what I’m doing to him that’s unlike anything else. I revel in the sounds he makes before taking him in my mouth.

“Luna, *fuck* ...”

I love the feel of him against my tongue. I try to fit all of him in my mouth, but begin to panic when I realize that’s not gonna happen. He’s too big. I pause to adjust to his size. Wrapping my fingers around the base, I move again, and he groans again.

His fingers flutter along the side of my head.

“You okay?” he asks, voice strained.

“Mmhmm,” I hum around his cock, and he moans my name, his hand tightening around my hair.

I love the taste of him, the feel of him. When I glance up, he’s looking down at me with a combination of want and heat and lust.

Both my hands are on his thighs as I take him deeper into my mouth, feeling him hit the back of my throat. My eyes water as I choke, but I don’t stop. Mumbled curses fly from his lips. He’s not being quiet at all.

“So good, L,” he moans, his gaze locked on mine. “You’re so fucking good.”

The throbbing between my legs keeps growing, and I increase my pace, sliding my hands from his thighs to grip his ass. He's smiling, moaning my name. His hand is gentle along my cheek.

"L, I'm close ..."

With his warning, I'd have more than enough time to move away, finish him off with my hand, but I don't do that. I want to taste all of him.

With one hand wrapped around the base, I suck harder. It's the perfect combination of warmth and friction that makes Henry groan, the sound low and guttural as he spills into my mouth. His hips move erratically, his fingers tighten in my hair, and he mutters in French. The wave of pleasure that engulfs him lingers as I swallow.

Mío.

Breathing hard, Henry sags back against the wall, looking utterly satisfied. I watch him with half-lidded eyes as I stand up. With a lazy smile, he takes my face in both hands and showers me with kisses.

"I'll do better next time," I mutter, feeling shy and embarrassed.

"What ... what are you talking about?"

I look everywhere, but cannot meet his eyes. "You're bigger than I thought," I admit, looking bashful. "I mean, I knew you were *big*, but ..." My voice is tiny. "I couldn't fit all of you in my mouth—"

"Luna," he cuts me off, "that was bloody brilliant." A shy laugh rumbles through him.

I look up at him. "I still think I can do better next time."

"I'll be honest, I'd love a next time," he smiles, kissing my lips. "But I loved this time too. Very, very much."

My eyes flicker up to his. "Yeah?"

"Fuck yeah."



Many of the stage actors Henry has known for years end up in a small pub only a few streets away. They're friendly, but they don't ask me too many questions. That could be why he's different with them. Somehow more at ease.

With his second pint in hand, Henry mentions my book. Only one of his friends has heard of it. But they all promise to pick up a copy.

"I'm holding you to that," Henry warns them, pointing his now-empty pint at each person sitting around the table.

A punk rock song I don't know plays, and they jump out of their seats. Most of them rush to the dance floor, which is the small, empty space in the middle of the pub.

"Come on." Henry laughs, waiting for my hand.

I wave him off. "You go ahead. I'll watch."

He pouts, but his friends drag him away. Soon, there's a mosh pit going on, and I quickly lose sight of him. That's when one of his friends returns to the table.

"You're the new girlfriend?"

Not bothering with a reply, I simply nod once. Something about him makes me uncomfortable. Maybe it's the way he's looking at me with an air of superiority.

"I'm sorry," I say, "I didn't catch your name."

"Liam."

He looks me up and down, and judging by his expression, he's not impressed. I smile then. So, this is Liam. He's not one of Henry's friends. He's the asshole ex.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

ex



LUNA

THE MUSIC IS LOUD, BUT OUR TABLE IS NEAR THE CORNER, where it's easier to carry on a conversation. Not that I want to at the moment.

Looking disinterested, I size him up. Liam. There's nothing especially remarkable about him. Some might consider him a good-looking man, but all I see is the person who let Henry walk away and then tried to punish him for it.

"You know we were together?" Liam smiles at me, and his thin lips and sharp jaw soften just a bit when he does so.

I was not expecting that. I didn't think he'd share any information. But the disdain in his tone earlier and again just now makes sense.

"You can't know this," Liam continues with a subtle curl to his lips, "but he's really good at sucking dick."

The fuck. Quien se cree?

Suddenly, my ears feel hot. Something knots in my stomach too. I want to walk over and slap that stupid, condescending look off his face. Maybe throw my drink at him, but it's only water. Obviously, he's trying to get a reaction out of me. I won't do it. That much I know.

Exhaling slowly, I blink at him, looking utterly bored with him and the entire conversation. Inwardly, however, I'm surprised to find myself jealous. I hate the realization that this man knows Henry in a way I never will.

I smirk, mainly to hide my panic and growing insecurity. "Look, uh, Leon, is it?"

I call him by the wrong name on purpose. His eyes narrow to slits.

"Liam," he corrects, and I can see the momentary lapse in confidence.

Has Henry really not mentioned me? he must be wondering.

It buys me enough time to start thinking straight. “Right, Liam.” I deign to smile at him before adding, “I’m good at sucking dick too.” A tiny part of me is shocked I actually said those words out loud, and the other part enjoys the disgusted look he gives me. “I do it every chance he lets me,” I lie smoothly. It’s only happened once, less than an hour ago actually, but this pendejo doesn’t need to know the specifics.

“You’re telling me”—Liam leans forward, his elbow on the edge of the table—“it doesn’t bother you to know that about him?” He tries to have the question sound casual. It doesn’t. I can hear the barely contained fury in his words.

“Should it?” I counter. “Seems pretty hypocritical of me to be upset to know he’s good at something I’m good at too. Don’t you think?”

Liam stares. His nostrils flare as he inhales, and when he exhales, he sits back, away from me, forcing a tight smile onto his face. In the light provided by the lamp behind him, his light-brown hair leans toward blond, and his blue eyes are clear and bright. For a moment, I think I know what Henry saw when he looked at him. Confident. Determined. And, yes, even handsome in a way.

It makes something worse than jealousy spring up in the pit of my stomach. It’s the first time I have the irrational thought that I cannot compete with this man. I have to fight against the ingrained beliefs I grew up with that people who look like him are better than people who look like me. Even though I’m ashamed to have allowed myself to fall back into that vat of self-hatred I broke free from long ago—even for the briefest of moments—I don’t allow any of it to show. Not the doubt or the self-loathing.

I’m past all that. I worked hard to get past it.

Instead of waiting for an answer that might never come, I lean close, as if to share a secret with my new best friend. “You can’t know this, but he’s really good at eating pussy too.”

The scandalized and repulsed look that flashes across Liam's face gives me life. In that fleeting moment, I realize that I know Henry in a way this man never will.

And ... Liam knows it too. I can tell by the way his expression changes. His pale blue eyes grow cold, and I see real hatred in them.

The rational part of my brain knows Henry is so much more than sexual favors. Way more important and far more special than just sex. That rational part is offended on Henry's behalf. He should not be talked about in this way, nor in these terms.

But the irrational part does not want to let this stupid little man claim victory, no matter how small. And so I play his insulting game because I'm human and I feel threatened.

"So, what happened?" I challenge. Still leaning forward. "Between you and Henry?"

"Henry?" he spits out, raising an eyebrow. "You call him Henry? How quaint."

"That is his name," I reply, looking at him as though he's an even bigger moron than I initially thought. "What did you call him?"

As if debating on sharing that precious information with me, Liam takes a long moment to answer. I look out at the crowd on the dance floor. The mosh pit has grown bigger. I cannot find Henry in the mass of bodies jumping and slamming into each other.

I don't want him to come over. Not right now.

"John."

I drag my gaze back to Liam. I don't need to say, *Oh, you're still here*, because my face does it for me.

"On account of his last name."

"Yeah, I got that." I nearly roll my eyes, but manage to maintain my composure. I take a sip of water.

“Watch out for his hands,” Liam warns me, a gleam in his eye. “Especially after a couple of pints.”

My heartbeat speeds up. I’m not sure if I’m feeling more resentful or envious that he knows that small detail and I don’t. After all, Henry and I have never been drinking. I didn’t even know he liked to drink until tonight. It makes me realize there’s still so much I don’t know about him. Maybe that’s all this slimy idiot wants to accomplish—make me doubt what we have.

“Hey.”

Both Liam and I turn away from each other to look up at Henry as he wipes sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. He stops on the other side of the table, leaving it as a buffer between his past and his present. The mosh pit left him flushed and breathing fast—similar to what he looks like after sex. I hate that Liam probably recognizes it too.

Unable to contain my curiosity, I make the mistake of looking over at the man Henry nearly stayed in London for. The hunger in those icy-blue eyes makes me want to curse and throw things. Preferably at his stupid face.

“Everything okay?” Henry asks me with a concerned expression.

“Yep. All good.” I force a smile. I’m getting really good at lying. “Your friend Liam stopped by to say hello.”

“I’m not his friend,” Liam snaps at the same time Henry tells me, “He’s not my friend.”

When Liam stands, both men look at each other. I try not to let it bother me.

“Have you told her about me?” he asks Henry. There’s something in his voice, something demanding, controlling.

It makes me feel sick.

Henry is the first to look away from the taller man. His warm gaze returns to find mine. “We only talk about important things,” Henry answers simply, but his tone is dismissive.

I wonder if he’s pretending too.

That's when I feel cold blue eyes shoot daggers my way. As much as I want to see him suffer, I turn away, toward the dance floor instead.

"Ready to go?" Henry asks, his dazzling smile making an appearance for me.

I shake my head. "Not yet." If I stand right now, my legs won't hold.

"You have my number," Liam reminds Henry as he rounds the table and brushes past him. "Been staying in Chelsea. Ring me."

That open invitation makes me feel unbelievably bitter and even more insecure, which I'm certain isn't Liam's only intention. Under the table my hands turn to fists.

Henry doesn't make a reply, doesn't bother looking a second time either. Instead, he walks around the table, closer to me. The entire time, his brown eyes never once look away from my face.

"Are you okay?" he asks once we're alone.

When Henry sits down, he reaches for my hand. They're still balled into fists. It surprises me when I allow him to smooth them out.

"I'll be okay." I nod, trying to convince us both.

"I didn't know he'd show up. I'm not sure how he knew I was here."

That's when I notice some of the others making their way back to the table, and I smile at Henry. It's not a genuine smile, and I think he knows, but I'm not about to give whoever called Liam the satisfaction of knowing they got to me. It's fucked up that they would bother to try.

Tucking a loose strand of pink hair behind my ear, Henry offers a silent apology with the gentle caress along my jaw. For a moment, it makes me forget those calculating blue eyes.

"We should go," I say, still forcing as natural of a smile as possible, still trying to appear completely fine. As far as anyone can tell, I'm having a great time.

Henry nods, uncertain. Once he stands and takes my hand in his, he never lets go. Not as we say our goodbyes, not as we make our way outside, not as we catch a cab.

In the back seat, he wraps both arms around me. “I’m sorry for whatever he said,” Henry whispers in my ear. He kisses my temple and holds me close against his broad chest.

I laugh. It’s a humorless sound. “He didn’t say anything ... negative.”

Henry leans forward, trying to look at my face.

“What did he say?” His voice is low.

My gaze wanders, and I happen to look up in time to catch the cabdriver watching us in the rearview mirror.

“Nothing important,” I assure Henry.

I rest my head on his shoulder. I’m gonna be sick.



I’m being unreasonable—I can admit that much. But unreasonable or not, I need space. Henry’s not giving it to me.

“I don’t understand,” he says. “You said everything was fine in the cab.”

“Because the cabdriver was being nosy! I didn’t know if he was recording our conversation! Or if he was filming you!”

“So, everything’s not fine?” Henry asks slowly, trying to understand. “I don’t get it.”

“Guess what,” I reply, voice higher and louder than usual. “You don’t have to. I just ... I want to be by myself right now.”

The pressure behind my eyes is too much, but I steel myself and hold the emotion back. I don’t want to cry. Not right now. Not because of an idiot that doesn’t matter. And yet those unwanted feelings of insecurity, of jealousy, are still

there, intrusive, pervasive. Without wanting to, I keep seeing those blue eyes, that nearly blond hair, pale skin, thin lips ... the man Henry once loved.

Why though? Why would someone as brilliant and talented, as kind and amazing as Henry love that guy? It doesn't make sense, and my stomach's a queasy, nauseous mess. I don't want to talk or explain. A part of me wants to be alone. Another part wants to bury myself in the comfort and affection Henry offers. I won't though.

He's about to argue. I know he doesn't like to leave things unsaid. He prefers everything be out in the open. Under regular circumstances, that in and of itself is difficult for me.

"Please, Henry, just ..." I look toward the door.

With a deep frown marring his face, he runs his hands through his hair, looking helpless. I turn away.

"Can I say one thing?"

Eyes on the floor, I nod.

"He doesn't matter. You and me, Luna, we matter."

Henry exhales loudly, and with one parting glance, he walks out of the office. I can hear him climb up the stairs and return to his room.

He didn't yell. He didn't slam the door. He didn't throw anything.

I was the one raising my voice. I'm the one who has the urge to throw something. Plopping down on the couch, my vision blurs, and I don't bother holding back the tears. Frustration comes pouring out of me because I'm realizing there're so many things I need to unlearn.

An hour later, after I've texted Sol and my younger brother, Vinny, once I've vented and talked shit, I do feel a little better. But I'm still in the office, lying on the couch, looking up at the ceiling, while Henry's upstairs in his room.

Feeling pretty miserable without him, I want to go to him, curl up against his body without saying a word, and be able to fall asleep in his arms. I know it wouldn't be right though.



HENRY

I haven't been able to sleep. Even after a short workout and shower, I'm tossing and turning. I even tried hugging her pillow. Nothing's working. Luna's downstairs, upset with me because of someone who's not important. The worst part is, I don't know how to fix it. She needs space, and I'm giving her that, but it's so hard to stay away.

Making matters worse, I don't know who called Liam. It's bothering me. A lot. They're supposed to be my friends. I still consider them as such. The feeling might no longer be mutual

...

A gentle knock at the door makes me sit up in bed. I didn't even hear her come up the stairs, but the outline of her figure is visible, thanks to the light downstairs.

"You awake?" Luna whispers, voice tentative.

"Yes." Relief permeates every inch of my heart. I smile in the dark room.

"Is it too late to talk?"

"It's never too late."

"I meant because you're on set tomorrow."

"I'll be fine," I assure her. The only sounds are caused by me moving around the bed. "Do you mind if I get the lights?"

"Um, no, that's fine."

The small lamp on the nightstand fills the room with soft, warm light.

"I woke you."

"I wasn't sleeping. I was hoping you'd come talk to me."

If Luna looked at me, she would see I'm being completely honest. But her gaze is down on her hands.

“I wasn’t mad at you,” she begins. “It’s just ... I wasn’t expecting him to be there. And ... he didn’t need to say any of the things he said. I just ... didn’t know how to feel.”

“What did he say?”

Now, my gaze is on the blankets in front of me, but I can hear her shuffling in place. She doesn’t answer immediately, and the silence stretches.

Whatever Liam said, it couldn’t have been anything good. I’m afraid whatever it was, it might influence Luna, pit her against me somehow. She and I, we’re so good together. I don’t want to lose her. Not now, not ever.

“You can tell me anything,” I remind her. Then, we can get past it.

“He said that you’re good at sucking dick.”

I mutter a series of insults under my breath.

“What did you say? To that?” I breathe, afraid, terrified of how she’s feeling.

Liam hated that I’m bi, questioned me often, tried to shame me for it.

Green eyes flicker to me, then away just as fast. Luna clears her throat a few times.

“Well ... I said that, um, you’re good at eating pussy too.” She mutters her admission, but I understand her clear enough. “Look, Henry, before you get upset, just know that I know I shouldn’t have said that. It’s offensive on so many levels. He was just ... pissing me off with his stupid face and *I call him John!*” she adds in a mocking tone. “I just wanted him to shut the fuck up.”

I don’t make a reply. I’m too busy biting back a laugh. I would’ve paid good money to see Liam’s expression when Luna said those words to him.

“So”—she clears her throat again—“I’m really sorry. It was dumb and immature and—”

In the blink of an eye, I'm out of bed, scooping her up in a giant hug. I wrap her up in my arms, grateful, relieved. When I open my mouth to explain what I'm feeling, I pause, take a deep breath, and then hold her tight. Because Luna's acceptance, it means everything.

"L, you have nothing to apologize for. He was the asshole."

"Yeah, he was, but I shouldn't have talked about you that way."

I lift her off the floor. How can she think she's offended me? She hasn't. At all. What she's done is so much better. She defended me in the only way she could think of at the time. Despite Liam's intent, she's not rejecting me, not despising me for being who I am. Instead, she's worried she upset me, concerned she insulted me. If I wasn't already, I'd be falling in love with her on the spot.

I smile at her, my heart full. Carefully, I place Luna on the bed and climb in after her.

"Do you really think that?" I ask, pulling her sweater over her head.

"Yes, it's insulting—"

"No, I mean"—I clear my throat as I continue undressing her—"do you really think I'm good at eating you out?"

"Oh." She swallows. "That? Yes. Very."

"Are you blushing, Luna?" I ask, my voice that low, seductive whisper she confessed makes her insides melt.

"No, I ... maybe a little," she breathes when I lean in to kiss her neck.

"Are you picturing it?" I ask, lips tracing her earlobe. "My face buried between your legs, my tongue licking you, devouring you ..."

"Henry ..."

It's a strangled sound.

I have her in the middle of the bed, half naked, writhing. I'm hard in my pants, but that's going to have to wait. All my focus is on her, on bringing her pleasure.

"Do you want me to do that again?"

"Yes," she answers before I'm done asking the question.

I twitch in my pants.

Luna holds my face tenderly in both hands. "But I am sorry about what I said and my behavior to you downstairs."

"You don't have to be sorry. You were upset. We're both going to be upset sometimes. It's part of—" I almost say *loving someone*, but stop myself. I don't want the first time I tell her to seem like a reaction to that git. "It's part of being with someone."

Something like a sob escapes her, and Luna buries her face in my chest. I hold her to me.

"I was upset. I wanted to kick his ass and yours for being with him. I'm sure there're much nicer guys to be with," she admits in a hurry, and the fact that she feels safe enough to share her thoughts fills my heart with hope.

I'm smiling at her, but she lowers her gaze. A few tears trickle down her cheeks.

"Hey, it's okay." I hold her tighter, my hands splayed along her warm, soft skin. I kiss her bare shoulder. "It's not always easy, being able to vocalize not being ready to talk."

"I don't think I'm ready for anything else right now either," she whispers, her voice shaky.

"Do you need me to leave?" I ask.

I hate that she's feeling this way. I wish she could look in my heart because she's the only one there. I wish I could show her my thoughts—they all center around her. However, I put aside my own feelings for now to ensure any pain, any distress, any sorrow she's dealing with eases soon.

"I'll be downstairs," I say, kissing her forehead before slipping out of bed.

“No, please.”

“Luna, it’s okay if you want to be by yourself right now.”

“But ...” She reaches for my hand and voices the words stuck in her throat, fighting to stay there. “Don’t leave.”

My heart beats again, and air rushes into my lungs. “I won’t.”

Luna raises her gaze to meet mine. “Can you ...” She chews on her lip, nervous.

“If I can, I will,” I assure her, sitting at her side again. “And if I can’t, I’ll find another way.”

“Can we just ... lie down together? Please.”

Every night, I think.

“Of course,” I say.

I lie back in the bed, bringing Luna with me. I wrap both arms around her, using my body like a blanket to warm her, like a shield to keep every bad thought away.

“This okay?” I ask.

“It’s perfect.”

CHAPTER THIRTY

event



LUNA

IN THE MORNING, BEFORE THE SUN IS SHINING, BEFORE MY alarm goes off, I'm up, dressed, gone. All while Henry still sleeps.

I cannot stop replaying my behavior without cringing. Allowing Henry to see me at my weakest, my insecurities on display like that? I don't know if I'm more ashamed or embarrassed or angry.

But ... he didn't ... Henry didn't dismiss me or my feelings.

I'm here for you, his eyes seemed to say.

His smile was soothing, comforting. *You can trust me*, it assured me.

Reliving everything, I feel drained and exhausted, like I need to sleep for a few days to recuperate. Last night, I wanted to thank him for giving me the time to process things, but if I did, I knew I wouldn't be able to keep from crying. And yet I still fucking cried.

I try not to think about it, but of course, that's all I can think of. That and his stupid ex-boyfriend.



It's still very early in the day when Henry walks into the conference room. While, technically, I'm working on my second novel, the truth is, I'm also hiding. I know it, and he knows it.

This place is usually full of people. It's a nice, secluded spot away from set. But of course, today, it's empty, which

somehow makes the fact that I've been ignoring his texts and calls worse.

“Hey, how's your morning going?”

Even if I hadn't heard or seen him walk in, I would still know it's him. I'd recognize the sexy, husky cadence of his voice anywhere. I'd notice that unique scent of his—something clean and fresh with an underlying hint of sandalwood.

My eyes are slow to reach his face. As if it matters.

“Hey,” I exhale, nervous at first, but the smile that overtakes my features is a genuine one. Because looking at him is like witnessing a miracle and seeing a breathtaking view for the first time, all at once.

“You left before I could make you breakfast,” Henry chastises playfully, as he places a hot latte and a bag of pan dulce on the table next to my laptop. “Got these from that little bakery you like.”

Why are you being so nice? I wonder, knowing he's always that nice, which makes me feel even guiltier now.

“You didn't have to do that,” I grumble.

“I did actually.” He grins, ignoring my sullen tone. Henry sits on the edge of the table, touches my chin gently, and leans in to whisper, “Plus, it was the perfect excuse to see you.”

I drink in the sight of him. *Is it always going to feel like this?* I wonder. *Like an electric current flowing between us, growing stronger the closer we are to each other? Him invading my personal space, making it ours, filling my body with so much energy that I can barely contain it? I hope it's always like this.*

“Thank you.” I clear my throat, looking away from him. It's all I say. Anything else would invite more conversation, and I'm dreading when he begins talking about last night. “You shouldn't have worried about it though. I know you're busy.”

“It’s not a problem.” His voice is light, but when I look up, I see his good mood is giving way to self-doubt now. “Besides, you haven’t replied to my messages. I’m starting to get the feeling you’re avoiding me.”

Though he chuckles, I hear the uncertainty laced in his words.

“I’m sorry I left without waking you—”

“That’s all right. Figured you had an early start to your day, which you simply didn’t have the opportunity to tell me about?”

“Kinda, yeah.” My face betrays me, and my cheeks turn pink, but I don’t move away from him. “Had to get my things. Clothes and stuff. And, um, you looked so comfy ... I felt bad, waking you.” That part’s not a lie. He did look adorably cozy.

“I won’t mind if it’s you,” he says, caressing one side of my face.

A knot loosens in my chest, and I laugh a little. “If I’m sleeping, I do not like being woken up.”

“L, I really won’t mind if it’s you.”

“Henry—”

“Luna, I’m not kidding.” He spins on the table to end up on the side I’m on. Taking the empty seat to my right, he tugs my chair closer to his. “Next time you come over, bring your things with you, clothes and stuff,” he says, his eyes fixed on mine. “You won’t have to worry about having to leave early anymore, yeah?”

There’s such deep affection in his lovely brown eyes that both frighten and excite me. I imagine that’s the same way I’m looking at him. Especially because I would love it. Every night, all night, and waking up with him every morning too. I really would.

“Yeah, I can do that,” I agree, smiling fully for the first time that morning.

“There they are,” he whispers, his thumb grazing my cheek.

Henry's grin changes into his dazzling smile, and I sigh, utterly captivated. He's leaning in, closer now. And I'm so drawn to him that I move without realizing it.

The door's wide open though. Anyone can walk right in and see us. We're not doing anything yet, but our lips are a breath apart.

"I owe you a good-morning kiss," Henry murmurs, his mouth near mine.

When he's this close, nothing else seems to matter, be at all important, or even exist. It's so difficult to get my thoughts in order.

"People are always coming in and out of here," I warn, but don't move.

He doesn't seem to care either. "Guess I'd better make it quick then." He doesn't. Brushing his nose against mine, he stays close. One of his hands is in my hair, and the other's on my thigh, ghosting up.

I'm breathing so fast, like I just swam across the Atlantic. I take his face in both hands and lean all the way in. My lips capture his; my body arches into his.

He moans as he kisses me back with equal desire, and there's fire erupting between us. I climb on his lap, straddling him, and he wraps his arms around my waist, draws me to him, closer, until there's no space left between us.

His hands glide down over my hips, my thighs, and back toward my ass, like he wants to touch all of me at once. When my fingers slide into his hair, he moans. Me encanta. I love the sound.

"Sorry ... about this morning," I whisper in between kisses. I'm so dumb. I shouldn't have left so early. I should've stayed in bed with him for as long as possible.

His hips twist beneath mine, and I grind into him, nearly breathless.

"Shouldn't ... have left."

Outside, someone runs down the hall. People talk. Lighting equipment rolls by. The commotion is the only reason we pull away.

“Let’s go back to my trailer,” Henry suggests.

The look in his eyes—heat and want and need—makes me answer without thinking.

“Let me get my things,” I agree, standing to pack up.

When Henry comes behind me, he snakes his arms around my waist. Safe and warm and . . .

I tip my head back against his chest, smiling without restraint.

My thoughts only clear when I see the time on the huge clock hanging on the wall. I spin in place. “Wait, when do you need to be on set?”

Looking at his watch, he makes a face. “In thirty.”

We don’t have enough time.

“Maybe we can meet there once you’re done filming?”

His face falls at my suggestion.

“The London screening is today, remember?” Henry replies, taking my hands in his.

“That’s right.” I forgot. Why am I feeling so clingy? I need to stop that.

“Where is it?” I ask at the same time Henry says, “What club are you guys going to later?”

I forgot about that too. “You first,” I counter to buy time.

“It’s the *White Memorial* special screening in Tottenham.”

He did tell me. They’ll show the two-hour season two premiere. Then, it’s a cast panel, followed by a Q & A, and finally pictures with fans.

“Sounds fun,” I say.

“Sometimes, it can be,” he answers with that look in his eyes that I cannot resist.

My heart races in my chest when he starts nuzzling my cheek. Then, he's kissing down my neck, which isn't even fair. I'm such a sucker for those slow, wet kisses he's perfected.

"What are you wearing?" It's the only thing I can think of to ask.

"Not sure yet." His voice is muffled, his tongue swirling against my collarbone. "They're sending over a stylist."

"A stylist?" My words come out in a breathy whisper.

I gasp when he's kissing along the V of my sweater.

"Luna"—his hands travel up my waist—"this fan screening was set up months ago."

"I know," I sigh as his fingertips glide up my rib cage.

Henry's kissing my breast. The heat of his mouth against the thin material of my sweater is going to have me panting soon.

"I'll cancel."

"Wha—"

"Don't know why I didn't think of doing it earlier. I'll call Trev to cancel." His voice is muffled. His hands slip under my sweater. "Last night—"

The alarm on his phone goes off. So does the one in my head.

"I'm okay," I breathe against him before taking a step back. I don't want to talk about last night. "You should get going."

He should. Someone's bound to catch him with me if he doesn't leave soon. We both know it's inevitable. I turn to finish packing up my stuff as he takes a step toward me.

"L, are you sure?"

The concern in his voice angers me. I nearly snap at him.

"I'm sure," I exhale.

"Sure you're okay?"

“Yep.”

“Like the cab okay or—”

I spin in place to face him. Close to yelling, I stop myself when I see he’s not making fun of me; he’s being serious. The worry and distress is so evident on his face that I want to cry.

“Actually okay,” I lie. I have to.

If I tell him how I’m feeling, he’ll stay with me and miss something that’s incredibly important for his show and his fans and him.

“I trust you.” He smiles, and it’s like a dagger to my heart. “Before I forget, I usually get asked if I’m seeing anyone during the Q & A. I always evade the question.”

Heat rushes up the back of my neck. Maybe it won’t be so bad if people know. “Yeah?”

“I wanted to make you aware that’ll be my tactic this time too. Given the tabloids lately—”

“Oh,” I cut him off, dread and doubt returning. *Que estupida soy*. “Okay, yeah, makes sense.”

“Luna, it’s not because—”

“Dude, it’s cool,” I assure him. I even add a believable enough smile to go along with yet another lie.

“Really?” He doesn’t look too sure. “I don’t want you to think—”

“Really, Henry. It’s okay.”

It’s not okay though. But I can’t let him know, not without leaving myself exposed again. Plus, I’m not sure if what I’m feeling is lingering emotions from what happened last night or if it’s simply part of navigating this aspect of his career—which still seems so weird to me.

No importa. I’m not gonna let it bother me. Or I’ll try not to. And I’m not gonna mention it to him either. That I can definitely do. He has enough things to worry about.

Henry's standing there, looking like there's more he wants to say. Whatever it is, he doesn't get a chance to.

"Bro, you won't—" Hazel stops mid-sentence, a shit-eating grin in place. "We're not interrupting, are we?"

"No," I reply at the same time Henry says, "Actually ..."

Maya giggles, and my cheeks feel warm.

"Sorry, Hank, but we need Wuna on set."

"Me? Why?" I ask, moving to grab my backpack from the table.

"Natalia's not here. She left for a designer's lunch at The Cellar Bar—"

"Dr. Harris wanted her to attend," Hazel interrupts.

"Nat mentioned you could help with wardrobe," Maya finishes.

"Yeah, so say goodbye to your boy toy," Hazel teases.

Even while I'm annoyed, my cheeks burn red, which makes the dirty look I send Hazel a lot less menacing. Henry chuckles, not at all embarrassed.

"What are you, twelve?" I mutter Hazel's way.

"Thirteen actually."

"We'll wait for you on set," Maya says as she drags Hazel out of the room with her.

Henry doesn't move. All I feel is his hand on my waist. It then slides to the small of my back.

When he speaks, it's in a low voice. "Send me pics. Of your outfit. I'll send mine."

"I will." I give him a small smile. "Hey, uh, thank you ... for being here."

"You couldn't keep me away if you tried." He winks.

"If you two keep whispering, we won't be able to hear you," Hazel yells from outside.

Maya pokes her head inside. "Sorry! She won't budge."

“I’ll see you ladies later.” Henry chuckles as he walks past Maya and Hazel. Before he rounds the corner, he turns back and waves at me one last time.

I wave, too, face mostly composed, ignoring the butterflies in my stomach. Once Henry’s out of sight, the other two pounce.

“You guys are so cute!” Maya whispers excitedly.

“I think the word you’re looking for is *gross*. As in you guys are so gross.”

“Se puso seria la cosa,” Maya practically squeals.

“I never noticed before, but the Tank has too many teeth,” Hazel comments, which earns her a questioning look from Maya and a confused one from me.

“What? No, he does not have too many teeth.”

“Don’t get mad.” Hazel laughs in my face without a hint of remorse. “It’s a known fact that guys smile a lot more when they’re getting some.”

“No manches, Hazel.”

“That’s what I heard. Anyway, I got good news about tonight!” Hazel throws her arm around my shoulders. She tells us Natalia’s been working on her own designs and made our outfits for the club. “So, if anyone asks, be sure to tell them it’s a Natalia Castro original.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

heaven



LUNA

AS WE'RE LEAVING THE RESTAURANT FOR THE CLUB, I'M thinking I shouldn't have eaten so much. The point was to go dancing, but I'm stuffed. I'm not gonna be able to move.

When the cab stops at a light, Hazel and Maya exchange a look that I would've missed if I wasn't turning their way.

"What is it?"

Maya offers me a tight smile. "Nothing."

"You can't say *nothing*," Hazel mutters. "She'll see it anyway."

"See what?"

"It's all over social media." Maya keeps her gaze downcast. "Sorry, Luna."

"It's Hank. With his costar."

The way Hazel says it, my stomach drops. The world stops. Everything's moving in slow motion.

"What about them?"

Hazel shows me her phone. It's Henry. I know the picture was taken today because he's in the same charcoal-gray suit and teal dress shirt he sent me a picture of a few hours ago. I could only think of two words—*holy shit*.

But right now, I'm trying to process how—why Henry's kissing some woman in a long black dress. Kissing her. He's kissing someone else. Why is he kissing someone else? I've been staring at Hazel's phone for so long that the image loses focus and warps into meaningless shapes and colors. When my hands start shaking, I return the phone before I accidentally drop it or fling it out the car window.

Where the world seemed to slow to a crawl seconds ago, it's all speeding up, and I can't keep up. I'm dizzy, sick to my

stomach, like I'm gonna throw up at any minute. Breathing's impossible, like someone's squeezing my lungs.

"Are you okay?" Maya asks, rubbing my arm gently.

My throat is closed off, and I don't understand why my vision's blurry until I realize I have tears in my eyes. *Cálmate.*

"Yeah, of course," I mutter, trying to wipe the tears away as discreetly as possible.

Why am I so cold?

"Hey, are you guys in an open relationship because I have a theory—"

Maya taps Hazel's arm. They both look at me as I turn away to stare out the car window.

We never said we're exclusive. It's not like he cheated, but it feels like it. He kissed someone else. He's not mine, like I was starting to believe.

Fuck. Fuuuuuck! How could I have misread him so badly?

This is what I get for daring to think about love. It's so pitiful; it's laughable.

Breathe. Breathe. No pasa nada.

Still, the lump in my throat makes it difficult. Tears threaten to overflow. I turn on my phone and text my sister.

Luna: Talk me outta picking a fight

Sol: Why? Fuck em up!

Luna: Sol

Sol: your a badass chingona, sis!!

Sol: don't let any of those British pendejos drag you down

Sol: your there to make jefa moves

Tiene razón. I'm here to work, to make connections, and finish my second book. Henry and love are not meant to be part of that equation.

Knowing my sister would know what to say to make me feel better, I thank her. I don't even remind Sol that it's *you're*,

not your.

Sol: u ok tho?

Luna: Better, thank you! I'll call you tomorrow

“Luna?”

When Maya calls my name, I sit up straight. It's only because she and Hazel keep staring at me that I even say anything.

“I slept with him.” More than once. And I loved every fucking minute of it. Almost immediately, I regret saying anything at all.

“No shit, bro,” Hazel sighs. “You two have no chill.”

“Luna, I'm so sorry.” Maya looks like she's about to cry.

Si ella llorea voy a llorar.

“I'm gonna fuck him up!” Hazel growls.

“No, you're not.”

“Yes, I am!”

“Hazel”—I take a deep breath—“hookups happen all the time.”

“Is that all it was?” Maya asks, rubbing my arm again.

No. Not for me.

“Obviously.” I try to smile.

“Did he say anything?”

“About making out with his costar? No, he forgot to mention that.”

“About meeting us there?” Hazel inhales sharply, snapping her mouth shut. She's trying to be nice.

I shrug, nauseous again. “He said he would, but I don't know anymore.” I don't know if I want him there. All I wanna do is crawl into a little hole and hide from everyone.

“We can go dancing another time?” Maya suggests.

That sounds so very tempting, but my friends want to celebrate their recent nomination for their original screenplay *Star Crumbs* and I want to celebrate with them. I have to pull myself together.

“We’re already dressed up.” I force a smile because these two women have been awesome since I arrived in London. They basically took me in, made space for me in their lives. There’s no way I want to flake on them. “We’re going, and we’re gonna have a great time.”

“Yeah, we are!” Hazel cries.

She sounds excited, but I can see them exchange a worried glance in the reflection of the cab window.



Outside the club, Maya runs into Zayyir. He’s the old boyfriend who looks like he wants to be her current boyfriend. I didn’t pay attention last time, but he’s tall and thin with dark, fluffy curls and kind brown eyes.

His accent reminds me of Henry’s, and I stop the rest of that thought immediately. All I’ve been doing in line is comparing everyone to Henry. That guy’s shorter than Henry. That one’s taller. No one’s as pretty as him though. No one has his full lips or the same textured hairstyle. Ya, Luna, por favor. I don’t want to think about him. And yet that’s all I seem capable of at the moment.

How could he?

Why?

Stop. I do my best to push all thoughts of Henry to the back of my mind.

When I see how happy Maya looks, it’s a lot easier to focus on her happiness than my own misery.



Inside the club, Tadashi, Natalia, Ruby, and a few guys from the crew are there. Maya's delighted, introducing everyone to Zayyir.

Tadashi pulls me aside. "Do you know who he is?"

"Yeah, he's Maya's old boyfriend."

"He's a Sharif!" Tadashi says it like I'm supposed to know what that means.

"Okay."

"They're one of the richest families in the world!" Tadashi looks like he wants to shake me. "Not US, not Europe, the world, Luna!"

"Are they?" I ask innocently. Because I'm not about to tell him the things I know about Zayyir's crazy family and how they feel about Maya. Luckily for me, a cumbia plays. My lips curve up when I hear that unmistakable beat. "Tadashi, tell me you know how to dance this."

Once I start dancing, I don't stop. I dance with Tadashi, with two of the guys from the production crew, with Natalia and Ruby, who are both amazing. But then I dance with too many random guys to keep track of, sometimes two at a time.

Ruby pulls me aside. "Luna, are you okay?"

"Yes," I tell her, and I'm pretty sure I mean it.

I want to feel good. With my hair and makeup done, plus the sexy-ass outfit Natalia made for me, I know I look good. Besides, I'm not about to cry for some asshole who kisses other women when he's supposed to be with me.

Fuck that. Fuck him!

"Let's sit this one out," she suggests, and I follow her upstairs.

I just need to stop thinking about him and his handsome face and beautiful body because none of that matters if he's a piece of shit on the inside. I'm not going through any of that again. Fuck no.

Ruby says something to Maya and Hazel, who exchange a worried look. I know I never dance with anyone, except my friends. Never even talk to anyone either. Right now, I don't care. I don't fucking care!

"At least she's not drinking," I hear Hazel mutter.

Before Maya can make a reply, I down a shot of tequila.

"Never mind."



HENRY

Walking in, eyes scanning, I know it's not going to be easy to find Luna. I've been texting her, but she hasn't replied, which makes sense if she's here with friends. They're dancing and having a good time. She's probably not looking at her phone.

The different-colored lights flashing directly on the crowd are blinding. An endless sea of bodies sways to the music in front of me. Almost by accident, I think I catch a glimpse of Luna's profile somewhere in the middle. I strain my eyes to find her again. That's when Tadashi comes up to me.

"Yo, you made it!" He slaps my shoulder. "We're sitting upstairs, near the balcony. I'll see you there in a bit. I'm headed to the loo."

I nod at him and continue making my way farther inside. Before reaching the stairway, the crowd parts just enough for me to be able to see Luna dancing near the center of the dance floor.

She's stunning. All in red. Skintight or painted on—I can't tell. All I know is, I cannot look away. Entranced, my eyes follow every line of her body, every movement. The sway of her hips, her hands in her hair. Green eyes are closed; pink curls are wild and loose.

If I wasn't obsessed already ... watching the dip of her waist bloom into those hips ... damn. When she turns around, that sweet ass bounces. Fuck. A jolt of desire shoots straight to my cock.

I start toward her, possessed. Then grow possessive when I realize I'm not the only one watching her. There's a circle forming with Luna at the center.

Some sorry git in pink pants and a shiny shirt invades her personal space. Too close. They're definitely dancing too close. Luna's not looking at the guy, but the guy hasn't

stopped looking at her. When he puts his hand on her waist, rage coils deep in the pit of my stomach.

Who the fuck does that guy think he is? He needs to get the fuck away now!

I don't want to see any more and yet cannot tear my eyes away. It doesn't matter that Luna shoved the guy off; it doesn't matter that the touch was ridiculously brief. It happened, and I cannot stop seeing it. It keeps replaying in my mind, over and over, keeps making me livid.

The disturbing desire to stalk over and beat the man to a pulp takes over my thoughts. Only there's no reason besides my own jealousy. Even knowing that, I cannot stop watching her. Him. Them. I feel sick. Cold. Bile rises in my throat. My hands ball into fists at my sides.

"Bro, you're still here." Tadashi laughs. "C'mon. Everyone's upstairs."

Not everyone. I don't want to go upstairs. I want to go into the middle of that crowd and protect what's mine. And that's what I'm going to do.

"I'll catch up," I tell Tadashi and head toward destruction. I know this. I see cameras and phones. I don't give a fuck.

I shove off a guy trying to touch her. Push another who's too close.

Her back is to me, but Luna stops dancing when I'm standing behind her. The circle around her dissipates, blending away into the sea of people dancing.

When I touch her waist, she shudders—a movement so small that I don't see it, but feel it.

"Not too late, am I? Was like LA traffic, heading over."

Why won't she turn around? I step closer, my chest brushing her back, my thigh bumping her ass. There's another slight tremor.

"Luna?"

"Go away."

“L, it’s me.” I whisper the words in her ear, my hand splayed over her hip.

For a brief moment, she leans into me, and I smile into her hair. Then, she shoves my hand away, and she’s gone.

I lose Luna in the crowd. Confused, I follow Tadashi’s path upstairs.

Everyone at the table greets me. Everyone, except Hazel, who mutters, “Fucking asshole,” as she bumps my arm—hard—before storming off.

What’s going on?

When I look around, Maya takes pity on me.

After she introduces me to her friend, she shows me the image on her phone. It’s a picture of me kissing Mi-Cha. I stare at it, dumbfounded, not comprehending. Must be some kind of joke. Then, I recall our awkward hug. It wasn’t a big deal. She apologized; I laughed it off. We certainly did not kiss. The thought never even crossed my mind.

Does Luna think ...

I look up at Maya. She’s frowning at me, and I know then that Luna must believe it’s real too. The disturbing thing is, it is real, but what appears to be happening in the picture never occurred. It’s the angle and the lighting. Perhaps even a bit of editing.

I lean over the side of the balcony, searching for Luna on the dance floor.

Natalia asks me to dance. I decline politely. Ruby gets up to dance with her. Tadashi and a few others head down the stairs to get drinks just as Luna’s coming up.

The strapless red jumpsuit she’s wearing hugs her curves, each dip and swell a place my mouth and hands have kissed and caressed. I’ve never seen her in anything quite as revealing. I swallow, just thinking about touching her.

Luna’s holding her hair up, fanning the back of her neck. A rosy pink colors her cheeks; she’s flushed from dancing, and my mouth goes dry because I know that look. I’ve seen it after

she comes on my tongue, as she's coming on my cock. It's a look reserved for me.

The moment our eyes meet, her smile wavers, disappears. Luna could've stabbed me straight through the chest, and it would've hurt less. She picks up the pace, her hips swinging side to side as she rounds the table opposite to where I'm sitting.

Downstairs, the music picks up again. Maya and Luna exchange a few words. Luna looks adamant, shaking her head, while Maya insists, nodding.

It's impossible to hear what they're saying, but I'm certain Maya mouths, *Talk to him*, before taking Zayyir's hand. Together, they disappear downstairs.

A new song plays in the background, but Luna continues to avoid my gaze. I slide three seats over until I'm in the chair next to hers. Scrolling through her phone, she doesn't appear to notice when I lean in closer.

"Are you going to keep ignoring me?" I ask, my lips near her temple.

When I place my hand on her thigh, she flinches away. My throat dries up. There's an ache in my chest I've never felt around her.

"Luna?" The hurt in my tone is unmistakable.

"You don't have to be here," she states simply.

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be." The words come out with such force that I surprise myself.

Luna, on the other hand, remains unaffected, letting out a humorless laugh. Those green eyes are on me, so cold and distant—she might actually be a celestial body out in space.

"Leave me alone," she warns.

"I can't." It's why, despite the sharp pain in my chest, I inch closer. "Luna, listen to me. Those pictures, it's not what it looks like."

A watery laugh erupts, and I hear the tears in her voice.

“You can’t even be original,” she spits out and stands to leave.

My body shuts down, and I’m frozen on the spot, watching her move farther and farther away. She makes it to the top of the stairway before I snap out of it and basically sprint to catch up.

“Luna, I’m not lying.” My hand reaches for hers, and the action startles her.

She looks up at me, her eyebrows drawn together, her eyes pleading with me. The words that pass her red lips are daggers. “I don’t believe you.”

Who knew four words could hurt so damn much?

When she takes a step back, away from me, fear grips my heart. Instinctively, I stop her with a hand to her waist. The heat at my fingertips warms me from head to toe.

My name crosses her lips. Pain flashes in green eyes.

I wish we were anywhere else. Though she said dancing would be fun, turns out, we’re in the worst possible place. The people, the obnoxious lights, the loud music—there’s no way we can talk. And we need to talk. I need to explain away those horrible images.

Luna hasn’t tried to leave again, which I take as a good sign.

“Give me five minutes,” I beg.

Time stops as I await her decision. I was unaware seconds could drag endlessly or that pain could multiply infinitely. Air fills my lungs once more when she gives me a shaky nod. When she turns back toward our table, I follow her lead. Both of us lean on the railing, overlooking the people dancing below.

The bass vibrates all around us. From up here, the lights aren’t blinding, and Luna doesn’t move away when I lean into her. Her bare arm is pressed against my shirtsleeve, and the warmth seeping through sends my heart racing. When I lean

in, inhaling that beachy scent I love, I say everything I should've told her the moment I knew I was all in.

“I will never willingly or knowingly hurt you, Luna. Never. I've been a coward, L, afraid to tell you how I feel. As if withholding the words could possibly change the emotions you invoke. What I should've said at each opportunity is that every second with you is my favourite. My heart beats for you; my lungs breathe for you. Every part of me exists to love every part of you.”

Her eyes meet mine, and she shakes her head. “I can't hear you,” she yells.

My words were lost to the music, but having said them out loud fills me with the courage to do it again. And I will, as many times as I must for her to hear me and understand me and believe me.

Before I can say anything else, Pitbull's “I Know You Want Me” starts to play. Luna turns to face me, and it takes every ounce of restraint I possess not to pull her flush against me. She's thinking of the playlist I made her. I can tell because for a moment, she's fighting back a smile. Mine is on full display.

The way her lovely green eyes keep traveling to my lips, it's as if the only thought in her mind is kissing me. I wish she would.

“You said you're not lying?” Hope clings to her words.

“I'm not.”

“Then, make it make sense.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

club



HENRY

THE DESPAIR IN LUNA'S VOICE, THE WAY HER EYES IMPLORE me, I realize she doesn't want to believe those misleading images. I wish we were somewhere else, somewhere I didn't have to yell to be heard, a place without so many eyes on us. I'd take her in my arms, hold her close, and apologize for things out of my control.

I fight this urge; it would invite more attention. Understanding she doesn't like to be photographed, I appreciate that she's willing and wanting to hear me out. When I open my mouth to speak, Hazel interrupts.

"Hank the Tank, turns out, I had you all wrong," she says, motioning for us to have a seat.

Since people are watching, we huddle close while she plays a video on her phone.

One of my other costars, Cynthia Rodriguez, who plays Dr. Rosa Trujillo on the show, was onstage, too, live-streaming the cast saying their goodbyes. When Cynthia pans around, she captures the moment when Mi-Cha and I embrace awkwardly, apologize, then laugh about it before going our separate ways. There's no kiss, nothing romantic or inappropriate. I even watch myself in the video, waving at the camera before walking off-screen.

Confusion coloring her expression, Luna looks up at me, then at Hazel, somehow asking for further clarification. I don't know what she's thinking, but it appears like she desperately wants to believe while simultaneously doubting.

Hazel nods with certainty. "Took nearly an hour to find this."

Without warning, Luna launches herself at an unsuspecting Hazel, who curses upon the contact and prolonged embrace.

“You should be hugging him,” she teases, patting Luna’s back with one hand. “And I probably shouldn’t’ve called you an asshole. My bad.” Hazel chuckles, punching my arm.

“Since you found that video, I’d call us even.” I smile ruefully. “In fact, I owe you.”

“Ooh, I like that.” Hazel laughs. “I’ll remind you when I need a favour.”

Relieved and grateful that the whole incident was caught on camera, I will happily owe Hazel. I make a mental note to thank Cynthia as well for always posting everything she does online. Should’ve thought of it sooner.

“All right, kids, my work here is done.” Hazel grins, dusting her hands off and leaving us alone again.

Green eyes flutter up to mine, then away. Dread lingers in the pit of my stomach as I reach for Luna’s hand under the table. She doesn’t pull away, and when I squeeze, she squeezes back. The tightness in my chest eases.

People at our table come and go, drink and dance. Still, Luna remains withdrawn, almost distant. She’s not furious with me anymore, yet she doesn’t seem quite like herself either. I don’t blame her. What happened last night on top of this evening? If things were the other way around, I don’t know how I would be feeling either.

“Are you okay?” I ask. It’s a stupid question, but I don’t know what else to say.

“I’ll be okay.”

I want her to be. It’s why I grab her waist and pull her onto my lap. Her eyes go wide as she tries to push off my chest.

“Henry, there’re people. We shouldn’t—”

“I need you close, L.”

I don’t realize how much until I secure both arms around her, nuzzling into her chest, my ear against her heart. The quickening *thump, thump* makes me smile.

I was scared shitless minutes ago. For my own sanity, I need to hold her. The closer, the better.

“Henry, people are looking at us.”

My eyes find hers. A certain calm has settled over her features. Perhaps she needed me too.

“I don’t care.”

“You do,” she whispers. Dark lashes flutter as she chews on that plump bottom lip. “And I do too.”

It’s why I let her slide onto the chair next to me.

But I can’t take it. I can’t stay away. When I lean into her, my lips near her temple, I snake an arm around her waist. A small gasp escapes her when I draw her close.

“Want to dance?”

She shakes her head.

“Thought that’s why we’re here, isn’t it? To dance.”

Her breathing is coming faster, and when she turns to face me, our lips are closer than they ought to be, given where we are.

“What are you doing?” she asks, and I flash a smile. Her eyebrows narrow in irritation, but her eyes betray her with the way they keep returning to my lips.

“Trying to get you to dance with me.”

“I’m not dancing,” she mutters.

“You were dancing earlier.”

One eyebrow shoots up.

“I saw you.” My voice is low. “Love the way you move, L.” I grin when she swallows. “Even if ... you were dancing with some guy in a shiny shirt.” I spit the last words, fighting off the pang of jealousy.

Frowning, Luna turns toward me again. “No, I wasn’t. I was dancing by myself that time. Shiny Shirt tried to get involved.”

My jaw clenches. Though I'm far too pleased that Luna wasn't dancing alarmingly close with that git, I'm upset the idiot was bothering her at all.

"Dance with me, L."

It's not a question. It's not a request. It's a need, stemming from the desire to touch her, to have her touch me. Except for that very brief instant earlier, she's kept her hands to herself. And I'm not going to keep it together much longer without her close.

I stand and uncuff my sleeves, rolling them up to my elbows. Luna's staring, heat rushing to her cheeks. When I offer her my hand, she swallows, hesitates.

Licking her lips, she takes my hand, and I lead us toward the dance floor. Halfway down the stairs, I stop her and pull her onto the balcony situated at the stairway landing. Couples and threesomes line the walls, so I don't think anyone will notice two more people. When I pin her against a wall, my body shielding her from anyone who would happen to look our way, her eyes meet mine.

"What happened to wanting to dance?" she murmurs, but her chest rises and falls quickly.

I cradle her face, resting my forehead against hers gently. These moments—where we're close, taking up a shared space, breathing the same air—it makes everything feel right.

"I only want you, Luna," I assure her, my lips near her own. "You know that, don't you?"

She makes no reply. That dread weighs heavily again. I would pay anything to know what she's thinking. Still, I remain undeterred, brushing my lips against hers with the faintest touch I can muster.

"If I haven't shown you yet, I will. I'll make sure you never have any doubt."

Luna's gaze softens as she presses her fingers to my lips. "Let's talk later," she says, her eyes regarding the people around us.

She's right. I shouldn't be so careless. I kiss her fingertips and hold her hand to my chest, where she can feel my heart calling to her.

Eyes glazing over, Luna has to clear her throat twice before she can speak. "Where's your suit?" she asks, her gaze traveling the length of my body.

"That was work. I came dressed to dance with my girl."

The words slip out, but I wouldn't take them back even if I could. Especially when Luna's cheeks tint pink as she traces the gold chain I'm wearing, inspecting the moon pendant attached to it.

"It reminded me of you," I tell her, leaning closer.

Her pretty face brightens, and the smile she hits me with makes my heart take flight.



LUNA

“My girl.”

Henry called me his girl.

I’m smiling, and I cannot stop. The way I’m practically vibrating with desire ... all I want to do is jump into his arms and have his body mold to mine as I kiss him senseless. Maybe he wants that, too, because when I lick my lips, his eyes flash with desire.

Henry comes closer, pressing my back to the wall, bringing his heat and intoxicating scent with him. It makes me dizzy, makes me crave him even more. I need his hungry kisses, his desperate, explosive touches. I want us to take our time, lingering close, both of us trying to catch our breaths.

“My girl.”

I feel like I’m floating. I need him to touch me. If he doesn’t touch me soon, I’m going to explode. That or I’ll climb him like a ladder without giving one single fuck who sees. As if he can read my thoughts, one of his hands finds me. It travels from the dip of my waist to the bloom of my hip, then back up.

“Did you wear this for me?” he asks, a sexy smirk in place.

I did. It’s his favorite color, skintight, and easy to take off.

“You like it?”

“I fucking love it,” he growls in my ear. “You look like a dream.”

Our eyes meet. His hand on my hip tightens, possessive, protective.

“Dance with me?”

“Yes.”

Smiling, Henry takes my hand, lacing our fingers together as we walk down the stairs. The music grows louder, the lower we go.



If I close my eyes, it's just Henry and me. And his touch is like fire. It sends warm shivers cascading along my skin and hot spirals of bliss racing through my body.

Brown eyes never leave me, watching my every move. The sway of my hips, the way my breasts bounce. I'm dancing with him, for him. And when he slips his thigh between my legs, I hold on to his broad shoulders. He tugs me closer, and I rub against him, needing the friction, wanting more of it.

Pleasure shoots down my spine. Fuck, I need to touch him. My fingers graze him, teasing that huge mound through the fabric of his jeans.

I turn around then, backing up into his body, and the curve of my ass presses against his crotch.

Henry groans. I feel the sound rumble through him, through me.

I love the shape of him against me, love how he holds me to him with his hand flat against my stomach. It's almost too much—the desire rolling down my spine. Henry's hot breath tickles the back of my neck, and I lean further back into him.

As we sway with the music, his other hand glides down the curve of my hip. I reach back to run my fingers through his hair, and he tightens his grip as a low growl escapes past his lips. When a new song plays, I turn around so we're dancing face-to-face again. The smile he gives me is the embodiment of sex and lust, and his touch is seductive, deliberate.

When I angle my face up to his, his lips brush mine. Half-lidded brown eyes tell me everything—the longing, the desire raging inside him. Reaching up to touch his jaw, I imagine the

feel of his beard against the most sensitive of skin. My eyes fall shut. Henry turns his face to press a kiss to the inside of my palm.

Unable to resist anymore, I lean up then, my smile capturing his lips. When he pulls me flush against him, his arousal pressed against my stomach, Henry bites back the moan that nearly escapes. It all feels so good, and for a moment, time stops.

There's no music, no lights, no people. Nothing exists, except the two of us. It's easy to lose ourselves in hungry kisses, both of us nearly incoherent with desire. It's easy to picture him naked and sweaty, our bodies tangled together. It's so easy to forget everyone and everything else. But we're not alone, and I don't want our picture out there again. I don't want people bothering him with questions about us, about me. Before the song ends, I pull away.

"Let's get out of here," he says, reading my mind.

As we leave the dance floor, his hand rests possessively on the small of my back, on the side of my hip. We use the side exit, where there are no cameras and the paparazzi aren't allowed.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

guntos



LUNA

THE OUTSIDE WORLD IS FORGOTTEN ONCE HENRY SHUTS THE front door. In here, it's just him and me. The shit trying to get to me, I leave it out there.

Our eyes lock in the dimly lit living room, freezing us in time. *This is it*, time tells me.

I'm not ready, but Henry, he's moving, unrolling the sleeves of his shirt as he stalks over. That walk of his is powerful, commanding, sexy as fuck. When I'm within reach, he lifts me to him and my reaction is instant—I don't need to think, I don't even panic—I wrap my legs around his waist. Those perfect lips are on me at once.

Henry's intensity floods my senses. Narrow hips between mine. Large hands eager as he carries me upstairs, exploring my body, claiming it. Hands grip my ass, squeeze my breasts. His mouth is on my skin, tongue hot and searing.

"You were dancing with someone else," he murmurs against the curve of my neck.

His voice is low. There's no anger there, it's something else.

I thought we were over, I want to accuse, but I don't. Not when I feel the sting of tears. "It was just dancing." *Downplay*.

"Didn't like it," he murmurs as he trails wet kisses up my throat. I tug at his shirt, eager to undress him. I want to feel his skin on mine, bask in the delectable heat. I wanna enjoy him, I don't wanna talk.

Henry stops, looks into my eyes. His hand is gentle on my jaw, his thumb tracing my lips. "I want to be the only one you ever dance with."

My heart leaps. *I want you to be the only one I ever dance with*. My throat constricts.

“Henry-“ I try to swallow past the lump, but the words won’t come. Shaking my head, I slide off him and my feet return to the floor. Every inch of me nearly trembles, alarmed by what I see displayed so clearly on his face. I have to look away. Turning in place, I ask, “Help me with the zipper? It got stuck earlier.” *Deflect.*

I’m lying about the zipper. Natalia’s attention to detail is unrivaled. She would never give me a faulty one. But I need to stall. To distract. To divert.

Henry steps close, invading my senses. The firmness of his body behind me, strong thighs behind mine, hot steel against my ass. I let myself enjoy it, revel in it unabashedly one last time because I cannot stop these *thoughts...*

When he sweeps my hair over one shoulder, his nose along the nape of my neck, he places a kiss there. “I’ve never seen anyone look as beautiful as you.” His knuckles travel along my spine as he pulls the zipper down. “You left me speechless, L.” His lips follow the same path. “It’s not the first time. I’m sure it won’t be the last,” he ends with a short laugh. It rumbles through me.

Fluttering wildly, my heart is making things worse. I don’t want to talk. I don’t want these emotions to overwhelm me. So I break away to pull down the top of my jumpsuit, knowing his eyes will follow. And they do.

The ravenous look in brown eyes, the flash of teeth. Cool air kisses my skin, that’s not why my nipples go hard.

The red material slips down my hips, continues down my legs. Henry watches the whole time, maybe enjoying how I blush and writhe under his gaze. I know I do. I love this. Just his eyes on me has me wet.

In turn I watch him. Smirking, he doesn’t bother with the row of buttons. Rather, he pulls the shirt off and over his head in one swift motion. The shape of him, wide shoulders and strong chest, that tapered waist, carved stomach, all that rich brown skin on display... he’s perfect. I want to touch all of him, I want to commit every lithe line, every lean muscle to memory.

A tiny voice urges me to confide in him. It tells me to share my thoughts and the endless concerns because Henry'll listen. I know he will, but the truth is I'm too fucking scared. Terrified. Sharing that much...I don't think I can. Instead, I step forward, choosing to touch him and feel him and love him at least one more time.

Henry meets me halfway, grabbing my waist and tugging me to him. Our lips collide then, an exquisite fire fuels us. This isn't just a kiss, it feels like a promise, of something deeper, something infinite.

We stumble through the hallway, make it as far as his bedroom doorway before he stops. By that time I'm half crazed with lust. We stand under the doorframe and Henry slides one hand up to my throat, caressing the underside of my jaw. His lips are on my lips, slow, devastating. Liquid heat pools between my thighs.

"Luna," he whispers against my mouth, his voice that delicious deep rumble. "Tu es mon rêve, ma vie, mon cœur."

Even if I don't understand the words, I think I know what he means. It's why I don't ask him to translate. Something fierce and fragile shines in his eyes and I drop my gaze to his chest.

"L, look at me." His voice is soft, raw.

I watch him with half lidded eyes. I can hardly breathe, the ache for him so strong.

Warm brown eyes smile and my façade nearly crumbles. His gaze travels from my eyes to my lips to my bare breasts. My chest rises and falls in quick succession.

Smiling at me, Henry's about to kneel before me. I know what he wants to do. Go down on me. Make me feel cherished and so fucking good. I want him to, but if he does that, I won't leave. Ever.

"Later," I smile, tugging on him. He comes up willingly. There's no way I can actually move him.

"Just a taste," he winks, kissing his way down my body. Then his hands are on my hips, his knees on the floor. When

he hooks one of my legs over his shoulder, I'm done. Those perfect lips... that talented tongue...I'm done. Ruined.

I'm so wet already, practically dripping with desire, Henry smiles knowingly and I can't help the blush that overtakes my features. When he glances up, the way my heart races doesn't surprise me anymore. "You're stunning," he whispers, a ferocious tenderness fills his eyes, "so fucking beautiful," he adds before burying his face between my thighs.

It's intoxicating being worshipped by him. I'm light-headed and...and happy. Breath ragged, I arch into him. He hasn't even used his hands and I'm falling apart already.

"Mine," he groans into me. His kisses never stop. He licks and sucks and slurps, obscene and decadent, like I'm the best thing he's ever tasted.

I'm dizzy, consumed by flames, as my back hits the wall. Henry's mouth ravishes me, his tongue delves deep with expert care until I'm begging him not to stop, urging him to keep going. He does just that.

"Fucking love how you taste..."

"Henry."

"Love my name on that pretty mouth."

"Henry."

"Just like that."

When he hums something I don't understand, the vibrations send me over the edge. Delicious bursts of pleasure erupt with his tongue swirling my clit and I'm shattering into a million tiny pieces.

We're both panting, my orgasm blurring the edge of my vision. Henry holds me as my bones liquefy and my leg wavers, unsteady.

"Give me one more," he begs and I can't say anything except, "*Please.*"

I'm not sure what I'm asking for, but he seems to. Smug smile in place, he stands, maneuvering me into his arms,

against the broadness of his chest, then we're on the bed, his mouth on my pussy. Both my legs are on his shoulder, so that I'm floating, weightless, and he's kissing me right there, right where I need him. And holy shit he's magnificent. That delectable pressure's building already.

My breath hitches in my throat. "Henry," I whimper, sinking my hands into his thick hair.

He murmurs my name. The heat and friction he creates with his talented lips and that sinful tongue, I never want him to stop.

Caressing my hips, his lips close around my clit. I can feel myself going soft and liquid at his touch. The way I grind against his mouth, I wonder if he's able to breathe.

"Please," I beg, so close.

Henry hums a sound of approval as I shudder my release, unraveling in his arms, moaning his name through broken whispers. Breathless and boneless, sliding into blissful oblivion, I think the words I know I shouldn't say.

When my vision clears and the last waves of pleasure have washed over me, Henry's watching me from the foot of the bed, an intense heat in his eyes. I smile, delirious. "Why are you so far? Ven pa' ca."

Smirking at me, Henry takes off his boxer briefs and I've never seen a man who looks more beautiful naked than he does. He's a living, breathing masterpiece. Absently, I sit up and lick my lips, loving his body's reaction to the simple act.

Brown eyes grow wild, ravenous as I crawl over to meet him. I'd be more than happy to kiss my way up and down his body, but his huge erection deserves my attention first for always being so patient. I reach for him, but pause to look up into Henry's eyes, asking for permission.

"It's all yours, L," he assures me, caressing the side of my face. "I'm all yours."

I feel like I'm in a dream, insanely happy with every word he says to me while at the same time I'm cursing him for saying them. Ignoring what he makes me feel, I focus on his

body, wrapping my hand around that impressive length. When I stroke once, a growl erupts from his chest. The sound alone gets me wet again.

“*Mio*,” I think the word while I’m on my hands and knees. I wet my lips in anticipation, then take Henry in my mouth. Swirling my tongue around the head of his cock, the guttural sounds he makes has me throbbing. I take him deeper, letting him slide along my tongue, swallowing him down until he hits the back of my throat.

“Luna.”

His hips jerk forward and I nearly gag from so much of him at once. My eyes water, but I don’t panic, I want to savor and enjoy him like this. I take him deep in my mouth and Henry sinks one hand into my hair. Moaning, he cups the back of my head.

“Love, you’re going to make me come.”

I manage to hum around him and only then does that four letter word register. Shivers run down my spine, yet I don’t stop to think. I use my hand around the base, where my mouth can’t reach, and suck hard to finish him off.

He’s mumbling something, barely breathing. He’s about to come, but pulls away at the last second. I’m gasping, looking at him hunched over, trying to catch his breath as well.

I hurt him. *Shit, shit.*

“Henry, are you okay?”

We’re both kneeling on the bed. He shakes his head and when he looks up at me, his whole face lights up.

“I was about to explode!” Strained laughter bubbles from his throat. He moves closer, his eyes softening. “I’m more than okay, L,” he laughs, stroking my bottom lip with his thumb. “You were making me feel so good,” he whispers, pressing me flush against him as he lays me down gently.

My world goes hazy as his lips meet mine. My body pliant, my heart thundering, but it’s my thoughts that begin to spiral.

A slow realization unfurls in my mind. I pull away to blink at him.

“When you call me L,” I search his eyes, afraid to ask the question. “It’s for *Luna*, right?”

My thoughts are swirling, twisting. It’s not just the kiss between Henry and his costar. It’s not just Liam and his words. It’s my doubts and insecurities. It’s the emotion in his eyes.

“Sometimes,” he replies, running a hand across the back of his neck.

He’s nervous. It makes me nervous, or maybe I was already nervous. Dread seeps into my veins.

I don’t want to think. I don’t want these intrusive thoughts. I just want him. To kiss him and surrender to the moment. We’d move with that burning desire, making everything hot and sweaty between us. Together we’d work our way towards that gratifying exhaustion by coming at the same time. Then, things would slow down, turning soft and tender.

We’d fall asleep naked, limbs tangled together, breathing each other in. My last coherent thoughts would be of warmth and comfort and...and love.

I *want* all that. Tears fill my eyes because I really want it. Another magical night with him...but I *can’t*. I hate that I can’t. Hate that my brain is full of all the reasons why this won’t work. I slip out of bed.

“Luna?”

“I need a minute.” I grab my phone and disappear into the restroom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

fight



LUNA

YOU KNOW THOSE HORRIBLE NIGHTMARES, THE ONES WHERE you just can't get away, can't move, no matter how hard you try? The ones where something terrifying is so fucking close, creeping in on you, and you're paralyzed with fear? That's how I feel right now, sitting on the floor of Henry's bathroom.

I found a pair of his sweats and a shirt on the counter. Not sure if they're clean or dirty, but I'm wearing them. I know I should talk to him. Instead, I'm scrolling through my phone.

While Henry didn't kiss anyone—this time—I can't stop seeing it. Which only makes me think that even if it didn't happen today, it's bound to. He's ... Henry. Gorgeous and fun and sweet and talented. So many people want him. It's inevitable one will catch his eye. Someone taller and thinner? Maybe someone who's an actor too?

He might fall in love with one of his costars. Don't actors do that shit all the time? And he'll move on, and I'll be devastated. He'll be fine, and I'll never be okay again.

Despite my better judgment, I'm going through his Instagram, his Twitter, article after article about his movies and his love life until my vision blurs and nausea overpowers me. Only then do I turn off my phone.

Feeling worse, like I knew I would, I stare at my reflection in the mirror. Minutes pass. Maybe hours. I know what I have to do.

When I open the door, Henry's standing there, in only his pajama bottoms riding low on his hips. He's barefoot, sculpted chest and abdomen exposed. Why's he always looking like a goddamn supermodel?

“Are you all right?” He runs his fingers through his hair, worry furrowing his brows. The muscles along his stomach tempt me to come closer.

“I was thinking.”

Seeing him usually puts me in a good mood. Not right now. Not after spending I don't know how long going down an internet rabbit hole, looking at picture after picture of Mi-Cha Jung. The Korean-American model turned actress in all her five-ten glory, who clearly has a thing for Henry. I can't do anything but glare at him.

I try not to think of the different sites dedicated to his and her characters getting together or knowing there's no picture where she doesn't look amazing or article she isn't talking about him or the fact that Henry's following her on Instagram and she's following him. Because right now, his brown eyes are fixed on me, and his lips curve up slightly at the corners like he's never been happier to see me.

“Talk to me,” he urges, his voice low, alluring.

“I googled you,” I admit as I walk out of the bathroom.

“Did you?” His surprise shifts, and he's grinning like he knows something he can't wait to tell me.

“We have the same birthday.”

He steps closer. “Yes, we do.”

Now, every single birthday, I'll think of him. And I'll wonder where he is and with who ...

“Why didn't you just say that?” Irritation laces through my words.

“I'm not sure.” He's looking sheepish, and I regret my tone of voice. “I suppose I could've. It was a surprise. Refreshed the page and retyped your name more than once. What are the odds, you know? I didn't want to ruin that discovery for you.”

The way he's smiling at me, I actually forget about beautiful models turned actresses. I let him wrap his arms around me.

“Google tell you anything else?”

I've never enjoyed anyone in my personal space more than Henry's presence. Gazing up at him, I lick my lips.

“You were born in London. Graduated from Cambridge. Made your debut at Shakespeare’s Globe.” I don’t mention the stories accusing him of cheating on his last girlfriend. “And you’re mutuals with Mi-Cha Jung on Instagram.”

His eyebrows come together on that last part. For a long second, he looks confused.

“I follow all of my costars. And people I’ve worked with in general. Does that bother you?”

“Nope, just thought it was interesting.”

“Interesting how?”

“Just ... interesting.”

His eyes hold mine. After a while, some of the tension leaves my face, but I wiggle out of his embrace anyway. He doesn’t try to resist.

I know I’m jealous. I never used to be. Once, I trusted unconditionally. But that was a long time ago. Honestly, I don’t know how to work past this.

“Are you ... jealous?” His eyes widen with the realization. Standing there, he scratches the side of his beard.

Sometimes, I wish he wouldn’t be so open, saying whatever’s on his mind.

“Luna, you don’t have to be. At all. I’m here with you. I’d stay right here. In this room. With you. All day and all night if I could.”

Okay, maybe, sometimes, his being so open, saying whatever’s on his mind, is a good thing too.

Henry approaches and lifts my chin. “How often do you check your Instagram?”

I blink up at him, confused. “I haven’t lately. Except today, but I wasn’t looking at my page.”

“Will you open the app?”

“Why?”

“Please?”

I do as he asked.

“Check your Message Requests.”

I’m checking.

“You see that message sent two weeks ago?”

It’s from him. Two weeks ago, he followed me. Two weeks ago was the day we ran into each other at the production offices.

I click on it.

“That right there, that would be me.” He smirks, pointing at his name. “I’m following you,” he adds. “You and I, we’re not mutuals because you haven’t deemed me worthy yet.”

Without looking at him, I tap on his name to follow him. That’s when I notice the number of followers he has. It’s insane! I’m not sure how I didn’t see it before.

“Henry! Four million followers?”

Four-point-one million, to be exact.

He shrugs and chuckles like it’s not a big deal. “I’ve been lucky in the roles I’ve been able to get.”

“Dude, when were you gonna tell me?”

“I thought you knew.”

“Oh, because everyone knows?” I try to keep my voice light. Not sure I manage it.

“No, because it only matters if you know.”

Last time I checked, I had a little over forty thousand. That’s nothing compared to him. Mi-Cha has eleven million. Those feelings of insecurity and inadequacy return.

The anxiety and apprehension due to his high-profile profession come back, too, and I can’t help but blurt out, “I’m going back to LA!”

“You’re going back?” He staggers. “When?”

“I only have the hotel room until tomorrow.”

He relaxes then. “Stay here. With me.” The warmth of his small smile leaves me feeling cold. “I still have over a month of filming left.”

“I know.”

“The house is big enough that you don’t have to be stuck with me all the time.” He hits me with a self-deprecating grin. “I love being with you,” he says, taking my hand. “Love spending time with you. And, hey, you can write here,” he offers, his gaze fixed on mine. “The office has that huge desk.” His eyes twinkle. “And there’s great lighting throughout the house.”

It’s an incredibly sweet gesture, but also one that makes panic rise in my chest again. My thoughts are not my own, and all I keep seeing is Henry with Mi-Cha and Henry with Liam, and it’s all suddenly too much. Way too much. More than I can handle.

Without explanation, I pull away from him. Both his eyebrows shoot up—he’s hurt.

“That’s ... look, I ... I don’t think I can. Living together?” It sounds wonderful! Up until last night, I would’ve agreed. Things are different now. Reality has set in, and I know we can’t be together.

Constant tabloid pictures and stories, having to hide, having to pretend? I’m not equipped to deal with any of it. My heart is racing, my mind panicking.

I don’t know what more to say, so I don’t say anything. I was being an idiot. I know I was being an idiot. In denial, pretending this wasn’t exactly what it was. What it is.

“Look, I thought we were just having fun,” I say, not able to meet his eyes. It feels like the worst kind of lie.

“Of course we are but—” he starts to reply, then stops.

The ache in my chest nearly takes my breath away.

“What are you saying?” Henry asks.

“What are you saying?” I counter.

He scans my face. I don't give anything away.

Moving toward me, he takes one of my hands in his again. "I know we haven't known each other very long." His fingers dance up my arm, over my shoulder, before cupping the side of my face. "You make me happy, Luna."

No. Please don't.

"You make me so happy ..."

I can see the truth of his words on his face.

"And I just ... I want to make you happy too. If you'll let me."

I shake my head. Pink curls bounce in the air.

"Will you let me try?" he whispers, leaning his forehead against mine.

I'm frozen in place, and I cannot move away. When he presses his lips to mine, I don't pull away. He pours everything he seems to be feeling into the kiss. My lips part for him, and Henry deepens the kiss, holds me unbearably close.

As the kiss ends, brown eyes search mine. Moonlight streams in through the open window and the air is cold. When Henry smiles, I know I need to leave.

"I love you, Luna." He's practically bursting. And he looks so happy. It's all so clearly written on his face, through his body.

I tremble ever so slightly.

"It feels like I've always loved you."

There's this strong urge to cry because without even realizing it, I've been waiting and wanting to hear him say it out loud. And I've been waiting and wanting to say it back.

The urge to tackle him to the bed and kiss him senseless until we're both exhausted and so deliriously happy that we fall asleep with smiles on our faces is immense. But I can't. Something inside won't let me. The image of him kissing his costar ... the inevitability of loss ... the fucking asshole who

obliterated my heart years ago ... it's all spiraling out of control in my mind, and I cannot think straight.

I hate myself in that moment because, as usual, I cannot say what I'm feeling. Worse, I cannot give him what he wants. The all-consuming, world-altering love his expression promises is not something I cannot return.

"I'm sorry." I shake my head, pulling away from him completely. "I can't."

The room is suddenly too small, and I can't get far enough, fast enough. Henry's moving, too, hovering close behind. I can't face him though. I don't want to see how I'm hurting him.

I lean on the dresser for support when he comes up behind me. My eyes are closed as I try desperately to gather any courage left inside.

"You don't mean that," he whispers. The pain in his voice draws my attention to him. "You can."

He reaches for my hand. I flinch away, turning from him again.

"Luna, please look at me."

I don't want to face him, but I do. He's searching my expression, silently pleading with me.

"L, talk to me," he whispers. "Tell me what's going on. Please. What are you thinking?"

"Henry, I'm sorry."

There's an almost-imperceptible shake to his head. He looks absolutely devastated, like the world doesn't make sense anymore. His eyes are dangerously close to tears.

"Sorry? Because you don't feel the same way or because you're scared that you do?"

My jaw tenses, and my eyes narrow.

"It's all right if you are. Scared, I mean. I am," he admits with nervous laughter. He's cupping my face with both hands now. "But then I think of the alternative ..."

He's too good to be true.

"I need you in my life, Luna. I can't live without you."

"Stop, please," I whisper, walking away from him.

But he doesn't give up.

"Everything we've been through has led us to this moment. Don't you see that?" He's right behind me, running a hand along the back of his neck—a nervous action I'm not sure he's even aware of. "How else was a kid from London going to meet the most amazing girl from LA?"

Tears are fully formed in his eyes now. He's given this a lot of thought, and the words just flow out of him.

"The fact that you wrote your first novel, had your book turned into a movie ..." He's pacing back and forth, then stops to look at me again. "I wasn't asked to audition—it's the first time I wasn't asked to audition. I was offered the role based on your book!" Henry cries. "We are meant to be here, Luna. Together."

Everything he's saying sounds so right. But there's this horrible, callous, pain-filled voice in the back of my mind that I can't escape, one I can't ignore. It reminds me it's all going to fall apart sooner or later, especially with someone like him. Beautiful and adored with endless opportunities to meet someone else. He'll leave. One day, he will leave me. Everyone does.

"Everything that's happened to us," Henry continues, moving to stand next to me. His hands come up to my shoulders, as though he wants to shake some sense into me. "It's been so we could meet at this point in time in our lives. How can you deny the truth of that?"

I don't answer, don't bother making any sort of reply.

Taking a step back, Henry runs his hands through his hair. I have the silly notion of reaching out to settle the thick strands he's disrupted, but I keep my hands at my sides.

"Unless ..." He looks up at me, brows furrowed, fear crossing his face.

I've seen that look before, when we were on the plane, caught in a lightning storm, afraid we were gonna plummet to our deaths.

"If I read this all wrong, if it was just me—"

"It's not." The words are out before I can stop them, and I see the way they light up his beautiful features. Instantly, I regret saying anything, but my mouth has a mind of its own and keeps going. "Everything ... everything about you is amazing."

"Then, I don't understand," he admits, finally coming to stand next to me again.

The heat of his chest close to mine and the hesitancy running through him, I can feel them both. He looks like he wants to reach out, but holds back.

"I can't. I'm sorry," I mutter, feeling as lost as I'm sure I look.

When I glance up, brown eyes are tormented, questioning.

"Henry ..."

We both hear the hesitancy in my voice, how it wavers, unsure. His hands are on me again. On my waist and my arms and my face.

"I don't want to get to the point where you don't feel that way anymore."

It's inevitable. Something or someone will happen, and the dream I thought him to be will become a nightmare. One that haunts me, one that has the power to destroy me. It sounds overly dramatic, but it's all too real. I've been there before. I barely survived then. Losing Henry would be the end of me.

The expression that takes over his face is unreadable. There's pain, incredulity, but my words are sinking in.

He gets it now, I think. His shoulders are tense. I don't like the way his lips turn down or the disappointment overtaking his features. I have to look away.

Henry clears his throat before he speaks. “So, because of what might—”

“Will.”

It will happen.

“Luna.” He sounds so sad, so unbearably dejected.

Fuck! Fuck, fuck, fuck! I hate how he says my name. Hate it. Hate how much I love the sound of it coming from his lips.

“Not everyone—” he starts, then stops.

We’re both quiet for a long time. He wants to argue with me, but he must see the resolve set in my features. Must see that it’s a losing battle. He knows it, and I know it.

“How did your last relationship end?” I ask, knowing he doesn’t like to talk about it.

Henry lets me go, shocked almost that I would bring it up. He paces a couple of times before sitting on the bed, the uncertainty clinging to him.

I’m looking at him now, marveling at how one person can be so painfully beautiful. I’m wishing things could be different because I can’t stop thinking about how he makes me feel—with his words and his hands, his lips, and his body. How gentle he is, how tender. And at the same time, how hungry and demanding. A delicious balance I’ve never experienced before, one I never even knew was possible. The way he sees the world—with open optimism, still believing in the world’s inherent goodness—I wish I could be more like him.

“She thinks I cheated.”

Air leaves my body at his admission. I’m barely holding myself upright.

“Did you?” I press on because, now, I need to know.

I’ve read the stories online. I know what other people say. I have to know what he has to say.

Henry flinches, like I threw a physical blow. The hurt that crosses his face nearly makes me apologize, but I bite my tongue and remain silent.

“No, I didn’t.” His voice is resolute. It brooks no argument.

“Then, why—”

“Why did she think I did?”

I nod, and he continues.

“Because a story full of lies was written to garner clicks. To sell ad space. I don’t fucking know, Luna!”

He might hate me in that moment, and even though it hurts, I keep poking at the wound. Because I need him to understand.

“Why didn’t she believe you when you told her the truth?”

He has a dangerous look in his eyes now. Like he’s afraid to face the reality. When he turns from me, I’m sure he’ll leave. Just stand up and walk out. His whole body is telling him to run, and I want him to listen to it. I’m barely holding on here.

“Because ...” He takes a shuddering breath. “Because I never loved her. I was ... lonely. She could’ve been anyone.” His voice is so faint. “And ... she knew it.” He runs a hand through his hair, down his face, frustrated. Finally, his gaze travels to mine again. When he stands up, he looks utterly defeated. “She wanted to believe the lie because it hurt less.”

He stands there for a long time. “I regret how I treated her.”

“She’s the one who tried to cash in on your name, right?”

His eyes snap up to mine—he’s probably wondering how I know that.

“Charlie mentioned something. How one girl used you. She didn’t give any names, but ...” I trail off, shrugging the thought away because it doesn’t matter. “No one gets a happy ending, Henry.”

I walk over to him. All I want to do is wrap my arms around him and not let go until that ugly realization fades away, yet I keep my distance. The only thing I can do is give

him a sad, pathetic smile. When his right hand comes up to caress the side of my face, it takes every effort to keep tears from forming.

“I don’t believe that, Luna.” His thumb strokes my cheek. “Before you, I never thought there was one person out there just for me. Never truly believed soulmates existed.”

My breath catches.

“How could I possibly meet someone new who felt known, like some strange place I’d never been to that felt like home? I couldn’t fathom it until I met you. You’re the type of person who alters life so much that there’s no going back.” He comes closer, his fingers running through my hair. “We get our happy ending when we find our soulmate, Luna, and I found mine.”

How can he lay his heart out like that? His voice full of hope and possibility and promise. His eyes full of ... of ...

My throat constricts.

“L, I need to know,” he begins. “Do you love me?”

Desperation urges brown eyes to search mine for the truth. The tears are looming close. I hold them back. Because I know there can be no doubt in his mind and he needs to be completely convinced. Even ... even if my heart is screaming yes.

“No,” I answer, my gaze locked on his.

The line between Henry’s eyebrows deepens, and his arm falls away from me, limp at his side. His beautiful lips turn into a straight line as he takes a step back.

“You’re lying.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

end



HENRY

THE DARK GRAY SKIES AND ENDLESS RAIN MIRROR THE HEAVY gloom in my heart. London is the perfect city to feel miserable in.

Truth is, my life's turned into a bad dream. Bleak and drowning in despair, lonely and restless nights, endless and disorienting days. Going from a house I wanted to share with her to a trailer that feels empty without her to a movie set, where her words and her characters fill every space. I cannot escape her.

The worst part, as sad and pathetic as it is, I don't want to. I realize Luna doesn't believe me, doesn't trust me or herself, but I keep thinking I could've figured out a way for us to get through this. If only she'd stayed in London.

I don't know if she's in LA already. She hasn't posted anything online—no pictures, no stories, nothing. I devour her old posts. Looking for hidden meaning, wondering if any are secretly for me. She hasn't replied to my texts or answered my calls. It's the stuff of nightmares.

Her friends are on set every day. Every day, I want to ask them about her. Every day, I have to actively and repeatedly stop myself from asking.

Her books arrived, the ones I secretly purchased for her the day of her book signing. We'd walked around the bookstore with Luna pointing out a few of her favourites, some she'd been wanting to read, but hadn't the opportunity or time, and others that simply caught her eye. Looking to surprise her, I had them delivered. The box sits on the third floor, and every time I look at it, a new wave of grief threatens to swallow me whole.

Some nights, I picture myself flying out to LA. Finding the little apartment building she told me about, just outside downtown. Begging her to give me another chance. I'll swear

not to speak of love since that's what scared her. I won't bring it up. I won't mess everything up again.

Except ... it wasn't just me. I was too honest, and she wasn't honest enough.

"This isn't working."

"That's bullshit, L. We work, and that's what scares you."

She shook her head, as if trying to keep my words away. "This. You and me. We don't work, Henry."

I couldn't stand there and listen to her not only lie to me, but to herself too. So, I left. I needed to clear my head and come up with the right words to get her to understand, to get her to stay.

But I shouldn't have ever left. When I returned home, Luna was gone.

And now, she's back in LA. Out of London, out of my life.

I go up to our room—my room. The sheets smell like us—they smell like her. I bury my face in her pillow, and the tears fall hard and fast.

I look at her for a long time. Even with her face downcast, she looks beautiful in the dim light of the bedroom.

"Why are you giving up before we've had a chance to really start?" My voice breaks.

"I'm not giving up. I'm accepting reality for what it is."

I push off the wall, invade her personal space. Her breaths fill my lungs; her scent swirls around me.

"I don't care who or what came before." I run my hands through my hair, wanting to yank the strands out. "I don't understand why you do."

“That’s what you’re not getting,” Luna sighs. “It’s not anything or anyone else. It’s me,” she assures. “I don’t want this.”

She does want it, I argue in my head.

I’ve felt her want, seen it. But the words are a crushing, devastating blow. Hearing them from her lips cuts through my heart, shatters my soul more than any other words have before. Everything hurts so much. I can’t keep the tears from forming.

How can she stand there and lie? How can she proclaim not to want this? How can she say she doesn’t want me when I’ve experienced it—in the way she touches me, in the way she looks at me? I don’t understand.

“I love you, Luna. I want to be with you.” I sound desperate, pathetic, even to my own ears. I turn from her and rub at my face wearily, exhausted. Maybe I do understand after all. “I thought ... I thought you did too. But I’m realizing perhaps I was wrong.” I wipe at my face.

Frustrated and growing angrier and angrier, I can’t stand there anymore. Can’t stay there, knowing she doesn’t care enough about me to be honest. Whatever it is, we can work through it together. If only she’d let me in. If only she would talk to me. But she’s refusing. Worse still, she’s willing to lie to me instead of dealing with the true issue.

“Luna, look at me.” I step toward her. “Please, look at me.”

Her gaze is on the floor between us. “I can’t.”

“Please don’t do this.” Tears cling to my words.

“I’m sorry, Henry. This isn’t going to work.”

After everything we talked about, knowing all the shit we’ve been through, I can’t believe her.

She’s done the same thing they’ve all done. Found me lacking in some way and left. And I’m a mess.

I type up texts I never send. I've almost called her so many times; it doesn't surprise me anymore. I end up at The Savoy, hoping to run into her, remembering too late that she's back in LA.

It's unbearable how much I want to feel hate. Abhor and despise her for doing this to me, loathe and detest her for ruining me. I want to hate her.

She just ... gave up. She didn't fight for me, didn't fight for us.

But I don't. I don't hate her, but I want to. And that's almost as good.

Bollocks.

I love her. So fucking much. She's everything I've ever wanted. Problem is, I've gone and fallen in love with someone who doesn't want to love me. It hurts like hell, that. Bad enough to feel lacking in some way, but when the person you love the most doesn't want to love you ... there's nothing worse.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

quiet



MAYA

BREAKUPS ARE HORRIBLE FOR EVERYONE. THEY SUCK. THEY just do. And nothing prepares you for them. Not previous breakups, not watching people on a screen break up, not reading about others breaking up. Even if you write about break ups, that doesn't help either.

I don't know if it was mutual. All I know is since Luna and Henry broke up, she's barely eating and he stopped smiling.

I don't think Luna's sleeping either. I'm worried. It's true that different people express their emotions in different ways, but what if they don't express them at all?

Henry's not doing much better. As long as I've known him, he's the type of actor every production team dreams about—kind, hard-working, approachable, and a true professional. He learns every crew members' name, puts everyone at ease (especially during difficult shoots), and he always comes prepared. How is he right now? Withdrawn and quiet, viewing the dailies with little to no emotion.

“Fucking Luna Wuna broke him,” Hazel curses.

It's not my place, but I want to say something to him. “Hi Henry,” I wave. He replies with a polite nod.

“Yup, broken,” Hazel mutters.



Last weekend, Luna was packed up and ready to go back to LA. Hazel and I were with her, but as soon as she checked out, Dr. Harris called.

“What exactly does she want you to do?” Hazel asked.

“Fine-tune a handful of screenplays.”

“Really?”

It’s an amazing opportunity. Does Luna realize it? I don’t think she does. I’m afraid she doesn’t even care.

“We can go to Bath,” I offered, giving her a small smile. “We’ll do that Jane Austen tour we were talking about.”

Luna nodded.

“Let’s go back upstairs,” Hazel grumbled. She’s not big on Austen. “I have two queens, remember? You can have one, Wuna.”

Luna replied with another polite nod. It made me think she might be broken too.



Outside craft services, just on the other side of the doorway, I overhear Henry and his brother mention Luna. No one else is around and I feel bad listening to their private conversation, but I do it anyway.

Trevor’s deep voice is low and I strain to hear him. “... then talk to her.”

Henry lets out a bitter laugh. “You don’t think I’ve tried? She doesn’t want to talk. At least not to me.”

Trevor replies. The words too low to make out.

“Doesn’t work one-sided, mate,” Henry sighs, mutters something else and then walks away.

He sounds so full of anguish and misery, I almost cry on the spot.



Two days later, we help Luna move to Tadashi's.

"You think this is a good idea?" I ask Hazel.

"Yaya, she's driving me crazy. She doesn't want to go out or eat or watch the tele. She doesn't want to do anything but write. By the way, I think she's working on a screenplay alongside her book."

"At least she's doing something."

"Besides, Dashi Washi has two extra rooms, he'll be fine. And this way, *I* can have guests over again. Plus, she's gotta woman up!" Hazel cries. "Trust me, Yaya, there's a trick to getting through to stubborn people, you gotta know when to push and when to back off."

"You think they'll figure it out?"

"The Tank and Wuna?"

"Obvio."

"Given that he's in love with the idiot, he's probably waiting for her to get her head out of her ass."

"I hope you're right."

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

dinner



LUNA

MY WHOLE BODY FEELS NUMB AND HOLLOW. EMPTY AND cold. Like I'm never going to feel warm again.

It's been a whole week. Seven days. I haven't seen Henry or talked to him or asked about him. It's better this way.

It's easy to pretend things are fine when I'm not alone. Maya and Hazel pretend along with me. They don't mention him or ask about him.

Tadashi offered one of his spare rooms, and I jumped on it. I'd been sleeping on Hazel's extra bed at The Savoy, but so many memories were tied to Henry everywhere I looked in the hotel. I needed to get out of there. I think Hazel wanted her extra bed back too.

The problem is, I see Henry in Tadashi's apartment as well. Laughing out on the balcony and smiling in the kitchen. Flirting with me in the game room. Letting me kiss him in the hallway.

He's still everywhere I turn.



“Ms. Luna, you got a minute?”

I don't have to look up to know it's Dr. Harris.

“Of course,” I say, shutting my laptop and standing to greet her.

“I'm taking you to dinner tonight. Unless you have plans?”

“No plans.” I smile.

Maya is going out with Zayyir, and Hazel is being uncharacteristically mysterious, which means she's hooking up

with someone she doesn't want us to know about again. Tadashi's rarely home early. Ava always seems to have something for him to do. Otherwise, we're at his place, watching old Dodgers World Series games until sunrise or until we pass out on the couch.

Dinner with Dr. Harris is probably the only time I'll go out. She's one of the most generous people, openly and willingly sharing the knowledge she's acquired over decades.

"How does a pretty thing like you not have plans?"

I look over to see Ava enter.

"Why the fuck aren't you out, having fun, screwing around? I mean that both literally and figuratively." She winks.

Dr. Harris grunts her disapproval.

As demanding and temperamental as Ava is as a director, she's also been one of the nicest people on the production team. I love watching her work—only when Henry's not scheduled on set, of course. Ava's storytelling is unlike anything. She approaches each take with a fresh pair of eyes. It's actually given me ideas about my own writing.

"I can't. I'm busy working," I reply, trying to keep a straight face.

"You're a fucking liar!" When she's out of the director's chair, Ava has the biggest potty mouth.

"I was writing." I was, but Ava doesn't believe me. I'm close to finishing the first draft, in fact. I'd been struggling with a bout of writer's block when I left LA, but suddenly so many words and ideas are pouring out of my head and my heart too.

"Lick me!" She sits on one of the two chairs in the office and turns to Dr. Harris. "Fancy a drink, Nora?"

"Sorry, Ava, tonight, it's Americans only."

"That's such an American thing to do, exclude those who aren't like you. So fucked up." She jumps out of the chair. "I didn't want to eat a shitty hamburger anyway." The way she says *hamburger* reminds me of those Valley Girls in '80s

movies. “Night, night.” She waves as she walks out. “Bloody Americans.”

“She’s brilliant, but ...” After rubbing her temples a bit, Dr. Harris eventually looks up at me. “Come on. We have reservations.”



“Dr. Harris—”

“Call me Nora.”

She’s asked me to call her by her first name more than once.

“I can’t do that.”

“I’m asking you to.”

It’s the same argument we have every time we have dinner.

“You worked hard for your doctorate. You deserve the respect that comes with your title.”

She bows her head lightly, a proud little smile on her face. “I agree; however, titles are unnecessary among friends, don’t you think?”

Flattered, I nod. I’m such a dork, but she’s so fucking cool. I’m unable to contain my smile.

“Tell me, now that you’ve been in London—six weeks, is it?—how do you like it here? What’s your favorite thing about the city?”

Henry’s handsome face flashes in my mind’s eye. I try not to dwell on it.

“I like the streets,” I answer honestly. It sounds weird to say, but I like walking and picturing the centuries of history preserved in any one place. “I can see myself living here.”

“Really?”

I nod as I take a sip of my water. “How about you?”

She wrinkles her nose. “I could never live here. Linh doesn’t like it. Too gloomy, she says. Needs sunshine. An Angeleno through and through.”

“How is Linh?” I ask, and her whole face glows as she tells me about her wife.

Linh is the reason I’m here. She and Jennifer, my publisher, are friends. They go way back, graduating from UCLA together years ago. Linh’s the one who gave Nora my book to read, and here we are.

When Nora gets a call and excuses herself from our table, I turn to my own phone. My sister keeps texting.

Luna: Que paso?

Sol: mira güey, stop ignoring my texts

Luna: I’m not.

I am. But she’s my sister. She’ll know something’s wrong.

Sol: u ok?

No.

Luna: I’m fine

Sol: mentirosa. you’re lucky i’m at work

Sol: sent DM yesterday. dime si te gusta

My sister did the cover art for *De East LA*, and I asked her to come up with a cover for the currently untitled second book.

When I click on Instagram, the first picture is Henry’s. My insides do a weird tumbling thing, and I swallow away the feelings that spring to life when I see him. He’s wearing a Burberry plaid shirt, black shades, head tilted, mouth relaxed, lips perfect.

I couldn’t bring myself to unfollow him before. I don’t know if I ever will. Even when he unfollows me. I swipe, knowing I shouldn’t. The next pic is similar to the first, but his dazzling smile is on full display. He looks so happy.

Nora takes her seat again. I turn off my phone.

“Do you know why I asked for your help with those scripts?” Nora asks.

“Because you like my writing?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. Plus, Ava insists she cannot spare Maya or Hazel. However”—she gives me a pointed look—“I had a feeling if you went back to LA, you’d return to the same life you’d left behind and stay there for another two years. Seems I wasn’t too far off the mark.”

I look at her with surprise in my eyes.

“A little bird told me.”

“Does this little bird have gray eyes, black hair, and go by the name Hazel?”

Nora only smiles before drinking from her glass.

“Did you know I was married before Linh?”

Still stunned by her previous statement, I can only shake my head.

“We grew up together, went to high school together, even had the same part-time job together. I thought I was in love. I’d known him all my life.”

Both my eyebrows shoot up.

“Don’t look so surprised,” she admonishes with a smirk. “I had a life before Linh. Just like she had a life before me.”

“I didn’t mean—”

“I’m sure you didn’t. Anyway, I haven’t told many people this story—mainly because it’s nobody’s business but my own.” She pauses, takes another sip of water. “What I’m going to tell you is not pretty. It was an abusive relationship, which might be a trigger for some. If you wish not to hear about it, please let me know, and I won’t mention it further, you understand?”

Nora waits for me to acknowledge her warning. When I nod for her to continue, she does.

“He was violent, and he hit me. On more than one occasion.”

“I’m so sorry,” I whisper, shocked. I can’t even imagine what that’s like.

Nora waves her hand, seemingly shooing the whole thing away. “I stayed with him for five whole years and endured it. Do you know why?”

I shake my head.

“Because I was scared.”

She chews on a piece of bread and looks in the direction the waitress disappeared to, as if mentally willing our server to bring our meal. For a fleeting second, I wonder if Nora didn’t have time to eat her lunch again.

She continues, “It took a random school counselor at the community college I was attending to notice a fading bruise on the side of my face. Without asking me for details, she took me aside and gave me various pamphlets with numbers I could call for help.”

I don’t know what to say. “It was lucky you met her.”

“It was luck,” Nora agrees. “A lot of people never get that lucky. Never even have that option.” She sighs deeply. “Things are starting to change now.” She shrugs like she wishes they were different already. “In any case, at least we’re encouraged to talk and share and call out bullshit when we see it. Wasn’t like that before. Before, when you saw someone bruised up, you pretended you didn’t.”

“Who—”

“Doesn’t matter,” she cuts me off. “I got out. And I swore that if I ever saw anyone in trouble, I would help if I could. Which brings me to you.”

“Me?” That catches me completely off guard.

“Yes, you.”

“But I’m not—”

“True.” Nora waves her hand again. “Your problems aren’t the problems I had, but you got problems.”

I don’t think she can mean Henry. So, I sit there, confused.

“Yes, I’m talking about you and your not-so-secret secret boyfriend.”

The look on my face must amuse her if her smile is any indication.

She then adds, “There’s not much going on in my movie that I don’t know about.”

“I—” I clear my throat. “He’s not my boyfriend.”

“Not anymore, I know. It wasn’t very professional of either of you to get involved at all. At least not while you’re both working on the same project.”

I drop my eyes to the table, embarrassed.

“But that’s life,” Nora amends with an understanding smile. “I’ve seen it happen more often than you’d think. You two are the first to nearly succeed in keeping it from me. I’ll tell you, the tabloids did not help.”

“We weren’t trying to be deceptive. I just didn’t want it to be an issue.”

“For who?”

“For anyone.”

I didn’t want to make it uncomfortable for others on set when things didn’t work out with Henry. I didn’t want it to affect his performance. Or his opportunities, if I’m being completely honest. His having a girlfriend might not be what his career needed. And I didn’t want anyone all up in my business either.

“Did he end it?”

I can’t meet her eyes.

“Did you?” Nora tries again, then sighs when she realizes she’s not getting anywhere. “Honey, you’re not being strong,” she says eventually, shaking her head.

I don't look up at her then either.

“Shutting yourself off, hiding your heart away—that’s not strength.” Nora chews on another piece of bread, then takes a sip of water. “Opening your heart and soul, allowing yourself to be vulnerable—that takes courage.”

“Being vulnerable makes you weak,” I whisper. “It leaves you open to pain you never see coming.”

Nora looks at me with big, sad eyes. “Someone really messed you up.”

“They tried,” I admit, twisting the napkin under the table. “But now, I know how to protect myself.”

I had not realized that was what I was doing until I said the words out loud.

Nora chews on more bread until she looks up at me again. “You’re scared. And believe me, I totally get it. Willing to love and allow yourself to be loved, I admit, it’s a risk. But the greatest risks come with the greatest rewards.”

I’ve heard it all before. “I don’t mean any offense, but those are just pretty words.”

Nora’s mouth is set in a straight line. When our food arrives, she ignores it.

“Pretty words can be powerful. Isn’t that how you make a living?” The hint of a smile tilts her lips.

I’m reluctant to agree out loud, but I do. I know firsthand how powerful words can be.

Nora continues, “Fear—how can I say this? It can have its benefits. It can, and it does. We even need it at times, but mostly, it’s useless and temporary. By the time you realize it though, all good things have passed you by.” She waits until our eyes meet. “Life is lived in the present. Not yesterday or tomorrow. Right now.”

Right now. The words echo in my head.

“There will be pain, but there’ll also be unrivaled joy. It’s a tricky balance. That’s why we’re given this life—to see if we

can figure it out and tip the scales in our favor.”

“I get what you’re saying, but I don’t need someone to complete me and make me feel whole.” I don’t mention what I’m really afraid of—and that’s losing Henry.

“Good. You shouldn’t. You should feel complete on your own. But what if someone can add to your life? Can add to your happiness? They make a good day even better, a nice night, a glorious one.”

She makes it sound so easy. I wish it actually were.

We eat in silence for a while. The hustle and bustle of the restaurant keeps it from feeling awkward.

“Luna, you cannot allow your past to hold you prisoner.” She waits for me to look at her again. “Whatever happened, it was only meant to be a life lesson, not a life sentence.”

It’s not that simple, I want to argue. But I don’t. I keep the words to myself.

“I thought the problem might be that he’s in the industry and you’re not. If that’s the case, you should know that there are many successful relationships between people in our business and those who don’t give two shits about it. Just look at Linh and me.”

I take that opportunity to ask about her wife again. The way Nora’s eyes brighten makes me smile. When Nora talks about Linh, it’s with real, unadulterated love.

I learn that Linh is working on her own novel. I also learn that they’re looking to buy another home, somewhere with lots of sun.

“Are you selling your house in Malibu?”

“Never!”

“I wouldn’t either.” I smirk.

“Before I forget,” Nora says in between bites of her burger, “Natalia needs to go back to Colombia—family emergency. She mentioned you’ve helped her in wardrobe before.”

“I have.”

“Can I convince you to cover for her until she gets back?”
Nora asks.

Knowing not much needs to be adjusted some days while others require an entire outfit to be fixed, I think it seems doable. Whenever I’m not needed in wardrobe, I can work on the scripts that need revising.

“Yeah, sure, I can cover for Natalia.”

“Great!” Nora claps her hands. “Tomorrow, instead of going to the production offices, show up on set.”

“On set?” My voice cracks.

Nora looks at me. “You’ll have to see him sometime.”

I was hoping I wouldn’t have to. Working on the scripts was the perfect job for me because I was able to work from the production offices, which are nowhere near the lot he’s filming on. There was practically no way I was going to run into him. But I just agreed to put myself in a position where I will undoubtedly run into him. Maybe often. My first thought is to call Tadashi and find out the filming schedule for the upcoming couple of days.

“Don’t look so worried.” Nora grins.

Exhaling quietly, I can only give her a faint smile.

“In case you’re still wondering, Henry told me himself.”

I actually stop chewing with that revelation.

Nora wipes her mouth with a napkin. “I don’t think he meant to tell me, but he was drinking. A lot. We were seated at the same table during the awards dinner last Tuesday, and he obviously drank too much. Hazel got him outside and called his brother, I believe.”

“Oh.”

“He never spoke ill of you. Just like you didn’t say anything negative about him. What does that tell you?”

“Nothing much. Two private people simply don’t like to air their dirty laundry.”

Nora narrows her eyes, then shakes her head. “Ms. Luna, this is your life. I can respect that, but you would be wise to remember, life is not a book; you can’t go back and fix everything in the sequel. You only get one chance here.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

ache



LUNA

IT'S BEEN THREE DAYS ON THE LOT. THREE DAYS, AND I'VE managed to avoid running into him. Maya helped me out on Monday, getting all the principal actors their wardrobe. Tadashi helped on Tuesday.

Wednesday, I'm on my own. It happens then because it was always going to.

"I have to dress him? Them, I mean."

"Yes, all the principals get dressed."

"They didn't have to be dressed the last two days!"

"They were supposed to!" Natalia snaps, sounding frustrated.

I know she appreciates that I'm helping her out because she's told me repeatedly. I know the actors, know the wardrobe and what's being used where, but Natalia wishes she could still be in London, doing her job. Unfortunately, her grandpa took a bad fall, and she's the only one with a flexible enough job to be able to fly to Colombia to take care of him after the surgery.

"You're supposed to check their outfits every day!"

Shit.

"Why?"

"Because, sometimes, they're idiots, Luna, and they don't remember how they were dressed the day before, or they layer in the wrong order, with the wrong accessories, and it ends up being a blooper on someone's YouTube video!"

I sigh, growing anxious. Still, I hear how exasperated Natalia is. "Okay, I'm sorry. I'll do it from now on."

"Don't worry; I'll walk you through it. First should be Max. El es fácil. Jeans, T-shirt, sneakers, no socks."

I have my earbuds on, and Natalia is literally walking me through every step. It turns out, Max is easy. He doesn't complain, makes lots of jokes, and with only three items for his wardrobe, it's all over pretty quickly.

"All right, Max is done," I say.

"Make sure you remind him to go to hair and makeup now before he forgets."

I do just that. Then, it's Siri. She's already been to hair and makeup, so I need to be extra careful with the sunflower dress she's wearing and the cardigan sweater too. We both make sure not to touch her face or her hair.

"Her earrings are in the top drawer of my desk. You have the keys o qué?"

"Yep, got them."

Through the earbuds, I hear Natalia cursing in Spanish, and then she starts telling me about her niece and her nephew and their annoying little dog. Apparently, they're all a bunch of little troublemaking monsters. That's when footsteps approach outside. When I look up, Henry stands frozen in the doorway.

"Henry ..." I whisper his name before I can stop myself.

The smile that breaks across his face when he sees me warms me like nothing has the last few days. The surprise and elation that cross his features make my stomach twist into knots, and I'm suddenly smiling back. Then, I remember, and he remembers. Our smiles fade, and the cold returns.

"Henry's there?"

"Yes, Henry's here," I reply, answering Natalia.

At his questioning look, I point at my ear. "I'm helping Natalia for a few days," I explain without looking at him.

"His outfit is hanging near the pink wall."

Without a word, Henry takes the clothes I give him. We're both very aware of the other and extremely careful not to

touch hands while maintaining as big of a distance between us as possible.

“He’s my favorite to dress.” Natalia giggles in my ear. “Nunca he visto a un hombre más guapo. No cree?”

“Si.”

It comes out in a breathy whisper, and Natalia laughs at me.

“Ay, hija, no me diga que está tragada? Everyone on set is madly in love with him. He’s all they talk about!”

I cannot control my breathing. My chest is rising and falling too quickly. When I glance Henry’s way, he’s looking at me. Quickly, he averts his gaze.

“He’s not done yet?”

“I don’t know.” I’m trying not to panic, but I’m definitely panicking.

“Luna, está bien?”

“I’m fine,” I lie.

“Ask him if he needs a hand. His clothes tend to bunch up on top because he’s wide at the shoulders and narrow at the waist.”

I know that. I’ve sat on that waist and tickled him until he couldn’t breathe from laughing so hard. I’ve taken a nap on top of him, using his arms as pillows. I’ve been carried by him while I held on to those strong, broad shoulders and wrapped my legs around that slim waist.

Fuck.

Why did I agree to help wardrobe? Why?

Clearing my throat, I approach the makeshift changing room, which is two curtains forming a square with two corner walls. Natalia told me bigger productions have very different setups because the budget allows for it, but this is a tiny movie.

“Clothes okay?” I ask him, rubbing my palms together because I don’t know what to do with my hands.

“What did he say?”

“He didn’t answer.”

He’s obviously not talking to me. He hasn’t said anything to me yet. Not *hi*, not *thank you*, not *eat shit and die*.

“Go check on him. He’s always on his phone, texting.”

Something in my chest tightens painfully. He’s usually texting me, giving me a play-by-play of as much of his day as he has time to share. Because once he’s on set, that becomes his focus. Before that though ... I loved getting texts from him. Memes. Selfies so I’d send one back.

I mute the call. My heart is beating so loud that I’m sure he can hear it. Natalia might be able to hear it all the way in Colombia too.

“Henry?” I call through the curtain. “The clothes okay?”

He pulls the curtain back, and suddenly, we’re standing too close. His eyes roam my face, as if hungry for the sight of me. There’re so many things he wants to ask—I can see it on his face.

My throat closes up. I’m frozen on the spot. I can’t move and can’t talk. So, I stand there, not saying anything, simply drinking in the sight of him.

None of the pictures I’ve taken with my phone even come close to how fucking beautiful he is in person. None of the posts on his social media accounts do him justice either. Nothing is quite like this, where I can experience the warm tones of his brown skin firsthand. Where I can see the thick, dark hair making up his beard, admire the soft fullness of his lips and the intense gaze from his eyes. And his scent ... holy fucking shit, he smells like heaven ...

It might simply be wishful thinking, but I don’t see hate in his brown eyes. I don’t sense any negative vibes from him either. He does radiate immense sorrow though. That alone makes my heart hurt.

When he takes a step closer, I don't move back. His gaze is intense and unwavering. I have the very foolish thought that he should kiss me. Because he might want to, desperately maybe. Because I would welcome it—eagerly.

Henry steps close enough that I feel his chest against mine. The hard, hot planes of muscles against the softness of my chest sends my thoughts racing. How many times did he bury his face between my breasts, using his tongue and his teeth to leave me panting, begging for more?

“Mr. Johnson,” someone calls from the door. “They need you on set.”

“Thank you.” Henry clears his throat. “I'm on my way.”

“Wait.” I grab his hand.

Hope springs in his eyes, warming every part of me. Then, I release his hand just as quickly as I reached for it.

“Sorry,” I murmur.

Confused, hope dying, he watches me pick up my phone.

“Natalia says it bunches up?” I explain, my eyes downcast, my voice barely above a whisper. “Let me double-check with her. It'll be quick.”

He makes no reply, but he hasn't moved. His eyes are on me, and I can't seem to breathe.

“Natalia?” My voice trembles, and he takes a step toward me.

“What's taking so long? Stop drooling over Henry and send him on his way.”

“You're on speaker.”

Natalia laughs an awkward, high-pitched laugh. “Hi, Henry. I was just kidding. How does the outfit fit?”

“Hi, Nat. No problems. With the clothes,” he adds, and my eyes flicker up to his. He's looking down at my phone though.

I lean toward him. His beard is full and scruffy, and his lips look so soft. Clearing my throat, I stop myself, quickly

stepping back.

What is wrong with me? It's like I can't control myself around him.

"Great!" Natalia claps. "Do me a favor, Henry. Raise your hands over your head."

Henry does so.

"Luna, can you make sure the shirt stays tucked in when he does that?"

I was hoping for a sliver of brown skin so I had the excuse to touch him, but the shirt doesn't ride up.

"It's staying tucked in."

"Perfect!" Natalia exclaims. "Now, Luna, please make sure you smooth out the sleeves inside the sweater so it doesn't look lumpy. Especially the shoulder and biceps area. The type of dress shirt Henry's wearing isn't wrinkle-free. If you don't even it out, it'll look so bad on camera."

"Okay." I nod.

Even though I wanted to touch him, now with the perfect excuse, I'm dreading it. Cheeks burning, I step closer to Henry. My hands are trembling when I reach under his sweater.

This close, he smells even better. Clean, fresh, and a note of something uniquely him. I close my eyes, shamelessly inhaling the scent of him.

Why does he smell so good? Why does he feel so good too? All warm, hard muscles ...

I tell myself to move quickly without touching him too long, but my hands have a mind of their own. They run up his abdomen, slowly across his chest, enjoying the delicious heat of his skin beneath the thin shirt.

Adjusting the sleeve, feeling the solid muscles under my fingertips, I swallow past the lump in my throat. I can recall my mouth on the very skin I'm touching, working my way toward his neck, swirling my tongue to make him moan.

Digging my nails into the flesh of his strong shoulders when we came together. Loving how he wrapped his arms around me in bed, held me close against his body throughout the night

...

Henry's watching me. I can feel his eyes on me.

Is he reliving the same memory? A different one? Does he care? Does he hate me?

When I can't pretend to ignore his gaze anymore, my eyes travel up to his. The little furrow cutting between his brows deepens.

My heart speeds up, and a warm chill runs down my back. Something in his lovely brown eyes softens, and his lips part ever so slightly to say something.

Are we moving closer to each other? Yeah, we're moving closer, holding our breaths until there's a knock on the door that breaks the spell.

"Come in," I call out, slipping my hands out from under his sweater. Smoothing the top of the thick material over Henry's shoulders as a final step.

It's one of the extras having issues with the zipper of her skirt. Before I can say anything to Henry, he's already walking out the door.



HENRY

“Action!”

Max says his lines, sounding angry the whole time, like he’s supposed to. Then, he exits, according to the script, shoving me out of the way. Siri says her lines next. She’s about to follow her brother out, but I stop her from leaving.

My focus isn’t on the scene or her though. All my thoughts revolve around one person.

Did she leave and come back? There’s so much I wanted to say. Starting with what in the world she’s still doing in London and ending with why she chose to break my heart.

I couldn’t believe she was here. Standing right before me. Beautiful and nervous, blushing while looking back at me with the same adoration that had always made me feel like I was flying. Her face looked a little gaunt, and she had bags under her eyes.

Has she been eating? Has she been sleeping?

I wanted to ask the questions. I wanted to tell her I haven’t been the same. I don’t know if I’ll ever be.

Siri yanks her hand out of my grasp. I don’t know what she’s saying, but I know what I’m supposed to say. I deliver my lines. Words full of pain and sorrow.

When I close my eyes, that fresh, beachy scent Luna favors invades my senses. Green eyes kept watching me, as if trying to memorize every aspect of my face. But it’s the way her gaze returned to my lips time and time again that gave me hope.

When I erased all distance between us, feeling her breasts against my chest, I nearly reached for her, wanting to feel her luscious curves in my hands again. Wanting to bury my face in that supple skin, suck on the delicate tips, take her in my

mouth to drive her crazy. She always ended up so fucking wet for me ...

I'm supposed to kiss Siri. My character wants to. I don't. The lips I want to feel aren't hers. But I'm going to do it anyway. The kiss is well choreographed with the help of the intimacy coordinator, so I simply follow the steps we've all agreed upon. My hands are on her shoulders. Hers are flat on my chest.

I'm supposed to look into her eyes, say a gentle, "I love you," then kiss her like I'm afraid I'm losing her.

"I love you," I whisper, but I'm not looking into Siri's brown eyes. I'm picturing Luna's green ones.

When Luna grabbed my hand to stop me from leaving, hope erupted in my chest. She changed her mind. She knows she made a mistake. She wants me back.

But that wasn't why she touched me. Still, I was in no hurry to leave. I wanted her close again. I can still feel the warmth of her fingers on the inside of my palm.

Siri's hands feel cold against my chest. When I dip my head to press my lips to hers, an involuntary shudder runs through my shoulders. It's all wrong. I consider pulling away, but I don't want to ruin the shot. And so I kiss her, tears forming in my eyes, running down my face because *she* doesn't fucking want me.

"Cut!" Ava looks intrigued and impressed. "Print that!"

I wipe my face dry.

"Got chills, man." Tadashi claps my shoulder.

"Nice work, Hank." Hazel offers a tiny smirk. Very different from the toothy grin I'm used to seeing from her.

I force a smile onto my face and nod like I appreciate it. I don't say a thing though. If I speak, my voice will break, and they'll all know I wasn't acting.

"Go again!"

I inhale and exhale. Patrick touches up my makeup, and I allow the pain to rise to the surface once more.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

hell



HENRY

EVERYTHING HURTS. SMILING TO KEEP UP APPEARANCES HURTS. Laughing to pretend I'm fine hurts. Waking up every day without her hurts.

Although I want to blame her, I did this to myself. I was in way over my head from the very beginning. That's on me. I know that. But it's also her fault. For making me fall so hard. For being so caring and smart and fun to be around. For being beautiful and sexy. For listening to me and encouraging me and never judging me. For being pretty much fucking perfect.

Until she lied to me. Until she gave up on us.

She gave up. And now, I'm in hell.



On Thursday, just as I'm dreading and looking forward to seeing Luna again, a runner shows up to deliver my wardrobe.

And there it is.

She doesn't want to see me. Now that I know she's here, she's made her decision.

Friday—the same thing. It's such an intense pain in the middle of my chest—feels like I'm being ripped in two.

If only I could talk to her, try to understand, get her to explain. No, this is for the best. For her. Natalia should be back by Monday, and Luna will disappear from my life again. Then, awkward run-ins can be avoided. We won't bump into each other in craft services. Both hyperaware of the other's every movement. We won't run into each other in an empty hallway, where I look straight ahead, like she's not there, and she does the same thing. But when we've passed one another,

we steal glances of each other when we think the other isn't looking. I've caught her looking, and of course, she's caught me as well. We won't be on set, where I'll pretend to be on my phone while she's trying to fix the most annoying dress shirt in the history of the world. And then maybe I can stop feeling so horrible and empty.



LUNA

Maya smiles at me. “What do you want?”

“Cough. Hank. Cough,” Hazel mutters behind her fist.

I give her a dirty look. “Did you just—never mind. Um, I’m not very hungry. But you guys get whatever you want. I’ll treat.”

“We should make you pay,” Hazel yawns. “For being all sad and mopey and fucking pining. You’re bumming me out, bro.”

Since I’m not at the hotel anymore, I haven’t been spending as much time with Hazel and Maya. I hardly go out. I don’t have energy. Which is why when they invited me to dinner, I declined, but they showed up at Tadashi’s anyway.

We order lots of Thai food and two large pizzas. They ask how I like living at Tadashi’s.

“I like it. It’s quiet. We’re usually watching old Dodgers games when he’s here. Sometimes Lakers games. Otherwise, it’s just me, writing.”

“That sounds pretty pathetic and incredibly boring.”

“Thank you, Hazel. You always know what to say to make me feel better.”

Maya giggles. “I missed hanging out with both of you.”

I look between them. “You haven’t been going out every night?”

“No!” Hazel cries dramatically, collapsing back into the couch. “Zayyir’s been in town, so Maya’s been ignoring me. At least when you were with Hank, you still hung out with us.”

Hearing it said so dismissively—*when you were with Hank*—it’s a stabbing pain. But Hazel’s right; we’re not together

anymore. We weren't even together that long to begin with. Only a few weeks—how is that even possible? It feels longer than that. I don't remember a time I didn't know him ...

When I stop wallowing and get out of my own head, Hazel and Maya are still arguing. I know the question that'll get them to stop.

“By the way, how is Zayyir?”

Maya's expression turns ecstatic. Hazel's is the exact opposite.

“He flew back to New York today.”

“Otherwise, she wouldn't be here with us,” Hazel mutters.

“Yes, I would be.”

“But you would've brought him along.”

“Yes, I might have, Hazel. Why is that a problem?”

“It's not a problem,” Hazel mutters.

“It sure sounds like it's a problem,” I point out because I'd rather focus on someone else's drama instead of my own.

Narrowing her eyes at me, Hazel lets out a small growl. “You wanna know what my problems are? I have two of them—you”—she points at me—“and you.” She glares at Maya.

I snort. “What did I do?”

“Look, I like you, kid,” Hazel states.

I'm only three years younger.

“But you don't even know how big you fucked up! You need to wake up. There's this person who's head over heels crazy about you, just like in the goddamn movies and stories we write! And you walk away? You fucking walk away?”

I can only blink at her.

“You look confused. It's not that confusing.”

“It's complicated.”

“It's really not.” Hazel frowns, serious in a way I've never seen before. “No one gets a happy ending. That shit's not real.

Real life is messy, and it sucks! That's why when you find that one person, you don't fucking let go! You just don't. And you definitely don't fucking give up before it even starts. That's so wrong."

I don't argue. Not when Hazel's words remind me of things Henry said as well, when they sound like things I used to believe once upon a time. Maya gives me a sympathetic look.

"Maybe you get a couple of years, or even just a few months, or a fucking week!" Hazel looks so unbelievably frustrated. "But you'll spend it with the person you love who loves you! Do you know how rare that is? I've had that; it's fucking beautiful. I know I've called you a lot of things to your face and behind your back, Luna, but this is next-level stupid."

Hearing her call me by my actual name is strange. Everything else isn't. Maya doesn't bother hiding her frown behind her hand. She looks offended on my behalf. Things are not always as easy as Hazel claims they are.

"And you"—Hazel turns to Maya next—"I know I called Luna stupid and an idiot—"

"You didn't call me an idiot."

"I meant to. But, Yaya, you don't need to be so ... desperate."

It's Maya who looks hurt now.

"Out of nowhere, this guy returns, and you drop everything and everyone to run back to him?"

"You just told Luna not to let go."

"Zayyir let you go. He did you dirty. Didn't fight for you. He took the easy way." Hazel's superior tone is gone. Now, she just sounds resigned and sad.

More tears fill Maya's eyes. "We both agreed. It was for the best."

"Wasn't it his idea?"

Silent tears roll down Maya's face.

"We all make mistakes," I assure her, getting up from the couch to rub Maya's back. "Sometimes, we don't know it until after we made them."

"True," Hazel concedes. "And sometimes, you can simply apologize, and everything's okay. Luna, you can call Hank right now, say *sorry, let's fuck*, and I bet he'd be outside that door in ten minutes. You know how I know that? Because I've seen him with you. What you had was sappy and disgusting, but it was real. You didn't see him talk about you. His whole face changed, like he couldn't believe his luck that he was with you."

I find it difficult to swallow, and the hole in my chest gets bigger.

Hazel continues, "You know that he got drunk? At an awards show of all places. The most professional actor I know." Hazel shakes her head in disgust. "I got him out of there so fast, but he said—never mind. I won't embarrass him by repeating it." Hazel shakes her head again. "I'll call him a moron for running back to you, just so you know."

Hazel turns from me to Maya.

"You don't know this because you didn't go." Hazel stands up. "Maya preferred to go out with her boyfriend instead of supporting her friends."

"That's not fair."

"But it's true." Hazel shrugs. "My point is, you and Zayyir, you guys have history. Super-complicated history. Shitty, super-complicated history. What if his family pressures him again? What if they mistreat you again?"

"We'll face whatever comes our way together," Maya whispers with a determination that cannot be argued with. "I trust him to have my back, and I'll have his."

Hazel doesn't say she'll believe it when she sees it, but her expression reveals it anyway.

"What about you?" I question.

“What about me?” Hazel looks as brash and confident as ever. “Maybe one day, in the distant, distant future, I want to find the funniest, most brilliant, hottest woman alive to live all my days with. I don’t know. But right now, that’s not for me. I don’t want or need that. I’m perfectly happy, doing whatever the fuck I want, fucking whoever I want! I love me, and I love my life. I want both of you to have that too.”

We sit there, letting the words sink in. Hazel runs a hand down her face and curses in Korean.

“Look, I know the things I just said ... they don’t always sound nice, but it’s only because we all need to get smacked around with the truth every once in a while. Maya, you’re one of my favorite people ever, and I want you to be happy. I really do.”

Hazel doesn’t try to escape when Maya crosses the living room to her. I join them because, now, I’m feeling even more emotional.

“Luna, I still think you’re a fucking moron though.”

“You wouldn’t be you if you didn’t.”

Eventually, Hazel shoos us away. “You know what we should do? Get matching tattoos!”

“No.”

“Not happening.”

“You guys are no fun.”

I get up to grab more beer even though I hate the taste. When I take a seat, they ask how my book is coming along. I tell them I’m about to finish the first draft. These past two weeks, I’ve been writing nonstop. I even started something new. A screenplay. It just so happens to be the two weeks since ending things with Henry.

“Guess all that D was getting in the way.”

Maya spits her drink.

I don’t want to laugh and barely manage to hold back. “Hazel, don’t start.”

Hazel does start though. “Do you remember how drunk she was that one time?” she asks Maya, who looks embarrassed for me. “Luna Wuna, did he tell you what you did?”

“Some of it.”

With that evil gleam in her eye, Hazel recounts everything that happened. Maya has to step in to correct some of the more elaborate and fanciful storytelling, but she’s pretty spot-on. By the end, I’m so beyond mortified that I’m hiding inside my hoodie. They’re both laughing at me. Hazel openly and Maya quietly behind her hand.

I don’t remember anything that they’re telling me, but to be completely honest, I don’t recall them being in the room at all. I remember Henry in the shower with me, my not being shy about sharing some of my fantasies, all of which revolved around him ... because I was insatiable when it came to him.

What I do remember vividly is his head between my legs, his mouth hot on me ...

Just thinking about it, I feel a chill run up and down my spine. I’m glad I’m hiding my face because I know it’s burning red at the moment.

Once Hazel and Maya stop laughing, they ask me the question I’ve been hoping to avoid.

“Have you talked to him?”

I fall back on the couch, shaking my head. The two beers in me with absolutely no food are very likely the reason I actually answer Hazel’s question. “I only spoke to him on one occasion. And he didn’t say anything.”

Maya asks, “Do you ... want to talk to him?”

Eyes closed, I answer honestly, “Yes.”

The room feels like it’s spinning.

“Why don’t you?” Hazel asks.

Because he hates me—I’m sure of it.

“Feelings? I don’t like them. Don’t like talking about them either,” Hazel admits. “But even I know, sometimes you gotta woman up and just fucking do it.”

I don’t argue, but opt for rolling my eyes. I did talk to Henry—not about feelings—but I was actually comfortable with him. Talking about other stuff and laughing and messing around. But once shit got real, I panicked and ran.

From the beginning, things were different with Henry. Out in public, he kept his distance because I’d asked him to. But when it was just the two of us, he didn’t hide his feelings. He showed me exactly how he felt about me. He even asked me to live with him. Said he loved me ...

Seriously, what is wrong with me?

“I need to pee,” I announce, getting up from the couch. “There’s more beer in the fridge if you guys want,” I yell from down the hall.

I’m washing my hands when I hear the front door. Tadashi’s supposed to be at a match. Since he’s here though, I’ll make sure he eats before the game since there’s still lots of food and he hates leftovers in the fridge.

When I open the door, the worst thing that can happen happens. Henry is there. Stunned. Mouth hanging open, looking uncomfortable until, eventually, he’s more angry than surprised.

Blinking, his eyes travel up and down my body, taking in my appearance. Long-sleeved black pajama shirt, Batman pajama pants, purple fuzzy socks.

“You’re staying here?” he accuses, eyebrows narrowed. Those are the first words he’s said to me in two weeks. “With Tadashi?” His voice as cold and hard as his eyes.

I try to ignore my racing heart and the way my whole body wants to lean into him even if it’s only for a little while. I hear Tadashi laugh with Hazel in the living room.

I cross my arms over my chest. “Oh, you’re talking to me now?”

“You don’t get to be angry.” Henry scowls. “Answer my question. Are you living here?” The pain is clear in his voice. After a long exhale, he mutters, “He should’ve told me.”

I can feel the anger rolling off him in waves. His eyes are wide. He’s seething.

“He should’ve told you?” I repeat, every word I say full of more irritation and annoyance until I snap. “He doesn’t have to give you updates on me, and I don’t have to answer shit!”

It’s possible he’s right, and I don’t get to be angry, but that doesn’t mean he gets to be an asshole either. Or maybe he does since I ruined everything. I don’t even know anymore.

Frustrated, he runs his hands through his hair. Anger is easier—it definitely hurts less. I can understand why he’s choosing to be angry, but I don’t wanna fight with him.

“Look,” I sigh, chewing on my bottom lip. “Yes, I’m staying here. I rent one of his spare rooms. Happy?”

“No, Luna, I’m not happy. Not even close.”

Just when I think he’s not gonna say anything else, he adds, “I ... didn’t even know you were still in London until I ran into you in wardrobe. You ... don’t tell me anything.”

I should walk away. I should walk away and not look back and lock myself in my room and leave him alone and let him move on with his life. I should walk away, but I can’t.

“What do you want me to tell you?”

We’re standing close, not quite touching yet. He waits a long time until I look up at him.

“Why in the world are you angry?” He doesn’t sound like himself. “You ended this, remember?”

The desperation, the sorrow in his voice cuts through me. I’m fighting back tears.

“Because ...” I swallow.

He inches closer. “Because?”

Because I'm scared. Looking up into his beautiful brown eyes, I realize I want to find refuge in them. I want to feel safe in his arms, but my mind is a terrible place where I've already lost him. To someone smarter, wittier, prettier. Everywhere we go, there will always be someone better than me.

It happened before. It's only a matter of time before it happens again. And I will not survive if Henry hurts me like I've been hurt. It's impossible to explain. He won't understand because he's never been betrayed with such malicious intent to such devastating consequences.

Ashamed and despairing, I turn to go without explaining anything.

"Luna, wait." He grabs my arm.

I stop, but keep my gaze on the floor.

"You said this wouldn't work," he whispers, stepping closer. His scent swirls around me. "You didn't say why. And I was so angry with you that I walked out. When I came back home, you were gone. I shouldn't have left, but I think I deserve to know."

His chest is so close to my arm. The heat from his body makes me feel dizzy. If I turn the slightest bit to the left, I'll touch him. There has to be a word for how desperately I want to touch him. With my hands and my body and my mouth.

"Luna?"

If I were to lean into him, bury my face in his strong chest, he would wrap his arms around me, hold me close—I know he would. He would make the pain go away ... for now. But it would be back in the morning. And I'll end up dragging him down with me. I can't do that to him. I won't do that to him.

"Tell me? Please." The pain in his voice makes me look up at him.

"Because ... nothing lasts forever."

"We can," he insists, the agony clear in his voice. His hands turn to fists that he shoves in his pockets.

When I meet his gaze and whisper his name, there's something fragile in my voice, like it's about to break. Henry's lips are on mine in an instant. The dark shadow consuming us lifts, like salve to a wound. The torment of the last few weeks is forgotten, our suffering finally eased.

He presses me against the wall, trying to touch every part of me at once. I cling to him, drawing him to me, melting into him so completely that neither of us knows where one ends and the other begins. It's pain laced with desire, love with sorrow.

We only break away when air becomes absolutely necessary, but even then, Henry holds me impossibly close. His eyes are shut tight, his forehead pressed gently to mine.

"You can't kiss me like that and tell me this is nothing to you."

It's everything. He's everything.

"Luna, we can—"

"We can't," I cut him off, shaking my head, my heart breaking all over again. Fixating on all the potential negatives overrides everything else. "We won't."

Unable to meet his eyes anymore, I step to the side, breaking from his embrace. I force myself to walk away. He deserves an explanation, but I can't give him one. Not when my thoughts move too fast even for me to understand. Not when all I'm left with are feelings of inadequacy and the terrifying fear that I'll never be worthy of him.

Instead of trying to explain any of it, I leave Henry alone in the hallway. I don't come out of my room until Maya knocks to let me know he and Tadashi left.

When I return to the living room, Hazel looks disappointed, shaking her head. "That was some weak-ass shit, Luna."

CHAPTER FORTY

set



HENRY

THREE MORE DAYS OF FILMING, AND I'M DONE. SEVENTY-TWO more hours. That's my life now—work and more work.

Lately, I've gotten into planning my day. If I know exactly what I'm doing next, then I'm able to focus all my energy on that one particular task. That's how I've been able to function and remain productive. Whatever meeting or dinner or appearance Trevor lines up, I'm there, no questions asked. Staying busy helps.

Max becomes a problem though. We were fine before. Never especially close, but we got along well enough. Until I stopped by wardrobe, looking for Luna, only to find Max there, making her laugh. It took every ounce of restraint I possessed to keep from charging in there.

Since then, I can't even look at the guy. It works well for our scenes. They call for me to address him with contempt. However, it permeates into real life.

"Hey, man, are we good?" Max asks after a particularly rough scene.

"Yes. Why wouldn't we be?" I reply a little too quickly, knowing I shoved Max too hard, with too much force during our scene earlier that day.

"If you say so. But ... if there're any problems, we should talk it out."

Why are you fucking my girl? I want to demand, but I don't know if they're sleeping together. It's not supposed to concern me if they are.

Besides, she's not my girl. She doesn't want to be.

"For sure, mate." I give him a grudging smile.

As I'm walking away, an inane thought has me wondering if she's talked to Max about her writing. My heart sinks deeper

in my chest. I felt like I'd been granted a privilege no one had before. Felt so fucking special.

Stupid git.

"Can I read it?"

Luna freezes in the middle of her hotel room. "You ... want to read what I wrote?" She visibly cringes as she asks the question.

"I'm curious. My fate is in your hands."

"Not yours." She gives me a rueful smile. "Just Benjamin's."

"Mine too," I assure her. The rest of the words left unspoken.

She clears her throat. "Um, you see ..." she begins, trying to stall.

She never lets anyone read her writing. Never. She told me this. People have asked, and she always says no. Not her sister, not her little brother, not even her publisher. Not until it's complete.

"The thing is ... okay, um ..." She nods and reaches for her phone. "You can read it, but I'm leaving."

I chuckle. "Why?"

"It's hard to explain," she tells me, pausing for a second. "Mostly because it's kinda embarrassing. And a little nerve-racking. And pretty much fucking mortifying!"

Luna's standing on the side of the bed, completely, gloriously naked, trusting me with her body, but not something she wrote.

"L, it's okay." I don't want her to feel pressured to do anything she doesn't want to. Truth is, it stings a bit though.

Recently, when looking up ways to support your writer, I remember one link claimed writing is very personal. The majority of writers refuse to let anyone read their works until

after many, many drafts have been written and rewritten. Most works in their raw form are rarely seen by anyone besides the person who wrote them.

“Here,” she says, handing over her phone. “I’ll be in the bathroom. Let me know when you’re done.”

“You’re really leaving?”

“Yes,” she answers without looking at me.

“Luna, sit with me, please?”

She’s on the edge of the bed.

“I won’t read it if it makes you uncomfortable.”

Slowly, she lifts her gaze to mine. “Really?”

I nod.

“And you won’t be mad?”

“Of course not.” I smile. “I thought it could be something we share, but I understand the need for privacy.”

Luna chews on her bottom lip as she climbs back into bed.

“Okay.” She releases a shaky breath. “It’s not any good right now, but you can read it.”

An amused half grin appears on my face. “You sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” she insists, sounding more convincing. “I want you to.”

She settles her warm, soft body next to me, wrapping her arms around my waist. “But I can’t watch,” she quickly adds, burying her face in my chest.

The huge smile on my face isn’t going anywhere. Even if it’s not an easy thing to do, she’s choosing to trust me with this too. I hold her close and kiss the top of her head.

“Infinite dark skies—”

A small hand flies out to cover my mouth.

“Henry, no! Not out loud!” She’s redder than I’ve ever seen her.

Apologizing, I chuckle quietly and kiss her palm, the back of her hand, trailing kisses up her arm. "I'm sorry."

"Silently, in your head, please," she urges, and I do as she asked.

It's a short excerpt, and I finish reading it quickly.

"I like where this is headed."

She peeks up at me through her hair. "Do you really?"

When I tug on a pink curl to bring her closer, her cheeks flush.

"I do, really."

Relief and pride flash across her pretty face. When her dimples appear, I toss the phone aside and tackle her to the bed. Her giggles turn into breathy moans when I kiss her. I love how she melts against me.

Those days are gone.



LUNA

Fuck. I hate this. Hate my brain and my thoughts and feeling this way. I'm scared shitless to let him see this weak and needy part of me, afraid he'll realize I'm not worth his time.

I should call in sick, go back home. But I'm well aware that Henry only has three more days of filming. It's why I show up on the lot. Not only is he amazing to watch, but I'm also afraid I'll never see him again once he wraps.

It's a difficult scene today. They can't seem to get it right. Upset, Siri storms off the set. Henry's left with his arms crossed over his chest, eyes on the floor.

"Everyone, take five!"

The set empties rather quickly. I stay to make sure Henry's okay. Not that I'm gonna ask. Not now that he knows what a coward I am.

When the intimacy coordinator steps forward to talk to him, she calls for a stand-in. Someone pushes me forward, onto the set's bright lights, and before I'm able to kill whoever did that, I'm standing in front of Henry.

"Thank you for being here." Winter, the intimacy coordinator, offers me a kind smile.

"Oh, I'm not—"

"Don't worry; you don't have to do or say anything. You're simply assisting us by standing in for Siri." Winter looks up at Henry. "Let's see if we can figure out the issue, shall we?"

Henry nods. I see him out of the corner of my eye.

"Excellent. Where shall we begin—ah, yes. You're walking together. First, you both take four steps."

Henry takes a step forward, so I take a step forward. No one said anything about walking, which, apparently, I'm

unable to do at the moment. I feel so awkward. The lights are so bright, and I can hear someone snickering in the darkness surrounding us. It sounds a lot like Hazel, and I know who I'll be murdering later.

"You're holding hands," Winter reminds Henry.

It's automatic—how he takes my hand in his. Still large and strong. Still warm and safe. Without looking at me, he laces his fingers with mine.

"You walk together. Then, she stops you."

I don't do anything. My heart is pounding so violently in my chest that I can't hear anything else. Henry's quiet, looking down at our hands entwined between us.

"She hugs you."

Letting out a shaky breath, Henry takes each of my hands in one of his and places them around his waist. Breathing is impossible. Heat blooms inside me. My body has been longing for this closeness. It's suffocating and yet not enough.

"You press your forehead to hers. Your hands caress the sides of her face. Eye contact is very important in this scene."

Eyes closed, Henry presses his forehead to mine. His hands tremble enough that I notice. But then his palms are on my face, soft and tender.

"You whisper in her ear and apologize for withdrawing, for pushing her away, and you remind her you love her. Then, you kiss her."

Henry's lips brush against my skin. My heart is in my throat. The side of his face against mine exhilarates every one of my nerve endings. It's unbearable—how much I want to hold him close, kiss his cheek, those lips, nuzzle the texture of his beard. Images of him laughing and kissing my body race through my mind.

"I don't want this anymore. I've never known pain like this," he whispers, only loud enough for me to hear. "It's agony."

My heart shatters.

“Loving you hurts too much.”

The anguish in his voice. I cannot get past it. Because I put it there.

The rest happens in a blur. Winter thanks me for my assistance. Henry leaves. Hazel jokes about something.

I didn't mean to hurt him. I didn't think I could. Not like this. In a daze, I start walking and end up in the last place I should be, knocking on his trailer door.

“Come in.”

He's sitting on the couch, his arms outstretched over the back of the couch, legs open wide, head back. He looks exhausted.

This is what people never see. The toll it takes, how drained actors feel. I know he's been on set over twelve hours already.

“You didn't even check who it was.”

“I recognized your knock.”

“Oh.” If it was any other time, a smile would tug on the corner of my mouth. As things stand, I simply exhale a shaky breath.

His eyes remain closed. “What do you want, Luna?”

So many things ...

A part of me wants to climb onto his lap, bury my face in his neck, have his arms secured around me, like he's done so many times before. Another part is aroused by his close proximity, our seclusion, the sight before me. I want to kiss him, then crawl between his legs, taking him in my mouth. To have him panting and cursing, able to taste his pleasure again ...

I blink, startled. Maybe that's part of my problem. It's either comfort or sex that I'm constantly seeking from him. But it's not all I want.

If I'm completely honest with myself, I want everything. All of him. But Henry deserves the world. The fucking galaxy!

Not my tiny, broken heart and messed-up head.

“I was hoping we could talk.”

He’s accused me of not communicating, not sharing how I feel. I owe him that, don’t I?

Henry peers one eye open. “Now, you want to talk?”

“If you have time.”

When has he not made time for me? He’s constantly put me first, from the very beginning, and perhaps that’s been his downfall.

Patience ebbing, frustration growing—if his expression is anything to go by—Henry shuts his eye again.

“You shouldn’t be here,” he sighs.

The air’s knocked out of me. He’s never ...

Heart hurting, I make it to the door. At the last second, I lock it instead. Because he deserves to be comforted too. And loved. And protected. And if he still wants that, if he’ll allow it, I want to be the one to do it.

Taking a deep breath to gather my courage, I walk toward the couch. Or I intend to once my legs start functioning again.

After many deep breaths and forcing one foot in front of the other, I dare to reach out and touch his hand. He flinches at the sudden contact. My heart drops, and what little confidence I was holding on to withers away. He’s never done that before. He’s always welcomed my touch.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have.” My voice is hollow between us. “Henry, I’m ... I’m not very good with words,” I begin.

“Says the writer.”

“Writing words down, yes. Saying words out loud, no.”

After another long silence, Henry stands. “Luna, you shouldn’t be here,” he repeats, tone resigned. “Not unless you mean it.”

Without looking at me, he disappears into the bedroom. I’m staring at the spot he stood in moments ago. My insides

churn, empty and numb.

“Not unless you mean it.”

What if I do mean it, but can't tell him, can't admit it? Devastated tears fill my eyes because he's right. I shouldn't be here. I can't give him what he wants.

Quietly, heart drowning in sorrow, I walk out of his trailer.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

fucked



TADASHI

GOT ABSOLUTELY SMASHED. BAD IDEA. PROBABLY A BAD IDEA to let Henry and Patrick crash too. My roommate, she likes to hide whenever anyone's over. Which is why I walk into my place, carrying two bags—one from the taco spot we like, the other holds a case of beer for me and two tamarind Jarritos for her.

Luna's on the couch with her laptop—writing, I'm guessing. She's up and ready to disappear to her room. Tends to do that when she doesn't want me to see she's been crying.

“I know you're sad, and you don't have to tell me why,” I say. Though I have a pretty good idea since Henry's been miserable too. “But you still need to eat. I got us tacos and cold beer.”

“The breakfast of champions.”

“Para la cruda.”

A humorless smile is on her lips. “I appreciate what you're trying to do—”

“And,” I cut her off, “Vin Scully calling game one of the 1988 World Series. Or game five in 2020.” I turn on the TV. “Plus, while that loads, some Chente.”

A wave of sorrow crosses her features as I play “Por Tu Maldito Amor” on my phone. She looks tinier now.

“Dude.”

“Heartbreak gets all of us, bro.” I shrug as I sit on the opposite couch. “Got tacos de asada or buche. What's it gonna be?”

Sitting back down, Luna wipes her eyes with her sleeve. “Asada, please.” After a while, she adds, “I could've made menudo if you're hungover.”

Always forget she can cook. But then that means I got dishes, and I hate washing dishes.

“By the way, whoever you brought home with you dropped something in the bathroom,” she says. “I think they fell too. They might still be there.”

“And you didn’t help?”

Luna smirks. “Not after last time.”

Last time she opened the bathroom door, she found me with the two girls and one guy I’d hooked up with the night before. Look, it was my first foursome. I wasn’t prepared. Someone wanted to take a shower, which was not the brightest idea. Now, I know I need a bigger bathroom for shit like that.

We watch the game in silence. Luna doesn’t eat. She’s balled up on the couch, and, fuck, I feel bad for her. She’s one of those people who always has your back, but thinks they can handle everything on their own.

“Yo, you know you can’t be Batman, right?”

She arches an eyebrow. “If there’s one superhero I can be, it’s Batman,” she argues.

I’m laughing. “Ah shit, for real?”

She throws off the blanket wrapped around her and stands up. This girl’s wearing a Batman onesie. I’m not knocking it, but ...

“Are you laughing at me?”

“A little.”

There’s a half smile on her face. I’ll take it.

“I will say, as cool as Batman is, sometimes, dude’s a loner. Personally, the Batman who has Alfred and Robin and Nightwing and Batgirl—my man.”

Her half smile’s gone.

“Shit happens,” Luna sighs, looking at her Jarritos bottle a long time. Don’t think she’s adding more, but then ... “One

day, you're a happy little kid, and the next, your dad gets hit by a drunk driver, and your mom never recovers."

Fuck.

"Luna, I didn't—"

She holds a hand up. Out of the corner of my eye, someone stumbles in the hallway.

"So, your heart breaks," she whispers. "Because you realize a love like that hurts too much." She takes a long breath. "Then, you're older, and you think you're ready to try, and the guy you're supposed to marry treats you like shit. But you don't realize it because it doesn't happen immediately. It's slow, calculated, little by little. Put-downs here, controlling behavior there, gaslighting you so you think you're the problem. But, hey, you're young and naive and you wanna trust people. Things'll get better, right? Except they don't. You stop hanging out with friends to avoid a fight. You dress different to avoid a fight. You change who you are to avoid a fight."

When she looks up at me, the tears are gone, and all that's left is a cold detachment. I fucking need a hug. I stand, but Luna stops me.

"Tadashi, don't. Please stay over there."

I sit my ass back down. Behind Luna, Henry retreats into the hallway. Don't know how much he heard. Don't know if it's right for him to hear any of it though. How do I stop her from sharing when she never shares?

"You think things'll work out," she continues, "so you put up with it. But a few months before the wedding, you go home early and walk in on the guy you're gonna marry in your bed with the maid of honor."

"Fucking shit!"

She ignores my outburst.

"And you get blamed for it. *Why are you home so early?* Like it's my fault he's balls deep in my best friend."

Fuck me, what do I say? What can I say?

“Guy’s from Boston.” She smirks, and I don’t know how she can do that, but I play along.

“Boston?” I yell, and pain erupts behind my eyes. So, hangover’s still going strong. “That was your first mistake.”

“Yeah.” She grows quiet again.

I don’t want to hear more. I’m not equipped for this.

“Sorry, I know you didn’t ask.”

“No, don’t be sorry.” Hell. “What happened then?”

She shakes her head. On TV, Gibson’s coming up to bat in the bottom of the ninth.

“You got this far.”

“Not much else to say. It was over two years ago. I was messed up. Went to therapy. Thought I was okay. Still, I didn’t want to date or any of that.” She sighs. “Wasn’t worth it, but then ...”

“My last serious relationship was in high school,” I admit, “so I’m probably not the best person to give advice, but if you like someone and they like you ...”

“Yeah, maybe.”

Seeing my chance, I risk it. “So, that’s what’s up with Henry?”

Luna shakes her head. “No, he’s—” Her eyes snap up to mine.

“I mean, it’s kinda obvious.” I grin. “So ... he’s the Catwoman to your Batman? Dude is pretty sexy.”

The unexpected sound of her laughter rings through the apartment. I’m staring, and I don’t realize she throws a pillow at my head until it bounces off my face.

“Didn’t mean to unload on you like that, sorry. Should’ve asked if it was okay first.”

A warning would’ve been good.

“Now I feel gross,” she shudders. “I gotta get up and move.”

“You’re going for a run, like, right now?”

She’s giving me a half-assed smile, but it’s something.
“Either I’m running out there or I’m a sobbing mess in here.”

“Don’t forget your sweater.” I wave.

Minutes later, Luna’s in her workout clothes and out the door. Henry steps out into the living room.

“How much did you hear?” Can’t read his expression.
Don’t know if it’s the hangover or her story.

“I heard enough.”

“Doing anything about it?”

Arching an eyebrow, Henry simply nods.

Fuck.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

call



LUNA

HENRY WRAPPED, BUT I WASN'T THERE. NO WAY I COULD BE. Not after the last time we were both on set.

Instead, I do something I've been avoiding and call my therapist.

We have a long conversation. Productive. It is. But it's also hard. Telling her everything ... it's exhausting.

I've never been one to talk and share and open up. It's not something that comes naturally to me. And yet I know that's the only way I'm getting through this.

Dr. González reminds me we all need help every once in a while. "Healing is not linear," she says. "There's ups and downs, good days and bad ones."

Seems obvious, right? But when you're right smack in the middle of a shitty day, it's difficult to find any bright light in a dark world. At least, for me, it is. Was. Is.

"I met someone," I blurt out. I did not plan on bringing up Henry at all. "I mean, it's over now, but ..."

The first therapist I worked with would've simply replied with, "Let's unpack this next week," or something similar. Dr. González gracefully spares a few minutes of her time.

"But what?" she asks.

I don't elaborate.

"Let me ask you this, Luna: What's stopping you from working things out?"

Me. I'm the problem.

As if hearing me, she states, "The things you went through, none of it was your fault—"

"I know," I snap, defensive and rude. "Sorry."

“It was not your fault,” she repeats slowly so that I listen, understand. “And you didn’t deserve it.”

These words, every time I hear them, my stomach drops. At first, I didn’t believe them. How could I? But I’m getting there. I’m trying to get there.

Once I fly back to LA, we’ll be resuming our weekly sessions.

Feeling so much lighter after our conversation, I call my sister. Spend I don’t know how long telling her about Henry. A little late, but we’ve always told each other everything, and yet I’ve kept so much of him to myself.

Sol listens with very few interruptions (surprisingly) and a handful of questions (as expected).

Then, the first thing she says, in true Sol fashion, is, “You lost my mom’s book! The last gift my dad gave her? No manches, Luna!”

Unfortunately, I did lose it. I’ve stayed up so many nights worrying. Reaching out to both airports and the airline numerous times, I’ve had no luck.

As I’m lamenting being a horrible daughter, two pretty bouquets of blushing roses and golden sunflowers arrive. After that draining conversation with Tadashi, I assume the flowers are from him.

When I ask, however, his reply is, “Shit, bro, was I supposed to send you flowers? My bad.”

I don’t have to wait long to figure out who sent them. Not when about a dozen more bouquets are delivered, one right after the other. White forget-me-nots. Tulips—my favorite—in all colors. Yellow and purple and pink and white. Red roses—Henry’s favorite. Pink snapdragons—the same shade as my hair. They fill up Tadashi’s living room, and I can’t stop smiling.

A mocha latte and warm croissant and mini conchas are delivered that morning and then every day since. I don’t want to read into it, but of course, I’m reading into it.

Sol: segura it's over?

Luna: Dude, he kicked me out of his trailer!

It's what I keep telling myself anyway. When I'm not foolishly hoping there's still a chance.

Sol: technically he said you shouldn't be there "unless you mean it." your dumbass chose to leave. i woulda stayed and talked it out and by talk I mean fuck

Luna: You're MY sister, güey!!

Sol: which is why i gotta call you on your babosadas mensa

I know she's right. I messed up. Again.

Luna: Too late now. Filming's done.

Sol: mira I'm not judging you for being the emotionally constipated fool you are, asi eres. yo se que you don't like talking about your feelings and shit but you can't keep hiding away.

Sol: being with that fucking colonizer pendejo fucked you up, I get it, but not everyone's gonna be an asshole like him

Thinking about that idiot doesn't have the devastating effect it used to. Now, I don't feel a thing. I sit next to the roses and inhale their sweet scent.

Sol: Is Henry an asshole?

Luna: No.

I don't even have to think about it. If anything, he's too nice. Doing everything everyone asks of him. He's kind and generous to a fault. And he's always been good to me.

Sol: dude what if he's your soulmate?

Tears sting my eyes. Sol's the romantic one. Like my dad, they *love* love. They sing love songs and quote romantic movies. Well, my dad used to, and Sol's continued that tradition.

Sol: I swear I wish I was there with you so I could kick your ass for being so stupid and stubborn. where's my chingona big

bro who ain't scared of shit??? donde está esa crazy bitch I've always looked up to for doing stuff no one thought possible??

This seems impossible. Picturing having to be so open with Henry? Having to admit my thoughts, all the crazy stuff he makes me feel, or telling him about the asshole I almost married and how he treated me? Just the idea of it has me twitchy and nauseous and nervous.

Fuck.

Luna: It's not that simple.

Sol: are you dealing with forbidden love como tita? did he say you're not good enough for his snooty ass like darcy? do you wanna wait patiently for nearly a decade like pinche anne?

I'm surprised by the references. All from books I love. Stuff I talked to her about, but doubted she was actually listening.

Sol: oye fea, do you want it to be over?

My heart's pounding. Because the answer is immediate and so simple.

Luna: No.

Sol: that mean you want him back in your life?

Sol: cause if you do, you gotta tell him

I know. It's not that I haven't been tempted to reach out, to text, send a DM, maybe call, but I end up doing none of it.

I carry some of the bouquets to my room. Then, I'm scrolling through his Instagram, and I accidentally like his most recent post. An ad for Burberry. Panicking, I unlike it as fast as humanly possible and toss my phone on the bed.

Pacing back and forth, my eyes on the damn screen, I'm afraid it'll turn on and send a message on its own. That doesn't happen, of course, but it does ping with a new notification. I stare at it. And stare and stare.

A DM from Henry. I know what it'll say. Leave me alone. Don't bother me. Stop stalking my page. Something along those lines—I'm sure of it.

Inhaling and exhaling, swallowing past the lump, I brace myself as I tap to read it.

I miss you.

The air leaves the room, gets knocked out of my lungs. I have to sit down. No, I need to lie down.

I'm lying down, watching fractured lights from a car outside glide across the ceiling, and then they're gone. The room is dark once more. I look at my phone again. A giddy warmth washes over every part of me all at once.

I miss you, he thought and typed and sent.

What do I reply? I don't know! I type up different things and delete every one. Nothing I write makes sense.

That's when the phone comes alive in my hand, and he's FaceTiming me. If I can't type, how am I gonna talk? So, why the fuck am I answering?

"Hello?"

"Luna?"

That voice, that accent, like warm honey. My entire being vibrates. I sit up.

"Hi," I squeak as his face appears on-screen. My chest feels tight, and I rub at the spot over my heart.

"I didn't wake you, did I?" he breathes, his voice rough, like he was sleeping, though I know he wasn't.

"No." My throat closes up. "A little maybe." And I don't know if he'll remember that conversation. It was so long ago. I want to say it was a simpler time, but we were always gonna end up here.

He sits up abruptly and turns on a light. He's shirtless, only wearing the gold chain with the moon pendant around his neck.

"I woke you up a little?"

That dazzling smile ... holy shit, he's so freaking handsome.

“Seems I’m always doing that.”

He does remember.

“How are you?” His eyes crinkle at the corners.

Shit, shit, I’m just staring at him.

He clears his throat and tries again. “Couldn’t sleep either?”

“I was sleeping!” someone mutters.

I failed to notice he’s not in his room. The bedpost is different. This room has wallpaper. Some detective I’d make.

“Where are you?”

“The Charles Hotel. In Munich.”

Someone throws a pillow at him. “Keep it down!” That someone has a deep voice.

A sinking feeling drops to the pit of my stomach. I’m almost afraid to ask. “Who’s that?”

Before Henry can reply, the phone gets snatched away from him. A face I’ve never seen looks familiar in a way I can’t describe.

“I know you,” he tells me. “Wait, are you naked?”

Off-screen, Henry growls.

“No, I’m not naked!” Took off my hoodie though. Seeing Henry, actually talking to him, I’m blushing like crazy, and my body’s overheated.

“Were you about to have video phone sex? While I’m in the room—”

In a swoosh, Henry tackles the guy talking. The phone clatters to the floor.

“That’s my girl, you daft git! Have some respect!”

My breath catches, and a dizzying wave of something deep and beautiful and powerful spreads through my body. A painful kind of hope blooms inside my heart.

When a lamp gets knocked over, shadows roll across the wall. Grunting and cursing and punches landing are the only sounds.

“Hey, Henry?”

The commotion stops.

“Yes, Love?”

I let out a weird, strangled noise. Am I dreaming? I must be dreaming.

“Are you okay?” I ask him.

Me? I’m not okay. Maybe I should open a window. Sure, it’s raining outside, but it’s like an oven in here. Even my tank top’s too much. And, yeah, I’m fucking swooning. And overwhelmed. I can hardly talk. What are words?

“You’re so whipped, bro.” Whoever that is cackles. He’s the first to the phone. “I’m fairly certain you’re the cute American. Luna, right? I’m Rex.”

“She doesn’t care, mate.” Henry snatches the phone away from him.

Rex laughs off-screen. “This tosser won’t shut up about you!”

“Rex.” It’s a warning, voice all gruff and deep.

The way Henry’s eyes narrow and the slight tic of his jaw ... I shouldn’t find it so ... so ...

“Sod it.” Rex chuckles, trying for the phone again. “You should hear him. *Luna’s so smart and so pretty, and I want to have all her babies—AHH!*”

The phone goes flying and lands face down. Cursing and punching resume in the background.

“Stop! Henry! I’m telling Mum!”

When Henry returns to the phone, he’s smirking, smug and triumphant. “Sorry about that.”

If I could travel through the phone to kiss that curl of his lips, I would.

Shuffling out of the bedroom, he heads down a long hallway. When the lights come on, it's in a large living room area. It's spacious. Contemporary art on the walls. Gray couch, orange cushions.

"I wasn't sure you'd accept my call," he starts, running a hand through his hair.

"I ... wasn't sure either."

His dazzling smile dims, fades. When he takes a seat, his expression changes, and the shadow of what's transpired in the past weeks crosses his features. He looks so tired all of a sudden.

"Right. Uh, I should go then."

"No, please!" I stumble over myself, trying to come up with a series of words that make sense. "I'm sorry. I wasn't expecting—can you hold on?" I ask.

I put my phone on mute and scream into a pillow.

Luna, stop being a scared little shit y habla con el!

Okay, how would I write this scene if it was in my book? That doesn't even make sense because I can't control his reactions. I *can* control mine though.

I pick up the phone, relieved Henry's still there, waiting patiently. One corner of his mouth quirks up when he sees me.

"Henry, I'm sorry. I'm ... the way I've been—"

"Are you?"

The earnestness in those pretty brown eyes soothes my growing apprehension.

"Yes, I am. I just ... get really nervous sometimes," I rush out, then take a deep breath. "Talking about feelings and stuff—my feelings. Not other people's. I'm really good at listening. Not so much at sharing." I'm rambling.

Henry's smile doubles in size. "I appreciate you letting me know," he says, then leans back on the couch cushions, hand behind his head. "So, tell me, L, how often do you like my posts and then unlike them?" he grins.

It takes me a second to catch up to the sudden change in topic. His biceps, the bulging muscles, distract me. But it's his smile that untangles the knot of anxiety in my chest.

"Dude, it happened once."

"Luna." His grin tips to the side. It's obvious he doesn't believe me.

I swallow. "Fine, twice."

He's laughing. At me. With me? A carefree sound that warms me to my core. And then I'm laughing too. It's not funny, not really. Feels more like sweet relief to be talking to him again than anything else.

Henry doesn't ask about the things I thought he would. Instead, he shares weeks' worth of news. His projects and travels. Mentions he made another playlist for me.

How does he always manage to make me feel special? And yet I let my own self-doubt sabotage everything.

Not anymore.

I ask what he's doing in Germany and learn he's there for a series of meetings with Zoe Hathaway and her partners. It's something big, something he can't talk about over the phone.

"Hey, L." Henry sits up again. "There's no pressure or anything, but perhaps ... when I get back—"

"Will you be in London for the wrap party?" I interrupt, heart in my throat.

His eyebrows shoot up. "You're going?"

I nod. "We can talk then ... if you want?"

Okay, I put it out there, which is good, but it feels like I'm about to pass out, which is bad.

"Wouldn't miss it. For anything."

We're quiet for a while. Henry leans back again, securing his phone on the cushions. I do the same in my bed with the pillows.

His breathing slows, and his eyes drift closed. I sneak a screenshot, but the sound wakes him.

“Haven’t been able to sleep,” Henry mumbles. “Tonight’s the first night—” He yawns. “Sleepy ...”

I watch him on my screen. So beautiful and calm and perfect. My eyes feel heavy too. Soon, I fall asleep, listening to Henry’s soft breaths.

When I wake up, my phone’s dead. Did I dream that? Or was it real life?



I’m freaking out! This actually happened! Henry called, and I answered, and we talked! Then, we agreed to talk some more at the wrap party! How do I know this? The picture I took of him, the screenshot of him sleeping so peacefully and looking adorable, is saved in my photo gallery. I am fucking freaking out!

I messaged my sister. She hasn’t replied. Told Hazel and Maya I was going to the wrap party after all, which is why Hazel’s in my closet, making faces at my wardrobe.

“Your problem is, you’re always hiding. You got that tiny waist, those hips, and that butt. Accentuate. Show it all off.” I roll my eyes, but she continues, “Before you argue, just know that being modest is out this year.”

“What are you wearing?”

“Three-piece suit. Bro, how do you actually have nothing to wear?” Hazel mutters. “I’m texting Natalia.”

An hour later, the doorbell rings.



Maya and Hazel disappear as soon as we walk into the huge lot. I spot an endless display of food, the DJ on the opposite side, and tables between the two. About half the cast and crew are already here.

I'm gonna miss them, these people I've worked with, gifted and skilled and inspiring. I'm gonna miss being on set and having craft services available every day too.

"Bittersweet, isn't it?" Dr. Harris states.

I nod as she stands at my side.

"How's book two coming along?"

"First draft's done."

Dr. Harris's expression shifts from surprised to impressed. "We might be doing this again in a year or two then?"

"I hope so," I reply, giddy at the prospect.

She tsks. "You're supposed to say *contact so-and-so* or *only if you pay up*. Know your worth, Ms. Luna. If you learn anything from me, it should be that."

"You're right," I agree. "Let's talk soon."

"Better." She smirks and walks off when her wife appears near the stage.

Linh blushes when she sees Dr. Harris. They're so cute together. Doting on each other, holding hands, whispering between them. They look like newlyweds, not like they're about to celebrate their tenth anniversary.

As I walk toward the bar, I overhear Siri talking to someone with bright orange hair.

"I'm telling you, he's bi."

A cold shiver creeps down my spine.

"Henry? Henry Johnson? The finest man alive ... you sure?" Orange asks.

WTF.

I don't think, I just step between them, ignoring Orange's gasps of disbelief at being interrupted and pushed aside.

Grabbing Siri's arm, I drag her away.

"Luna, hi. Hey, what—what are you doing?"

I stop near the corner, far from most people.

"What the fuck is your problem?" I growl, getting in her face.

"What are you talking about? Is this because I said I didn't like how you wrote Viviana and preferred Hazel and Maya's take on her?"

Esta mensa.

"I don't give a shit about that. What are you doing outing someone?"

She blinks at me like she has no idea what I'm talking about.

"Are you being serious right now?" I seethe, wanting to shake the stupid confused look off her face.

Her eyes go wide and both her hands fly to cover her mouth.

"He's *not* out?" she stutters. "I didn't know, I promise I didn't know. He never said not to tell anyone."

"He shouldn't have to. It's none of your business! Or anyone else's," I state.

When she nods, I turn to leave before I do something really stupid. As I'm walking away, Ruby catches up with me.

"So you read the article?" she asks, worry in her dark brown eyes. "She shouldn't have said that about your writing or your book."

I almost ask what else she said when I glance behind her and notice people looking between Siri and me. *Shit*. Ni modo, I'd rather have them think I'm an angry writer than let them know what we were actually talking about.

"It's pretty messed up," I say.

"I'm sorry." Ruby gives me a sympathetic smile. "Come on, let's get some Baath cake. We can dance too."

“Thank you, Ruby,” I exhale, my eyes searching for Tadashi so I can tell him to stop being a dumbass.



I’m stuffing my face with pastries and Indian food when there’s a light tap on my shoulder. I turn to Max, holding Patrick’s hand.

“Luna, I would like you to meet my boyfriend, Patrick.”

“She knows who I am.” Patrick rolls his eyes, but looks like he’s gonna jump Max at any second.

“She didn’t know you’re my boyfriend.”

“ ’Cause I wasn’t until five minutes ago.”

“And whose fault is that?” Max questions, but they’re both barely containing their adorably goofy smiles.

“How did I not know about this?” I ask because at no point did I suspect.

Max mentioned someone, but no one specific. As they tell me the lengths they went through not to give in to their attraction, I wonder if Dr. Harris knew about them too.

“I’m glad you guys figured it out.”

Patrick smiles wide. “Me too. Look for us on the red carpet.” He winks as he tugs Max away. “Let’s go tell more people that you’re madly in love with me.”

Max laughs but follows happily behind. They both have stars in their eyes, and a pang hits my chest. I’ve seen that loving gaze before—in Henry’s eyes when he looked at me. Why couldn’t I see it for what it was then? I need a drink.

The music slows, and there’re murmurs of an after-party. It’s getting pretty late, and I don’t think Henry’ll show. Maybe it’s better that he doesn’t. Even though I’ve practiced what I’m gonna say, like, a million times in my head, I don’t feel ready.

The music picks up again. I catch up with the crew, take pictures, and even sign a few copies of my book. About an hour ago, Hazel snuck off with Billy while Maya's been dancing with Zayyir the whole time.

When Natalia asks me to accompany her outside, we head out to Tadashi's car to get the keepsakes she made. As we round the corner into the long hallway that leads to the parking lot, my heart stops. He's there. At the other end. His brothers and his cousin at his sides.

Henry ...

He's in a black button-down with his sleeves rolled up, strong forearms on display. The top buttons of his shirt are undone, gold chain and moon pendant visible. Tapered waist, strong thighs. He looks absolutely delectable. My body thrums with awareness of how close we are, and I swallow.

When I take a step forward, his intense brown gaze pins me in place. My skin's aflame, and I might burst at any second. Before I know what's happening, my legs are moving toward him.

For some reason, I can't get enough air in my lungs. That's when I realize I'm running. Even if I'd worn heels, I'd still be running toward him.

A warm smile explodes across his face, and when I jump, he catches me.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

wrap



HENRY

LUNA'S ACTIONS HAVE STUNNED ME INTO SILENCE. MY MIND swirls, jumbled into incoherence. I'm unable to do anything, except hold her as tightly as she's holding me.

I didn't expect to see her out in the hallway. I didn't expect her to run into my embrace either. In fact, I was using this short walk from the car to mentally prepare myself for our reunion in whatever form it might take. Perhaps a slight nod, a small smile. Even reminded myself she'd likely want to continue to keep our relationship between us.

"You're here," Luna whispers, her arms around my neck, her body flush against mine.

The sound of her voice, in combination with that beachy scent of hers, breaks through the thick fog of shock dulling my senses.

"Of course I'm here," I reply, wrapping my arms tighter around her waist and burying my face in pink waves that smell like warm summer days. I often wondered if I'd ever inhale her sweet scent again. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be."

"Henry."

The level of elation simply from hearing my name? I've never experienced anything like it.

"I'm so sorry," she whispers against my jaw. "You didn't deserve to be treated like I treated you, and I'm so, so sorry." She snuffles. "If you let me, I'll make it up to you, and I'll take care of you, and I'll make sure no one ever hurts you again."

With those words, Luna obliterates the rising uncertainty. When she shifts back to look at me, the tears in her eyes cause a painful tightness to grip my chest.

"Please don't cry, Love," I beg, depositing her on the floor. As I caress her face, I'm left wishing I could wipe away her

sorrow as easily and gently as I wipe away her tears. “L, it’s all right.”

Trev approaches on my left. “Figure this out. Away from prying eyes. You’ve got ten minutes.”

Realizing people continue walking up and down the hallway, most staring, Luna visibly withdraws into herself. “Sorry,” she mumbles, taking a step back, but I reach for her hand.

“My trailer’s still on the lot.” The urgency in my voice hangs between us.

She tries to pull her hand away, but I don’t let go. I’m never letting go again. Not having her in my life felt like my heart had been ripped out and was off wandering the world without me, following Luna wherever she went. The part that loved and laughed, smiled so easily, and wished to be happy was gone with her.

Tentative smile in place, she slides her fingers between mine. “We can go anywhere you’d like.”

“Anywhere?”

“Anywhere,” she assures me and I’m able to breathe again as she allows me to lead her away from the wrap party.

“Hijueputa,” Natalia mutters behind us. “Since your guy just stole my girl, one of you needs to help carry my boxes.”

Rex steps up. “I volunteer!”

I can picture Charlie rolling her eyes, but helping nonetheless. “How heavy are these boxes?”



Outside, under a clear night sky, Luna slips her hand from mine. I’m looking at her, and she’s looking down at her screen, texting someone until she notices I notice.

“It’s my sister.”

“Everything all right?”

Her eyes meet mine for the first time since I saw her step into the hallway. “Here,” she says, taking a deep breath and handing me her phone. “It’s probably easier if you read it.”

Luna: Help!

Sol: wya

Luna: Walking with Henry!!! Headed to his trailer 🚐

Sol: mira ngl wont be easy for you, pero ponte las pilas cabrona and TALK to him!!! you like this guy, que no? it’s ok to tell him. no lies, no bullshit

The smile on my face is ridiculous.

“Sol’s right,” Luna sighs, wringing her hands. “It’s not easy for me. Even before ... everything two years ago.”

“Hey.” I stop her, and my fingers encircle hers. Swallowing down my own nerves, I lift her chin with my free hand until our eyes meet. “You never have to say anything you don’t feel comfortable saying.”

Uncertainty crosses her expression. She looks away, then back at me from under her lashes. I step closer, breathing in the air around her. Those beachy pink waves are begging me to run my fingers through them.

“Let me ask you three questions, yeah?” I grin, walking backward toward my trailer.

Exhaling a shaky laugh, Luna unleashes that gorgeous smile, dimples and all. “Let’s hear them,” she nods.

As Luna steps inside, I notice her dress again. Short, tight, black. The cinched waist, the fullness of her shape. I saw it all in the hallway. There’s no way I could have missed it. However, it did not fully register how truly short her dress was, stopping midway up her thighs, or how tight it was, loving every curve of her body.

I swallow. “You look ... nice.”

Nice? I said nice? Her devastating figure is temptation personified, and I went with nice? Good one, mate.

Green eyes are on mine the moment the door is locked. The look she gives me sends my heart booming like thunder in my chest. I know Luna knows what I'm thinking, what this feeling coursing through my veins is.

“Thank you.” Her breath hitches. “You look really nice too. You always do.”

I shove my hands in my pockets to keep from reaching for her. She steps closer.

“First question.” For the life of me, I cannot reel back my smile. “Do you want to be here with me?”

“Yes,” Luna replies quickly. A faint blush accompanies that one solitary word.

Her hands are behind her back, and I tell myself it's so she can maintain some sort of self-control over herself as well.

“Second question: Did you miss me?”

When I look into her eyes, I know she'll be honest when she answers this as well. The rosy color on her cheeks intensifies. Her eyes are warm and bright and meet mine without hesitation. We're locked in this time and place where she doesn't even need to reply. It's all right there, written on her pretty face.

“I missed you, Henry,” she admits, sounding shy. “So much. So fucking bad. Every moment you're not with me, I miss you.”

She cannot repeat my words back to me and expect me not to react. Grinning because I'm about to do what I always want to do when I lay eyes on her, I move to cradle her face and smile. When I dip my head, I press my lips to hers, soft and slow.

The delicious heat of her mouth, the supple warmth of her body, for a split second, I'm certain I'm dreaming. I'm terrified this isn't real. Then, her arms come around me, hold me, center me. Kissing Luna is like tasting heaven, and it leaves us both breathless.

The dreamy look on her face and the delicate quirk to her lips make my heart swell. Her cheeks are a rosy pink when she finally looks up at me. I flash her my most charming smile before wrapping her up in my arms.

Luna's the first to speak. "Ask me your third question, Henry."

I hold her closer. She leans into my chest to place her ear over my heart. I wonder if she hears it calling her name.

"I'm saving my third question for later," I tell her, smirking when I see her ready to argue.

"Why?" comes her hesitant voice.

"Because, L, I already know the answer."

The tension builds for a few tantalizing seconds. I lean closer, and so does she. Our breaths blend together while electricity sparks in the space between us. Then, our bodies collide. Heat consumes us. Luna wraps her arms around my shoulders, kissing me like her life depends on it. She sinks her fingers into my hair, and a low sound, guttural and feral, erupts from my chest. I kiss her with the desperation that's been building since she left. It was days that felt like years, decades.

I kiss her neck and the top of her breasts. Her skin is blazing hot on my tongue. She's not wearing a bra, and I moan into her skin when I discover this through the thin fabric of her dress.

Reason urges me to slow down, to continue our conversation. How does she feel? Where do we stand? Where do we go from here? But I've gone too long without her, and I want to lose myself in the taste of her again. There's absolutely no way I can be reasonable right now.

"Henry." She grips my arms, and her nails dig in.

Perhaps Luna will be the one to come to her senses.

"I need you."

Perhaps not.

"Touch me, Henry," she gasps. "Everywhere. *Please.*"

More than happy to oblige, I slide my hands under the skirt of her dress, caressing the smooth skin of her thighs. Fuck, I missed these thick curves, these gorgeous legs. When I find the tiny underwear she's wearing is already soaked, I moan, grabbing her ass, biting down on her neck.

“Mine.”

“Yours,” she promises, eyes glazed over with feverish desire as she works my belt and zipper.

“You sure?”

Something hurt and fragile in my voice makes her stop, and I wish I could hide this doubt. Bury it so deep that she never has to deal with it. I want to be strong for her, trust her, without the pain and uncertainty creeping its way into my heart and my thoughts.

“Surer than I've ever been of anything in my life,” Luna says, her forehead resting against mine. “I'm sorry I messed everything up.”

“You didn't—” I start to argue, but she cuts me off with a shake of her head and her fingertips on my lips.

“I did. Because I was so scared and I didn't even realize why,” she admits, sorrow in her voice.

Gently, Luna cups the sides of my face and gazes deep into my eyes. The world has stopped; it waits, frozen and anxious for her next words.

“I thought I'd dealt with all my issues, but there're still so many things I have to learn. And unlearn. Work I still need to do. But the one thing I'm absolutely sure of is you.” Her eyes shine with unshed tears. “My heart is yours, Henry ... if you want it.” Her voice breaks, and the tears fall. “I'm yours. Right now and tomorrow and as long as you want me.”

My gaze is full of reverence—it must be. She's so unbelievably brave and strong, and she doesn't even know it. To be able to voice that ... I'm standing here, stunned, unraveled.

“I hope you know ...” Luna pauses as she goes on tiptoe to press her lips lightly to mine.

“Tell me.” My voice is hoarse.

Holding my face tenderly in her hands, Luna caresses my bearded chin and jaw. When she tilts her face up, she looks so breathtakingly beautiful. “You’re everything I’ve always wanted.”

Dazed, I’m smiling, unable to reply. To hear these words from her, to know she feels about me the way I feel about her ...

“Am I dreaming?” I mutter, watching her trying to catch her breath as well.

“Guess we both are.” She smiles my smile, the one reserved for me, and I know this is what forever feels like.

A laugh erupts from my throat, relief and joy, mixed with desire and love. Then, I’m kissing her, slow and sweet. Luna parts her lips for me, welcomes my tongue as it slides and twirls with hers.

Intoxicated with desire, starved for more, I can’t wait to bury myself deep inside. Luna’s eager, too, shoving my jeans down to pool around my ankles. Then, she wraps her fingers around my cock, alternating between tender strokes and frenzied ones.

“Please,” she breathes.

I tug the top of her dress down, exposing her full breasts, then press my face to them. Her skin is warm and soft like silk. I nip and suck and bite until she’s begging me not make her wait anymore. When I grind my hips against hers, desperate to sink into her wet warmth, I’m half delirious with need. Grabbing her thighs, I lift her up. Luna’s legs wrap around my waist, and I pin her against the wall, our mouths and hands possessive.

She sucks on my bottom lip and kisses up my jaw. It’s not enough. I want her lips on me everywhere, her hands exploring, claiming. Yanking the shirt up and over my head, I toss it aside, and seeing the way her eyes glow with

undisguised lust, I want to feast on her all at once while I cherish every part of her.

My heart hammers in my chest. I'm breathless when our hips align, and the slickness between her thighs makes me shudder. The warm friction makes me curse. As the strangled sound of my name floats between us, I slide into her perfect, wet pussy.

“Luna, fuck ...”

I am dreaming. This blissful perfection cannot be real. She's hot and searing, deliciously warm and welcoming. I let myself sink deep between her legs, pausing to enjoy this moment, relishing her sensuous heat.

“Do we need—”

“No,” she gasps when my mouth finds her breast. “I haven't—it's only been you, Henry. It's only ever gonna be you.”

My heart swells with all the things I want to say. And now that I can say them, I do.

“Je t'aime tellement,” I whisper, my lips sprinkling featherlight kisses against her skin.

Jesus, she's delicious. Teasing her breast, I swirl my tongue around one hardened nipple while massaging the other.

“Mi Luna, preciosa, como te adoro.”

I move in and out of her, fast, hard.

Mine.

“You feel so good.”

I need a second to catch my breath. Have to slow down, or it'll be over too soon. Being with her ... it's better than I remember. Her breasts bouncing against my chest. Her thighs opened wide for me, just for me. But the adoring looks she gives me? The way she touches me? It's like I'm hers too.

“Don't stop,” Luna begs, face flushed, voice strained, shivering when I give her what she wants.

I grab her hips and fuck her harder, faster. My face is buried in the nape of her neck, biting, sucking, wild and frenzied.

With her hands in my hair, she pulls me up for a kiss. I don't want this to end.

Luna sucks on my tongue as her body clenches tight around mine, and I know the moment pleasure erupts and consumes her.

“Tu es l’amour de ma vie,” I whisper as she continues to fall apart around me.

I love the way her skin flushes, the way she gasps my name as she comes.

“Let me look at you.” My voice is thick with desire.

Green eyes flutter open, brilliant yet hazed in euphoria. I come undone as my gaze meets hers, and ecstasy rushes through my veins, flooding me with exquisite pleasure. Mesmerized, I watch her shudder in my arms again as I buck up into her a few more times. Love and lust burn through me and I breathe her in until my hips slow to a stop.

The feeling continues, washing over us, slowing to ripples. We stay here, eyes locked, riding out the aftershocks together. Something profound passed between us, this connection cemented, binding us in a way neither of us has ever experienced, in a way neither of us can deny.

Gone are the past few weeks, the pain, the doubt. Not having her in my life was hard. Really fucking hard. But right now, I cannot recall the heartbreak or sense of loss. Right now, we're here. She's here.

We're both still breathing heavily. My legs feel like they're going to give out. I hold the wall behind her for support while the other is secured around her waist.

Green eyes meet mine. Smiling as she climbs off me to stand on wobbly legs, Luna reaches up to caress my jaw. I slump forward against the wall, pinning her in place so she can never get away again.

She tilts her head back to look up at me. “You’re amazing,” she says, voice soft.

I try to come up with the right thing to say, but words fail me for a second time tonight. The world around us is forgotten as we linger close, adjusting our clothing, our hair. We share lazy kisses while I help with the bottom of her dress and the top. I realize then that bruises mark the sides of her neck and breasts.

I tend to be careful, but I couldn’t hold back. “I’m sorry.” I frown.

“Don’t be. I’m not.” She adjusts the collar of my shirt, the buttons, too, leaving the top few undone. “This means Henry was here,” she smirks, blushing.

This woman.

I smile at her adoringly. Pulling her to me, I brush back a lock of pink hair. “How are you so perfect?”

“Hardly,” she replies, her smile faltering, her gaze dropping to my chest.

“Want to know why I didn’t ask my third question?”

“Why’s that?”

I lift her chin to look into her eyes. “You tell me in other ways, L.” My voice carries the confidence I feel. “You sought me out the other day. Told me you weren’t very good with words, asking me to understand and I didn’t. Not fully. For that, I’m sorry. But you show me, Luna. All the time. When you encourage me. When you support my career, knowing how much it means to me. When you share your writing with me—something you’ve never done with anyone else.” I wink, kissing the tip of her nose. “You show me when you honour me with that gorgeous smile and this exquisite body and this beautiful heart.” My hand is on her chest, and I smile, relieved, happy, proud because these words are true. “I don’t have to hear you say you love me to know that you do.”

Tears fill her eyes, but she holds them back. “You really believe that?”

I remember when I asked her that same question about a different topic long ago. I repeat the answer she gave me then. “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.” Smiling, I cradle her pretty face in both hands.

Luna clears her throat before she speaks. “And that’s enough for you?” The words are so faint that I barely hear them.

“You’re enough, Luna,” I whisper against her lips. “You’re more than enough.”

A few tears fall, and she wipes at them before I can, but she’s smiling. Her dimples send my heart flying in my chest.

“You’re too good to be true,” she tells me, and then her lips are on mine, her tongue in my mouth, tasting, exploring.

When her hands slide up my arms and her fingers plunge into the back of my hair, I’m gone. I wrap a hand around her waist and bring her flush against me. It’s only the knock at the door that keeps us from losing ourselves in each other one more time. Fortunately and unfortunately, my family’s here to remind me I’m at work.

“You’re late,” Trevor growls when I open the door. “Henry, go with Rex. Luna’ll meet you there.”

Rex pushes past Trev to shake Luna’s hand. “We’ve sort of met before. Over the phone, when you two were about to have video sex, and earlier, when you jumped my brother. I’m Rex. How are you?”

Luna’s blush reaches all the way to the tips of her ears. “Hi.”

Charlie steps forward to salvage the situation and greets Luna with a warm hug. Behind them, Trev is laying into Rex.

When Charlie disappears into the bedroom, she returns with my black jumper for my girl. It’s only then that I remember the bruises on her skin. With her hair over her shoulder, I forgot about them, but not their meaning—*Henry was here.*

“There,” Charlie says. “Your hair can hide what Henry’s jumper can’t.”

“Thank you.”

My jumper is too big on her, but she makes it look good anyway.

Trev turns to us. “Not a good idea to go public tonight.”

“It’s not your call,” Luna replies, then looks at me. “What do you think?”

We’re wearing matching smiles.

“We can, if you’d like,” she supplies when I don’t answer, her small hand slipping into mine.

“Just like that?” I ask her.

“Just like that.” She nods with certainty. “I meant every word I said to you, Henry.”

“You haven’t figured it out yet?” Trev mutters, shaking his head. “You were supposed to talk it out.”

“Bet there wasn’t much talking going on,” Rex teases.

Trev spins in place. “Shut it or get out.”

“Bro, you need to relax. Fine, fine, I’ll be outside.”

Trev whirls on us next. “If you haven’t resolved anything either way, best to wait, isn’t it?”

“Let’s walk and talk,” Charlie suggests.

Agreeing with her, Trevor makes two things very clear. One, I’m at a work event, thus I’m here to work. Two, if Luna and I are going to be together, she needs to learn how to handle the press and paparazzi. Even her presence on social media has to change.

“You all right with that?” I ask her. “I know it’s a lot.”

“I’ll do anything,” she promises.

“You don’t have to prove a thing.”

“I appreciate you saying that, but I have a lot to prove. To you. And myself.”

I smile, pulling her into my arms to kiss her once more before we go. “Let me know when you’re ready to leave, yeah?”

She arches an eyebrow. “Why?”

“I’m not spending another night without you,” I smirk.

Is she blushing?

“Oh, um, okay.”

Yeah, she’s blushing. I kiss her temple and walk out of my trailer, holding her hand.

Trevor’s next to Luna, straight to business. “We can schedule a block of time next week to go into further detail, but for now, first things first ...”



Something about wrap parties always gets me. It’s the perfect way to close out a production. When it was a tough one, everyone’s glad it’s over. But when it was a good one, it’s the best way to thank everyone who made it so.

Even the last couple of weeks here, when I was miserable without Luna, the crew and production team made this as positive and productive of a place for me as it could’ve been. Next time we reunite will be for the promotional press tour and premiere. I’m looking forward to it.

After discussing a few projects with Dr. Harris and meeting her lovely wife, I catch Luna’s eye across the room. Hazel demands her attention, but green eyes flutter my way often even then.

“You are so gone,” Rex laughs, smacking my shoulder, but his voice is low between us. “Never seen you like this. Looks like you’re about to break into song at any moment, mate.”

The way I’m feeling, I might.

“She’s the one then?”

When I look over at Luna, she looks up at me and smiles. My heart and my head, my body and my soul all agree without a doubt. She's definitely the one.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

love



LUNA

WE HAVEN'T LEFT HENRY'S HOUSE. NOT IN THE FOUR DAYS since the wrap party. Both his brothers are in New York, and Charlie's back at school. Almost everyone working on the set of *De East LA* has left London.

Hazel and Maya did invite me to Italy, but I wanted—needed—to be with Henry. It's just been the two of us. Me and him and amazing, mind-melting sex and extremely difficult conversations and morning runs and late-night talks. I can't remember a time I've been more uncomfortably open or felt more excruciatingly vulnerable, but also so freaking happy at the same time.

Otra cosa, I never imagined sex with Henry could improve because it was always so good, but it's even better now. There's something unequivocally intimate in sharing not only my body, but my heart as well. It's so freeing, not having to hide or hold back.

We've spent hours completely wrapped up in one another, literally and figuratively.

Yesterday, in bed, while I was on top, Henry sat up, sheathing himself deeper as he pulled me flush against his hard, naked body. One side of his mouth curled up so that he looked even sexier, which I hadn't thought was possible.

With my forehead against his, we breathed each other in, enjoying this connection. Even though I felt exposed, I also felt safe. And that was such a turn-on. It was what allowed me to gaze into his warm brown eyes, hold the eye contact as he rocked his hips against mine in a leisurely motion. It was a moment so erotic and sensuous. Heat, hot and thick like lava, raced through my veins. My heart was overflowing, ready to burst.

We've held each other with an avid fascination and touched one another with sweet reverence. Taking our time,

but also feeling like there's none to waste. It often goes from quiet and tender to urgent and frenzied. I'm shameless with how much I want him. I've kissed every part of him while he's caressed every inch of my body with soft lips and eager hands.

"What're you doing up?"

Henry's voice. My favorite sound. The desire laced with love, affection with lust—how I missed hearing it. The cadence, the accent. It brings me back to the present.

My eyes fly up to meet his. I'm incapable of looking at him as anything other than the glorious first rays of light rising after the darkest day. Relief floods my entire being, and though I feel the sting of tears in my eyes, I'm smiling.

Henry's leaning against the doorway, arms crossed over his chest. He's not wearing a shirt because I'm wearing it. I should steal his clothes more often. I'm rewarded with sleek muscles and taut skin. As I trace the defined lines of his broad shoulders, the corded muscles lining his arms, desire dances in his eyes.

"Did I wake you?" I ask.

That fluttering in my stomach when he smiles at me ...

"Not at all."

His presence alone puts me at ease. But when he looks at me like he's doing—confident, relaxed, eyes crinkling at the corners—I know he's feeling as light and happy as I do.

"Working?"

"Kinda. Writing."

"Inspiration struck?"

"Something like that."

He steps into the office, moving with masculine grace toward the desk. "Why didn't you wake me? I would've come down with you."

"I know, but you were sleeping. Snoring too."

"Funny."

I shut my laptop as he approaches. Old habit. Bad habit. “Sorry.” I shake my head.

“Hey”—he holds my chin carefully between his fingers —“no need to be sorry. Whatever you’re comfortable with. That’s what we discussed, right?”

“Right.” I nod, grateful that Henry’s given so much value to the things I’ve talked to him about. “Thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank me, Love.”

I melt a little every time he calls me that. It might be my favorite endearment yet.

Henry gives me a soft kiss on the lips. When his eyes land on the phone near the edge of the table, he arches an eyebrow. Immediately, I think of our time upstairs.

“Can I see the pictures you took?”

Something passes between us. At the time, it seemed like a fun idea. Now, I’m embarrassed to have suggested it. I’ve never taken pictures like these, ones not meant to be seen by anyone else. But when he stood at the edge of the bed, sunlight bathing him in a soft glow, all glistening muscles and mischievous grin, something compelled me to capture the moment.

I asked if I could take his picture, and he agreed without hesitation. To have his trust, given so freely, I knew then that I would never do anything to break it again.

I took a few pictures of him. Of us. And he took some of me as well.

“Have you looked at them?” he asks.

“Not yet.”

“Do you want to?”

I answer by unlocking my screen. He leads me to the couch, where he pulls me onto his lap. Settling into the warmth of his body, I find the first pic and hand him the phone.

It's Henry. Fully erect. A hungry look in his playful brown eyes. The beautiful lines of his hard body on full display, looking like Michelangelo himself carved him to perfection. I'm not even aware I'm staring until Henry clears his throat.

Chuckling to cover my sudden shyness at being caught ogling him again, I tilt my head back to rest on his shoulder.

"Thank you," I whisper when our eyes meet.

He places a chaste kiss on the corner of my mouth. "You can take my picture anytime."

"No." I laugh a bit. "But I'll keep that in mind. What I meant was"—I inhale—"thank you for letting me be here." I swallow past the hesitancy and years of self-doubt trying to stop me from saying more. "And ... for making this a safe place." I exhale the last words, then bury my face into the base of his neck. Yes, I'm hiding. Expressing my emotions and saying these words out loud, it's not easy, but Henry makes it feel like it will be one day. "Also, that might be my favorite picture ever."

He laughs, and I relish the sound. To be here with him ... after everything. I cannot deny the way my heart sings anytime—every time—he's nearby. When he looks at me again, the smug expression he wears is adorable.

I swallow and ask, "What's the next one?"

Henry kisses my temple before he swipes to the next picture. This time, both of us stare.

"How did you take this?"

"I don't know."

Only one word can describe it—*stunning*. Maybe sensual and intimate too. Taken by accident. I aimed the phone at his butt and hoped for the best. It was meant to be funny, something to laugh about later. It's so much more than that.

I'm on my back, Henry's on top, and we're joined at our hips with my thighs cradling him. He keeps himself propped up on both elbows while his hands are in my hair. I'm caressing his cheek with one hand, and my other is

outstretched, holding the phone. But it's the warmth in our smiles, the eye contact, and the unmistakable adoration there. The way we're both completely comfortable with each other ...

"I love this," he whispers with awed reverence. *I love you*, is what it sounds like.

Something warm and delicious seeps into my veins. It makes me nervous. I push past it.

"I was aiming for your butt," I admit, trying to make a joke and end the intensity engulfing us. Maybe then I can keep from feeling more than what's already raging inside me.

But Henry doesn't let me run away. The way he looks at me, always, constantly, I feel his affection for me, and it gives me the strength I need.

"I love it too," I admit, voice barely a whisper.

With a small smile, he smooths his palm over my skin, up my stomach, past my breast to cup the side of my neck. His eyes never leave mine. When Henry takes my mouth in the softest kiss, I'm lost; I'm found.

Breaking away, I shake my head and ignore the fresh wave of arousal running through me because tears burn my eyes.

That ugly, cruel voice in the back of my head mocks me. *Why would someone as wonderful and amazing as Henry want someone like you?*

Untangling myself, I stand. These intrusive, unwanted thoughts I'm having, they're just that—intrusive and unwanted.

"You can't control when they pop up," Dr. González reminded me yesterday over the phone. "You can, however, control your reaction to them."

That's what I do. Accept the thought, not fight it, not dwell on it.

Come on, brain. It's okay. I'm scared, too, but we're safe here.

I let it pass and understand it'll probably occur again.

“Sorry,” I mumble, returning to the couch. I sit at his side.

“Don't be. Can I help with anything?” His voice is steady, comforting.

I've shared everything with Henry. I want him to know me as much as I want to know him. Told him about losing my dad, then my mom one year later. Feeling alone and unloved at eleven years old, realizing no one cared about four orphaned children of immigrant parents. The rare few that did weren't in a position to help.

I didn't go into great detail when I told him I'd met someone I thought I could trust. Someone I thought I could share my life with, only to be so devastatingly wrong. Henry admitted he'd accidentally overheard some of this when I told Tadashi. Turned out, he was the drunk stumbling around the bathroom that night.

Then, he listened as I told him what I'd only ever admitted to one other person—Dr. González. After I called off my engagement, I was unable to stop feeling dejected, betrayed, discarded. I was ashamed of always being overwhelmed, exhausted of feeling hopeless, and I contemplated hurting myself. I didn't, but I was in such a dark place that I just wanted to end the pain.

When I looked over at Henry, he had tears in his eyes. He pulled me to him and wrapped me up in his strong arms for a long time. It was hours. Days. I don't know how long he held me as I cried.

When he said, “You're safe here, Luna. You're safe with me,” I believed him.

And I do. I believe him. Because I do feel safe with him.

After all the difficult conversations, Henry's been so careful with me, so thoughtful and considerate. I want to apologize for my emotions and doubt, for these pervasive thoughts and feelings of inadequacy. I want to, but I don't. Because that's part of the problem. I remind myself that healing takes time. What I forgot is that it also takes constant

work. It means knowing there will be triggers and I need to develop new and better ways of coping. It means feeling vulnerable and being okay with that. It means letting myself process every appalling thought and experience every horrible feeling. It means letting Henry in when I'm ready.

"Luna?" Henry's touching my face so tenderly.

"I know I'm asking a lot of you," I blurt out, unable to look at him. Starting with an endless amount of patience and ending with the kind of love I've never known.

"L, I'm right here. I know you don't need me to be. I know you're going to work through this with or without me. Because you have the desire and the tools to do it." Gently, he lifts my chin until our eyes meet. "I'm asking a lot of you too. I'm asking you to allow me to be here. I'm asking you to let me love you every day. I'm asking you to be patient with me because I'm not perfect and there're things I have to work through as well."

I want to get to that place where even if something isn't easy to talk about, I'll manage to do it anyway. His ability to be so in touch with his feelings, with his experiences, leaves me awestruck and makes me admire him all the more.

"I'm sorry I'm like this," I sigh.

"I'm not. You wouldn't be you any other way."

Blinking back tears, I sit there, looking down at my hands on my lap, shaking my head. He's not asking me to change, not even hinting at it. He loves me for me ... how is that even possible?

A smile breaks out across my face.

"What's so funny?" he asks.

He's been open and honest from the beginning. I want to be that for him too.

"I was just thinking ..." Readjusting my position, I inch closer until I climb onto his lap, my knees on either side of this gorgeous man I can't get enough of.

He's so broad and firm. I'm lost in his beautiful brown eyes, my fingers dancing along that dark, full beard. He's practically beaming. The smile he gives me—ecstatic, joyful, his eyes crinkling at the corners—makes the fear gripping my soul feel smaller, bearable.

“I'm really happy.”

He kisses me then, his hands everywhere I want them. I know the hardest thing for me will be learning to accept his love and getting to a place where I feel worthy of it and him.

Henry holds me close, and I press my forehead to his temple, nuzzling his cheek. I want to melt into the comforting warmth that's always between us, bathe in the delicious heat he exudes. As I breathe him in, I know without a doubt that I want to share everything with Henry, want us to make all sorts of amazing memories together, and want to live every day of my life at his side.

Overwhelmed with emotion, I wrap my arms around his neck and press my cheek to his. For once, I let my heart speak directly to him.

“I love you,” I whisper against his skin. “And I'm so sorry I lied about it.”

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

truth



HENRY

I WONDER IF I HEARD HER CORRECTLY.

“Say it again?” I whisper, wrapping my arms so tightly around her that they tremble from exertion.

I want to hear it again. Need to.

“I’m so sorry I lied about it,” she replies.

“Luna?” I hold her face in both my hands, and I realize she’s wearing the tiniest smile, teasing me.

With green eyes locked on mine, she swallows and takes a deep breath.

“I love you, Henry.”

My heart explodes with unparalleled joy. I want to laugh and shout to the sky, dance in the streets, and run around the city. I do none of that. Instead, I watch helplessly as tears stream down Luna’s face.

“I never meant to hurt you.” She shakes her head. “I’m so sorry.”

I kiss her tears, taste her sadness. It breaks my heart all over again.

“I don’t know why I’m crying.” She sniffles. “That’s ... not true. I do know.”

“Hey.” I hold her close. I need to touch her—reassure myself she’s still with me and remind her I’m here too. “You can tell me anything, Luna.” I kiss her lips and her cheeks and her eyes. “You don’t have to deal with it alone,” I whisper. “I’m here. Let me be here for you.”

We both know I cannot fix this open wound—we both know she has to do that herself—but I can support her and love her through it. I want to assure her she has me, no matter what.

“Henry, I want to ...”

My eyes are wide and hopeful and waiting.

“You just make me feel so much,” she admits, her green eyes blazing into mine. “You always have.”

“Good.” I smile, sweet relief permeating my entire being. “Because you make me feel so much too.”

Truth is, I’m consumed by her, obsessed with her.

I love the intimacy of us getting lost in each other. Love letting my hands worship the curves and dips I dream about often. Everything about her is an absolute delight for my senses. I love that she likes to cuddle and hugs my back while we sleep ... the cutest little spoon. Love dancing with her in the kitchen at two in the morning after we’ve talked for hours about everything and nothing. Love that she doesn’t treat me differently because of who I’ve dated or what I do. I’m simply Henry to her, and that’s enough.

“I love you, Luna, with every part of me. You’re my every breath, every heartbeat.”

Having her in my arms again, I realize we have another chance, and I’m not messing up this time. I’m prepared to be patient. I’m ready to wait for as long as she needs.

“But you’re so ... and I’m only ...” She can’t meet my eyes as she speaks. “I don’t deserve—”

“This doubt? You’re right; you don’t. That feeling that you’re not enough? You are.” I press my forehead to hers. “Give yourself permission to be scared and nervous and anything else you need to feel, Luna, but don’t hold on to it.” I try to keep my voice steady, calm. “You deserve all the good things, Love. Every good thing.”

I inhale a shaky breath and continue, “Please know, I’m not going anywhere. Even when you feel you’re unlovable, I’m going to stick around. You’re so patient with me. Try to be a little patient with yourself too.” I swallow down my own nervous energy and press my lips to hers in a soft kiss.

Luna melts against me.

When she leans back, her green eyes sparkle with laughter, and those dimples steal my breath away. Helpless—that’s how I feel when she looks at me. And bold too. Because the moments where Luna’s green eyes gaze at me like I’m the sun and the stars and the moon, all at once, with awe and reverence and—my heart speeds up—with love, it makes me feel invincible and unstoppable, like I can accomplish anything and everything.

“It won’t always be this hard,” I assure her.

“Promise?” A watery laugh.

I kiss the tip of her nose. “I promise.”

“You can’t just—” She stops herself, half smile on her face.

“I can’t what?” I’m smiling fully now.

“You can’t be all cute and sweet and make everything feel like it’s gonna be okay.”

“Luna”—I chuckle—“that is my sole purpose as your boyfriend.”

Chewing on her bottom lip, she smiles at me, then releases a deep sigh. “I’m working on it.”

“I know.” I return her smile.

Even though she’s been quiet and reserved—more than I’ve known her to be—I can sense something wonderful happening. Just as she continues to be open and honest, she’s also willing to accept the comfort I offer. And that means she’s not simply saying she’ll work on it; she’s actually working on it.

It’s the reason I’m taking two weeks off. No work, no meetings, nothing. Trev didn’t seem very surprised by my decision and didn’t try to convince me otherwise.

The thing is, I’ve been working nonstop for nearly a decade. I’ve been quite fortunate in my life and my career. I know this. But during one of my many late-night talks with Luna, I realized I’m more than my career. I’m more than the

roles I play or the ads I'm in. I'm more than the awards I win or the accolades I receive.

All those things are nice, certainly, but they're not everything. Truth is, I've been blessed with a lot of opportunities and experiences because of my job—I understand that. Yet, for so long, it's been my priority because I was afraid that everything I'd worked so hard for could be snatched away.

I'm getting to a place where I know that if that were to happen and it all got taken away, I would be all right. Being an actor doesn't define me. There's a certain sense of peace that comes along when you accept you cannot control everything. And having someone at my side who will support me, no matter what I do, who wants me for me, is a gift I will never take for granted.

“Oh!” Luna stands before I know what's happening. “I got something for you! I'll be right back.”

She runs out of the office, and that's when I remember I have something for her too. I've been holding on to it for a while now.

We meet on the landing. I was headed upstairs, and she was coming down.

“Here.” She hands me a large envelope. “This is for you.”

“Should I open it?”

“Yes!” She laughs, and the sound is one I want to hear more of.

Inside the envelope feels like a stack of papers. Perhaps her manuscript?

It's a screenplay. I'm thinking she gave me the wrong envelope—one of the many lying around the house—until I read the title page: *Agent Betts, Written by Luna Valenzuela*.

I stare at her, mouth agape. “You wrote a screenplay?”

“You've talked about producing.”

“So, you wrote a screenplay for me to produce?”

“You should read it first though.” She shrugs. “The story might not be what you’re looking for, but the formatting is spot-on. Maya and Hazel helped with—what?”

When she talks about her writing or books in general, it’s always so effortless and with confidence. Very different than when she talks about herself. But she’s working on that part, learning to accept herself and love herself too.

“You’re amazing, Luna.”

“I’m totally biased, but I think you’ll like it.” She grins. “You’re kinda the inspiration behind it.”

My smile cannot be contained. “Am I?”

“Suave, super-sexy spy? Smart and clever? Dude, it’s totally you.” Color blooms across her cheeks.

She wrote it for me. To do as I choose. I can star in it. Produce. Both?

“I can’t believe you did this.” I hug her to me. “Thank you, Luna. I don’t know what to say.”

She keeps leaving me speechless.

“It’s not a big deal.” Her arms are around my waist, her voice muffled against my chest.

“Of course it’s a big deal! Your talent and your time are both valuable, and you spent them creating something for me.” I’m incredibly flattered and a little overwhelmed. “When did you find the time?”

“While finishing my first draft.”

“Thank you,” I say again, this time wrapping her up in a warm embrace.

She tilts her head back, her lips now impossibly close. When I feel the light, tentative touch of her fingertips along my back, I kiss her.

“You’re welcome.” Luna smiles that beautiful smile reserved for me.

Those lips are tempting me to ask for another taste. But I don't have to. She goes on tiptoe to seal her mouth to mine.

This aspect of our relationship has always been easy for us. Always hot and intense and extremely satisfying.

"I kinda like that you're so tall," she whispers between kisses.

I pull her flush against me. "I kinda like that you're so short."

"I'm not short," she argues, pinching my side.

I laugh, dodging out of the way.

"So ... I'm tall, but you're not short?" I ask to clarify.

"Exactly."

Luna crosses her arms over her chest, daring me to contradict her. I don't bother. Instead, I rush her, lifting her up and over my shoulder.

"Henry!" she cries with a strangled laugh.

"I want to show you something." I chuckle as I carry her up the flights of stairs to the third floor.

When I put her down, she's blushing. "Show-off," she mutters, but she's smirking too.

The rain outside pounds against the windows at the end of the hallway. We stand at the white double doors.

"What's in there?"

I take her hand. "It's a work in progress," I warn as I open one door.

When I turn on the lights, the floor to ceiling bookshelves come into view. As she approaches the nearest bookshelf, she looks back at me, probably realizing a lot of those books were ones she's told me about since that first flight in LA. Which reminds me...

"I didn't know how to return this," I say, handing Luna a book.

She looks from the book in my hand back to my face. Tears fill her eyes as she takes her worn copy of *Como agua para chocolate* and rushes into my arms.

“I thought I lost it. Where did—how did—?”

“While you were sleeping, I went to get it from the newlyweds. I put it in my backpack, but after the turbulence and our many stops, I forgot I had it.”

“Thank you,” she whispers.

“I hope it’s okay that I read it.”

Luna looks up at me. “You read it?”

I run a hand along my beard. “You said it’s one of your favourites so—”

Her lips are on mine before I can finish the sentence. Then, she tells me it was her mum’s book. The last gift her dad gave her mum before he passed. When I try to apologize for having it so long, she stops me.

“I’m glad it was with you.” Her cheeks tint pink as she says the words. “If something’s in your hands I know it’ll be taken care of and protected.”

We both know she’s not simply referring to the book, but her faith in me, her trust, her heart.

Luna dries her eyes, clears her throat.

“Was this library always here?” she asks.

“No.”

Luna walks over to the rolling library ladder, past the small desk. “What do you mean no?” She stops to look at me. “You did all this?” she asks, running her fingers along the back of the sofa, her green eyes fixed on me.

“You said you wanted a big library. Like the one in *Beauty and the Beast*.” I scratch the back of my neck. “It’s not how I’ve envisioned it yet, but—oof!”

Luna comes crashing into my chest, her arms tight around me. “You built me a library?”

“The chair by the window was already here.”

“Henry,” she admonishes playfully, wiping at her eyes. I expect these are happy tears. “This is incredible! You didn’t have to do this.”

“I wanted to,” I assure her. “I want you to live here with me, L.” I kiss her forehead and hug her to me. “And I want you to be happy and comfortable and—”

“I’ll be happy and comfortable anywhere with you.”

Hearing her say that ...

“I never—” I have to clear my throat before I can speak. “I never believed there was one person for everyone, but when you happened, Luna, I knew it was true. You were made for me.”

With a smile so sweet, Luna wipes at the tears that roll down my face. Then, I’m talking again.

“I want to laugh with you and travel the world with you and make love to you.” I’m holding her face tenderly in my hands. “I want to share my life with you.”

“I ...” She caresses my face, takes a moment, and then, “At times, I don’t feel like I deserve it, but that sounds fucking perfect.”

I cannot contain the exuberance coursing through me, and I spin her in the middle of the room. Her surprised laughter rings out in the library.

“Can you do something for me?” I ask when we collapse on the sofa, dizzy and laughing.

“Anything.”

“Say it again.”

Green eyes sparkle as she looks up at me. “I love you,” she breathes. “I love you so much.” Her cheeks colour, but her gaze doesn’t waver.

“I’ll never get tired of hearing that,” I say with a quiet laugh, bringing her onto my lap and into my arms.

“Good.” Luna beams, her soft lips so close to my own.
“Cause you’re gonna hear it forever.”

My heart thunders in my chest, wanting to take flight.

“Forever?” I ask, remembering that once she didn’t believe in it.

Our eyes meet, and we share a smile.

Her loving gaze is fixed on me as she replies with a certainty that leaves no doubt in my mind or in my heart,
“Forever.”

epilogue



Four Months Later

HENRY

“GETTING LOUD, INNIT?”

Outside, cheering fans line one side of the street. On the opposite side will be our stop, where the red carpet and the media await. A step-and-repeat with the *White Memorial* logo, as well as graphics for the studio and various sponsors, provides the backdrop all the way to the theater. The weather is perfect LA weather—warm, sunny day, clear blue skies.

“We’re stepping out when the car stops, are we?”

When I look up from my phone, Rex’s leg is bouncing. He’s nervous? Strange. Man loves being on camera. Hams it up too. And with his two-episode guest role in season two—and possible return for season three—I suggested he walk the carpet with me, but was outvoted.

“*You’re not,*” Trevor snaps.

Trev’s been distracted lately. And miffed all day. Having established his own PR firm and picking up three new clients, it’s no wonder.

“Henry, Luna,” he barks, “two minutes. Everyone else, the following stop.”

Relieved, Rex sits back, looking more at ease.

“Thought you *liked* the red carpet?” Charlie teases as she scrolls through her phone. Her voice is light, but worry lingers in her tone. Even at a young age, she was always a perceptive one. And now, little gets past her.

“It’s champagne. Thought an Oxford *graduate* would know the difference.”

Now that Charlie’s done with school, she’s working full-time with Trev.

Proud smile in place, she rolls her eyes. “You know what I mean.”

For this final stop of the *White Memorial* premiere tour, the studio chose to go with a champagne carpet. The entire cast is supposed to wear white. Not sure it's the best idea, but we'll see how it plays out.

During the premieres in London and Seoul, there was an actual *red* red carpet. Luna was with me at both.

In London, Trevor rode ahead of us with Mi-Cha, one of his new clients, which left Luna and me alone in the town car. Luna's pouty lips (painted red) and her see-through black dress (a short, voluminous skirt, tufts of tulle, a bodice) had me absolutely mad. I could hardly keep my hands to myself. Or my mouth. She looked good enough to eat, and that was what I planned to do. Luna convinced me otherwise. Given we were about to be photographed by every major industry outlet, she was right, of course.

Still, the car had to circle the event more than once while she let me have a taste of those tempting red lips. I wasn't able to devour the rest of her until later on the car ride home, but after watching Luna come on my hand, I stepped out of the car with the most obviously satisfied smile on my face.

In Seoul, my girl ensured we weren't alone in the car.

Today, we have a full house. I understand why she's done it—doesn't mean I like it.

Rex and Charlie's playful bickering fades to the background when I turn to Luna. Green eyes are on me at once. *I am so in love with you.* The way her cheeks tint pink has me wishing the night were over and we were on our way back to her place. I'd peel off the lovely off-white dress she's wearing to get lost in her lush curves for hours.

Here's the thing: I can also sit and talk to her for days on end. I've not been in a situation like this before—a relationship where I'm happy doing whatever we're doing. Watching the telly or reading in bed, late nights in, dinner out, dancing—I want to do them all, so long as she's with me. Everything she has to say, I want to hear it. Every thought of hers, I want to know it. I want to know *her*. And the best part

is, she's letting me. It's something I'll always cherish, how she bares herself before me in more ways than one.

Falling asleep with Luna in my arms, where I can protect her, and waking up with her curled around my back, like she's protecting me—that's what I want every morning and every night. Yet it's still not enough. I know then that one lifetime cannot possibly be enough. It's why soulmates chase after each other from one life to the next.

"I know what you're thinking." Luna smirks.

I cup the side of her face to caress her cheek with my thumb. She's only here because of me.

Truth is, she doesn't like the red carpet. Or the champagne one. Whatever colour, she doesn't like the attention. Or the millions of cameras. Or the reporters' endless questions. But she understands it's part of my job, and she's here. For me. She holds my hand and smiles and has my back.

Wrapping an arm around her waist, I pull Luna to me and whisper in her ear, "You know what I'm thinking, L? It involves me bending you over, lifting this silky dress, and devouring your sweet pussy like it's dessert—"

Her fingers fly to my lips to keep me from saying more. When she leans back a bit, her eyes glow with desire, and I see her swallow.

Luna shakes her head. "It's satin, and you're gonna get us in trouble again."

"Simply sharing my thoughts, Love."

She smiles, and her adorable dimples make an appearance.

"Louder, bro! Can't hear you on this side."

Exhaling the frustration, I take Luna's hand in mine, bringing it to my lips for a kiss. "Maybe next time, we get separate cars?" I wink at her.

Laughing, she shakes her head again. "Not a chance."

If her pink waves were loose, they'd be flowing freely around her face, but her hair is in a textured chignon, spooled

at her nape.

While in the hoodies and turtlenecks she favours, looking cute and feeling comfortable, Luna's the most beautiful person I've ever seen. But this—flawless face done up, golden-brown shoulders bare, tiny waist on display, miles and miles of satin—Luna looks like a goddess gracing us mere mortals with her presence. She's stunning and confident and all mine.

“Do I get to take you home tonight?” she whispers in my ear. The lust laced through her words shoots straight to my cock.

“Stop whispering!” Rex mock yells, and my good mood deflates.

Trevor spends the next thirty seconds going over the logistics again, and then the car comes to a complete stop.

“Kick butt, Hank!” Charlie whispers.

Not sure how I feel about everyone suddenly using that nickname, courtesy of Hazel.

“Luna?” Rex is smirking. “Remember, no picking fights with Henry's costars.”

“You should probably tell them not to mess with him then,” she replies without looking up from her phone.

At the wrap party, Siri told me Luna got in her face and why. Then, my costar apologized for being so thoughtless and careless.

Rex likes to tease Luna about defending my honour, but I continue to be in awe of her. Not only did she stand up for me again, she wanted to protect me from having to share more of myself with the world before I'm ready.

Before anyone can say anything else, someone opens the door from the outside.

Deep breath, and then I exit to hundreds of blinding lights. Cameras flash. Phones record. It's surreal, daunting. The whole world seems to be looking at me. When I smile, cheers erupt all around.

My name is screamed from across the street and chanted up in a fan section I failed to notice earlier. Some people are holding posters of my face as Dr. Robert Bryant, others of the show's entire cast. There're banners being waved and even a marriage proposal.

MARRY ME, HENRY!, it reads.

While I feel lucky and grateful, I know it's fleeting, and I take it in stride. When I look back inside the car, that's when my breath catches. Luna's gorgeous smile, the love so clear on her exquisite face, the adoration in those bright eyes. She sends my heart beating wildly.

"Ready?"

"Contigo, siempre."

With you, always.

My heart soars. She's a dream, one I never want to wake from.

Luna takes my offered hand to stand at my side.



LUNA

Even after weeks together, it still feels like the first time. The nervous energy, the raging desire. Only now, we know what we like and want and need. Leisurely, wet kisses drive me crazy, especially when Henry grips my hips, thrusting in that slow, sensual, deep motion.

Mmm ...

He likes me on top, my hands in his hair, my lips at his ear, whispering everything I know he wants to hear. Never fails to get him moaning, groaning, losing control.

It's so good.

Tonight, on the ride home, I was the first one on my knees, between his legs. I unzipped his pants and made him forget everyone and everything. Once at my tiny apartment, I suggested a hot bath. His feet hurt, and he was sore from the new workout regimen he'd been on. It doesn't surprise me that season three of *White Memorial* has a lot more shirtless scenes.

"Did you have a good time tonight?"

I let the sound of his voice wash over me before I reply, "I always have a good time with you."

It's the truth. Even while in places I'd rather not be, he makes it worth it.

Tonight though was tough. It was another reminder that Henry's not just an actor; he's a fucking big star. We were at the premiere, celebrating his TV show, and people *love* him. All ages, all races, men, women, everyone.

I could see it on *all* their faces. They *hated* me. Despised me. For being there with him, holding his hand, on the receiving end of his dazzling smile.

That part I could deal with. That loathing from total strangers, I expected.

But I wasn't ready for how fucking *happy* I was to be there with him.

How fucked up am I that the good stuff is harder to deal with? Something to bring up when I see Dr. González next week. Shaking that thought away, I exhale slowly through my nose.

“Luna?”

I lean back into his chest, and Henry wraps his arms around my shoulders. Seems he always knows what I need. He feels warmer, more soothing than the water.

“Something wrong?” The low rumble of his voice against my ear sends delicious shivers down my spine.

“Hmm?” My eyes fall shut. I snuggle into the hard muscles of his body. This is heaven. “Nothing’s wrong.”

“Luna, hey.” He touches my jaw and turns my head a little so he can look into my eyes. “We don’t do that. Right?”

“Right.” I inhale.

We’re honest, and we share when we’re ready. I turn in place to face him, and water sloshes over the side of the tub.

“Do you want to talk about it now?”

I nod. “It’s dumb though.” He opens his mouth to say something, but I cut him off, “I’m not saying my feelings are dumb, just the situation.”

Caressing the side of my face with tender strokes, he waits for me to continue.

“I was”—I think of the Feelings Wheel I use with Dr. Gonzalez—“very anxious and quite hostile when Sasha kept touching your arm. I wanted to drop-kick her.”

Sasha, the world-famous singer who pressed her breasts against Henry’s biceps while I was catching up with Maya. He moved away, but he shouldn’t have to endure shit like that.

“I also wanted to drop-kick that reporter who kept looking at you like you were her next meal.”

Amusement dances across his brown eyes.

“Then, I was mad at myself because I realized I need to learn how to drop-kick people.”

He lets out a short laugh.

“And I ...” I swallow the hesitancy and the fear. “I was excited to be there with you. And very thankful.”

Every time someone called me his girlfriend, I couldn’t keep the damn smile off my face.

Strong hands slide to my lower back, and he draws me closer. Henry’s dazzling smile makes my heart skip a beat. Right on cue.

“So, you *did* have a good time then?” He kisses my cheeks and my nose and chin.

“I did.”

His lips travel down my neck. “Want to know the best thing I heard tonight?”

I pull away from him. “Henry! You got it?! You got the part? You’re the new—”

He kisses me to stop me from saying it out loud.

“We’re meeting with Zoe Hathaway next week to finalize everything.” He seems far too calm and composed as he smooths hair away from my face. “*Then*, we can shout it from every rooftop if we want.”

Me? I am not calm or composed. I throw my arms around his neck, sending water every which way. “Oh my God, Henry! That’s so exciting! Congratulations! You’re gonna be amazing!”

He’s been trying to downplay it, but being the lead in a new superhero franchise? It’s a huge deal!

He hugs me back. Tight. “You think so?”

“I know so!” I grab his face and shower kisses on his lips and cheeks, his beard, and the bridge of his nose. “I’m so happy for you.”

“For us.” He laughs. “When I sign, I can build you the biggest library! Bigger than Belle’s.”

That makes me laugh. Once, that would’ve been the best thing ever. Now, I have him. And seeing Henry this happy? I don’t need anything else.

“It also means four months in Australia,” he reminds me.

I smooth away the little worry line between his eyebrows with my fingers. I promised to accompany him, whether they shot in Australia or Mars. After all, I can write and edit anywhere.

“We’re gonna have so much fun Down Under,” I tell him, then blush when I realize what I said. “That sounded kinda dirty.”

Henry chuckles as he grabs my butt to pull me toward him. “I love when you talk dirty.” He grins, sucking my bottom lip into his mouth.

He’s incredibly distracting, but I don’t let us get sidetracked.

“That’s not the news you meant though, is it?”

Brown eyes light up, and I know whatever it is, it’s gotta be the best thing he heard tonight.

“Someone told me my girl’s *number one* on the *New York Times* Best Seller list.”

“Oh.” My face feels warm.

He arches an eyebrow. “When’d you find out?”

“This morning.”

Henry sits up, and water falls everywhere. “You knew this morning and didn’t tell me?”

The disappointment in his eyes hurts.

“Sorry.”

“L, you—” He stops. When I meet his eyes again, they’re narrowed in suspicion. “Trev asked you not to tell me, didn’t he?”

I swore months ago that I would never lie to Henry again, and I haven’t. And I won’t.

“He said you would talk about me instead of your show.”

“Of course I would!” Henry mumbles a few curses under his breath. “I would’ve done both.” Exhaling, he presses his forehead to mine. “We’re in this together, L.” Our eyes lock. “Your wins are my wins. Mine are yours.”

The best thing about him saying that is that those aren’t just words. He means them. I don’t know if I’ll ever believe it without a doubt, but I want to.

“Thank you.” I run my hands over his shoulders to ease the tension there.

“I’m in this, Luna,” he told me back in London. “I’m all in.”

“I’m all in too,” I promised.

I look into his warm brown eyes.

Henry chose me. It’s what I repeat to myself when the doubt gets loud and the insecurity grows unbearable.

Henry chose me.

I place featherlight kisses along his lips and his cheekbones. “We’re in this together,” I repeat, and his hold around me tightens.

Henry stands then and brings me with him. Our skin’s slippery, but when he lifts me up, I know there’s no way he’s gonna drop me. He’s the strongest person I know, inside and out.

I study his expression—pretty brown eyes, perfect lips, that beard. The way he looks at me ...

He. Chose. Me.

The doubt in my mind quiets, and the ache in my chest goes away.

“You know I love you?” I sound breathless.

The smile that blooms on his face, it’s like the sunrise—bright, beautiful, warming me up.

“Say it again.” His voice deepens, and his accent thickens.

He walks with sure steps, placing me gently on the bed. Henry climbs over me. We’re dripping water, but not cold. I’m never cold when I’m with him.

I cradle his jaw in my hands. “I love you, Henry. Con todo mi corazón.”

The desire in his eyes is so intense that I can barely hold his gaze. But I do. Because I feel so safe with him. Because every time he says he loves me, I believe it a little more. It’s something steady and strong, without conditions. Just like him.

Henry covers my body with his own. The feel of his hot skin is forever seared into mine. Eager, like a man possessed, his hands devour the peaks and valleys of my body.

He kisses me, soft, rough. I gasp his name when his lips travel down my body, his mouth and his tongue settling between my thighs. Arching my back, I surrender to the warmth and pleasure he offers.

As Henry whispers those three life-altering words into my skin again, they float up like a loving caress, wrapping me up in a gentle embrace, filling my heart with so much freaking joy that I don’t know what to do with myself, except smile at him adoringly.

“Eres mío.”

It’s no longer a question.

“Soy tuyo,” he replies, and I lose track of time.

Hours later, maybe days, we lie there, on my bed—our bed. Tangled together, breathing each other in, feeling happy, sleepy, and loved.

“I don’t want you to leave,” I whisper.

He lets out a short laugh. “I was planning on staying the night—”

“Ever.”

I’m looking up at him from where I lie on his chest, and even in the dimly lit room, I hope he can see the truth in my eyes.

“I’m not going anywhere.” He kisses my forehead. “Ever.”

Warmth spreads like fire from my heart, enveloping me with everything soft and good. I’m floating, soaring, and I hold on to him to keep from flying away.

“Even if my second book sucks?” I ask the question in the darkness.

“It doesn’t. I read it,” Henry replies through a yawn. “And I love that you let me read it before anyone else. Besides your editor,” he’s quick to add. “But even if it were awful, I’d be here. I’m always going to be here.”

After a while, his eyes fall shut. The smile on his face grows smaller as his breaths even out. After such a long day, sleep is ready to claim him. I just need to tell him one more thing.

“Henry?” I whisper.

“Yes, Love?” He peers through one eye and then the other.

The feel of his smooth, naked skin against mine wants to lull me to sleep. I pull back just enough to look at him, leaving all the warmth behind.

“You okay?” he asks, reaching up to hold my chin.

“Yeah.” I nod, tracing the perfect outline of his lips. “I think you were right when you said the universe aligned for us.”

My words make him smile, and Henry pulls me to him.

“I love you,” I whisper against his lips. Every time I say it, my heart grows stronger, bolder, softer too.

“I know,” he assures me. “I love that you love me.”

He nuzzles my neck, his breath warm against my skin. One large hand is on the small of my back, and the other is between my breasts, over my heart.

“I just ... I can’t—” I stumble over my words. “I can’t believe I get to love you,” I admit, and fuck if I don’t feel like I’m about to implode or explode or something.

All I know is, I can’t stop smiling. With one hand over his heart and the other tangled in the tight curls along the back of his scalp, I lean into him.

He’s smiling at me when he says, “I can’t believe you think *you’re* the lucky one.”

“Henry.” A watery laugh. I kiss the corner of his mouth while I feel the sting of tears in my eyes. I keep talking anyway and say the words I’ve been too afraid to share out loud. “I love that you chose me.”

The look he gives me is something soft, fierce, tender, and infinite.

“Everyday, Luna.” He reaches up to cradle my face in his hands, his eyes on mine. “I choose you every moment of every day. In this life and the next. In this universe and every other one out there.” He holds me like he’s never letting go. “I’ll always choose you.”

“I know,” I whisper between us.

My face feels warm, and my heart’s full because I chose him, too, and I’m not letting go either. Not ever.

thank you!

I truly hope you enjoyed *When You Happened!* And if you did, please consider leaving a review on Amazon or Goodreads!

acknowledgments

After dreaming of typing up this page for years, it's so strange to actually be doing it! And I know that I'm only able to do it now because of so many amazing people!

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about the author

I.B. Solís lives in the Los Angeles area with her wonderful husband, two beautiful children, and two lovable (and sometimes destructive) dogs. She's always loved books and getting lost in them. Then one day, writing and sharing her stories became just as important.

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