

Marigold

Author not credited

STORYPDF

Complete English text · US Letter reading edition

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About this edition

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Chapter 1

Mari's POV

"I could make it better

You serve as my light

'Cause after everything

Oh you're the sun in my light (Oh)

But I lost you

And it broke my heart too

'Cause you were the reason that I am alive"

My voice resonated inside my room as I dry my hair with a towel, my bathrobe safely covering my body as I lazily step out of my bathroom. I was wearing my undies underneath.

"You were there for me when I and down and sad

I was there for you only after you were gone

I know that I messed up but I promise I

Oh-oh, I miss you so bad"

I hummed a little as I sang one of my Dad's hits back in the day, though I can pretty much tell that it's still famous even to my age. How long has it been since they released it? I don't also have the slightest idea.

I sat in front of my dresser with a mirror big enough to take a whole damn family picture, something my Mom insisted on getting because, according to her, not being able to see everything when I ensemble up my fashion pieces is a total disaster.

Yeah, and that's something only her and aunt Max would always talk about whenever they check Elle and I's wardrobe and how our uncles would say we've got so many things to learn, especially from our moms. Ow-kay, they were fashion ambassadors, fine! We get it.

Two knocks on my door, and it immediately opens without hearing from me whether it's okay to come in.

A long sigh escaped my lips, my gaze shifting towards the door where my younger brother was grinning, half of his body already inside.

"What now?" I asked, preparing myself for something I would be annoyed within less than a minute. Anything that comes out of Latch's foul mouth annoys me. If he isn't my younger brother like biologically, I would have thrown him outside the lawn five years ago the first time he sneaked into my room and wreck my cute little bunny stuff toy.

"Dad won't let me go out until I get your permission," he grins, and a long sigh escaped my lips. I took a glimpse of my wall clock and noticed that it's already past eight.

Dad often says that because he knew I probably know Latch's circle of "friends."

"Who are you going with, and where to?" Grabbing my comb on top of my dresser, I started brushing my hair, eyes focused on the mirror instead of my stupid younger brother.

"Just a few of my classmates, we're going to have a picnic across the town,"

My eyes drifted back to where he is, and a scowl automatically shows on my face. And when I scowl at him, it means to cut the bullshit and stop lying on my face - which he understood because it isn't the first time.

Soft chuckles escaped his lips, and if he doesn't resemble our father a lot, I swear this brush on my hand will fly straight to his face in five seconds.

He rolled his eyes and finally entered my room uninvited, taking in my bed and sat into it.

"Okay, I'm going out on a date. But I don't want to tell Dad because he'll think it's Elle. I can't risk Dad calling uncle Sky. Elle will kill me if she finds out I'm going to date her friend. Like, why can't she trust me with her friend? If not, she should worry about me. I'm her best friend," he grimaced, and it's my turn to roll my eyes at him.

"Really? You want me to answer that?" I deadpan answered. Latch, on the other hand, looked so bored. And why is he going to a date looking like Dad in his twenties? Really? A black pullover?

He raised his eyebrow as he swings his feet sideways.

I put down my comb and crossed my arms, our eyes meeting in the mirror.

"Little brother, why would she trust you when you already dated almost half of her friends? And it's not like you actually dated them," I turned around and looked at him straight in the eyes.

"Latch, your span of attention is limited to two weeks! Two fucking weeks Latch, and you drop them girls like potatoes. Clever wise, that girl you're supposed to date with is rather stupid for even agreeing. And it's not like Elle doesn't have a good reason. Her so-called-friends flood her with

hate messages after you start avoiding them. They ask the girl to tell those to you. Is she a hate platform that your girls can use?" I gritted my teeth in frustration. Of all the things he can inherit to our father, it has to be that charisma that makes the girls swoon over him. And that's me paraphrasing what mom always says.

He tilted his head a little, his arms resting on my bed as he sat almost leaning to it, "Sis, that two weeks is a safe zone for us to know each other. Why would I date her if we don't click?"

"Yeah, why would you go out with those women if all they do is harass Elle. And don't start with that one lady who rolled her eyes when she saw me. Let her do that trick again, and she's dead,"

He laughed at what I said but didn't even bother reacting. What should I expect? I once got into a catfight because of him.

My eyes closed for a moment. I did a quick breathing exercise and recited the real names of my uncles, a chant their fans use to scream at the top of their lungs. It calms me down since I was a kid, and I kind of adapted it until now, like a force of habit.

My mind refuses to remember that time I saw Elle crying in front of Z. I was there hanging out with her brother, my best friend, when she started crying.

She's gossiping on Latch after she received another hate message. The girl is practically losing friends. I told her to drop my brother instead, jab it in like that, but I know it's impossible. The two grew up together. If Uncle Sky pushes my father to break out of his shell, it was Latch that did it for Elle. Now Elle is just as much spoiled and a brat like my younger brother.

Releasing another sigh, I don't know just how many I let out just because of Latch, I open my eyes and look at him in the eyes.

"Fine, tell Dad I said okay," I muttered, giving up. It's no use anyway. I may hate how annoying my brother is, but once he starts to put his mind into convincing me, I'd probably end up saying yes still, so what's the point of delaying the possible outcome?

Upon hearing my response, his lips break into a huge bunny smile and almost lunging into me for a hug, but I stop him. "I hate your perfume," I snickered, and he just laughed, messing my hair a little before running outside.

He's too excited to tell Dad I said yes. As bratty and spoiled my brother maybe, he would never lie to Dad about me agreeing if I didn't. He'd probably get away with it, but Mom will kill him.

I stood up from my dresser and went straight to my walk-in closet. Slowly removing my bathrobe, I pulled out a huge GUCCI oversized T-shirt with a deer patch. I once grabbed it over Z's wardrobe

and wore it without second thoughts. An oversized shirt for sleepwear? Yep. I don't feel like wearing pajamas tonight.

Since the shirt is loose and a little lengthy, I didn't bother wearing any shorts or pajamas as it covers my body so well, and it reaches just above my knee.

Humming the song that I was singing earlier, I hung my bathrobe properly. Mom and Dad taught us to clean our room. Even Dad washes our clothes sometimes just because he's so sensitive to smell.

Once satisfied with how everything looked, I lazily went out of my walk-in closet only to find Z standing on the leaf of my door.

Chapter 2

Mari's POV

His eyes landed on my bare legs, his eyebrows raising a little, his arms crossed over his chest. Like me, he was wearing a black jacket with another white Gucci shirt tuck in inside and a black denim pants. Instead of shoes, he was wearing one of our indoor slippers.

My hand rested on my hips as I wait for him to talk.

"Elle begged our father for a sleepover. The brat found out about Latch's date and refuses to be tomorrow's victim," his dark eyes met mine, and I urged him to come in, which he did. He closed the door while I went straight to my bedside table to grab my phone.

"She caught Latch on his way out. My sister jumped in front of his car like a maniac," he laughed a little while shaking his head. That's typical of Elle.

He sat on the couch, located on the far corner of my room, and pulled out his phone as well; his eyes still focused on me. Once I sat on my bed, I saw him gestured my blanket, and I understood. I quickly tucked half my body in so it would be covered, my body resting on the headboard of my bed.

"Aunt Max agreed? The last time the two had a sleepover was four years ago. They're grownups now," I pouted. Latch is seventeen now, and I'm two years older than him. Elle and Latch are of the same age, with Latch older for a few months.

"That's why I am here," he mumbled, eyes now on his phone.

I tried to stop myself from laughing. Sometimes Z gets pissed off with my brother which is quite funny because Latch ends up getting scared with the twins Z and Y, though his mischievousness would come out at most times.

"So you're going to sleep in my brother's room? I doubt the two would sleep. The two of them will play video games until Latch gives in. Your sister is fucking crazy too,"

"Again, that's why I'm here," my brows furrowed at his words, realization slowly sinking in.

"No. I'm not going to stay awake for you. Go to them and suffer alone," I pulled my sheets and covered my entire body.

I am supposed to get a good sleep today. Atlantis and I have someplace to go tomorrow.

Z and I are best friends, I've declared that many years ago and Z eventually had to accept that fact. If my brother is mischievous, imagine how stubborn I am.

But Z is like a solid rock. Sometimes he gives in but he has his own ways on how to get away from me.

"Okay," I heard him answer and my insides started to get giddy. I know Z. His answering in one-line means trouble. And right now, I can smell trouble coming after me in less than a minute.

"Hello, Zamara,"

Automatically, my hands release my covers, and I watch him as he was talking over his phone.

"Fuck you," I grunted before quickly standing up as I made a run into him, grabbing his phone and ending the goddamn call before Zamara can ask anything.

I glare at him, an annoying smirk once again plastered on his face.

Z, he looks like a younger version of Uncle Storm; only his stares are deeper, especially when he doesn't smile. And this idiot doesn't smile a lot.

Him calling Zamara means a total children's party. If he calls Zamara, Ashton will arrive in less than five minutes, which means my Mom calling the rest of my aunt and uncles. They're going to use this excuse again to meet up.

And it gets annoying afterward. Imagine seeing your parents acting like they were still in their twenties running around the backyard?

He laughed at my misery and pulled me closer so I can sit beside him - his arms were reaching for his phone.

I watch as he quickly types a message to Zamara, uncle Storm's daughter, telling her it was nothing and have a good sleep.

I scowl at him, and he just messes my hair.

I pouted. Now my night is ruined, and I'd probably have huge bags under my eyes tomorrow.

"Now you, lady, why don't you go inside your walk-in closet, put some shorts on so I can quickly do a set up for movie night?"

Shifting my body, I faced him with a gloomy expression, "I hate you," before leaning in, my hands reaching for his shoulders as I dive for his chest, burying my teeth to his tone chest.

"Awww, Mari!" he screamed before wrapping his arms around my waist, pulling me away from him.

His grip was firm, but he was gentle enough to make sure not to hurt me. He scowled at me and I grinned.

"Karma hits so fast, huh?" I teased him. He removed his hands on my body, caressing the part I bite.

He looked at me sternly, his eyes focused on my face, and I smiled at him adorably. My Dad said I got Mom's smile. I don't know if that means anything, but yeah.

His eyes softened until his expression changes into a frown, "Don't go around biting people Marigold. That'll get you in trouble,"

Soft chuckles escaped my lips as I leaned over, my lips reaching for his cheeks as I kiss him. He's used to it. Every one of us kisses each other's cheeks as a greeting so me doing that to Z is like a regular thing.

"Sorry," I giggle before finally standing up so I can grab some shorts. Z is motherfucking conservative, and he gets annoyed if he starts lecturing me about it, so I've longed to follow his orders, especially if just the two of us - for peace and quiet.

"We're not going to watch some Disney movie," I heard him scream, and I just laughed adorably.

The last time we had a movie night, I won our little game, and he had to spend the entire five hours watching Elsa and Olaf with me.

Good old days.

Chapter 3

Z's POV

"Baby, are you still sleeping?"

I heard my Mom's voice, the sound of something rustling filling my ears for a moment. I heard the knocking on my door and a groan escaped my lips as I try to remove the blanket covering my body.

But before I can even pull it down, I felt a hand tightening its wrap around my waist, a slow movement on my side shaking my entire system.

Shit. I totally forgot about waking Marigold last night so I can drive her home!

She was very adamant about drinking last night to calm her nerves. And since we can't go to a bar, we ended up drinking on my room's balcony.

My eyes widened as I saw my mom opened the door. She walked gracefully and her nose crunches as she saw the bottles of beer on the side.

"You drank too much baby," she mouthed but headed straight to check my cabinet, a habit she had ever since.

Her frustrations on buying clothes had become an obsession but Dad always says it's just an outlet Mom had for having to deal with all of us every day.

If I didn't know very well, it's just Mom's stress over Dad and Elle. That little girl is a pain in the ass too.

But my ass is about to get beaten if Mom sees a girl on my bed.

"Mom," I whispered, afraid whoever is under my blanket would move or create any noise.

Mom was busy checking the clothes that made sure everything on me was covered.

"Baby, I can't find one of the jumpers I bought you last week. Did you give it to Marigold again?" It was a question but I can sense that she's upset.

She always whines about us not loving the clothes she gives us but thanks God Y knows how to work his magic on Mom.

I remember the jumper she was talking about and if my memory does not betray me, it was the same jumper Mari took yesterday when she barged in my room.

I bit my lower lip at the memory of it. That brat was so pissed off because someone threw a glass of water on her because of Latch.

Her prodigal brother just broke another girl's heart and Marigold had to take the downfall of it

If I didn't arrive on time, Marigold had probably ripped all of the girl's hair. I can clearly remember what she did with that one girl who tried to slap my sister for being so close with Latch.

She went berserk and had a full catfight with her.

It took Ashton and Alex to stop her as Mari told me she'll kill me if I take another step to stop her. As much as I don't want people to get hurt, I also know how many times Mari will kill me if I don't listen to her.

My breath hitches when I felt her pull me tighter, her warm breath hitting my skin sending shivers all over me. I felt the movement of her other hand and my eyes widened when I felt it go lower, I had to move a little and grab her hand of my own.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

I looked at Mom's direction and took a deep breath when I was sure she wasn't looking.

I pulled the blanket even more, but enough to ensure there was air coming in for her. I intertwined my hand over hers and I felt her stopped moving.

Holy shit. How did we end up on one bed anyway?

Marigold, she was like fire, a breath of fresh yet wild air.

Even though we were sons and daughters of the most famous kpop superstars ever known, we were not exempted from the bullying and everything a teenager experiences. As much as possible, our parents wanted us to experience a normal life.

Now yesterday, I had to bribe Marigold for another of my toy car collection so she won't snap.

And of course, she had to barge inside my room and take another one of my clothes. It's not new to me anyway. She's been doing it half our lives and had forced herself as my best friend.

I gave up telling her otherwise. Amongst us second generation as what Dimitri calls our group, Marigold and Latch may be the most carefree. I'm not sure if it's because they are the sons of the known most powerful couple, as what our parent's fans call them, but those siblings can do whatever they want and Aunt Tokyo will be out there cheering.

My father isn't even an exception. I can clearly imagine him cheering with Uncle Grey too.

"Baby, if this keeps up, I swear I'm going to have to ask her mother to pay me. That little bitch always gets my things too. Thank God I love Mari more than her mom that's why I'm letting her," she chuckled before closing my cabinet. A smile emerged on my lips.

Mom would always call aunt Tokyo names but she's the first to go crazy like a mad dog whenever there is an article about Aunt Tokyo.

"You always call her names when she's like your baby," I teased my mother and she just rolled her eyes.

My mother, despite her age, is still as glamorous and beautiful the world remembers. Actually, all of them including our uncles.

It's like they don't age at all.

Apart from uncle Storm, all of my uncles can still do chicken fights in the backyard. One time, my father, uncle Grey, and uncle Seth almost ruined aunt Zaya's garden after they run wild and played some games.

To be honest, they all act more like a child than any of us.

"Stop teasing me and take a bath. You reek of alcohol," she pouted before she gracefully headed straight to my door.

And just when she's about to pull the door close, she peeked on me again and smiled cheekily, her gummy smile showing.

I gulped. Sometimes, I find Mom's gummy smile creepy. She always gave me that look whenever she wants me to admit something.

It's like an invisible yet moving force.

"By the way, your uncle Grey met with your father today. You're a dead kid, my baby. Tell Mari to call her Dad the moment she woke up," she stated and my jaw dropped on the floor.

"Stop keeping your girlfriend under your covers. Get up and go outside," she muttered before pulling the door close, the sound of her laughter echoing through the hallway.

It was then that her words slowly sank in.

"She isn't my girlfriend!" I tried reasoning as if my mother can still hear me.

Girlfriend, what is she even saying?

I have never seen Marigold as someone except my best friend.

I felt Mari moved below me and I groaned when she started kicking the covers until her face was available for me to see.

And the moment I did, my mouth went agape when I saw how surreal she looked. She turned a little and my eyes caught sight of her ethereal face, a few strands of her hair scattered beautifully.

Suddenly, she started moving and even scratched her neck, my jumper sliding a little so I can see a clear view of her collar bone.

I gulped, my eyes avoided her and I moved slightly away from her. But before I can even move a bit further, I felt her hand stopping me once again, this time, she even swing her feet over mine.

"Oh God," I groaned and I felt her make a sound.

"Z..."

Fuck.

It was just my name but why does it suddenly sound different? Her voice sounding hoarse not even helping.

And I felt it, something in me awakening.

Fuck Z, what the hell is happening?

That's Gold, Mari. Sweet, fiery Marigold, your best friend. Right?

Chapter 4

Marigold's POV

"Come back here! Latch!!! I swear to God I'm going to kill you if you don't give back my jacket!" I screamed the moment I confirmed that my favorite jacket was missing.

I quickly ran outside my room and my hunch was right as I saw Latch struggling to put his shoes on while kissing our mom's cheeks for goodbye.

"Latch!!!!!" I screech and the moron had the nerve to salute in my direction before turning around gracing his way to our front door.

The moment he opened the door, Dad came buzzing in and my idiot brother even gave my father a high-five.

"Dad! Latch took my jacket!" I whined before running down the stairs.

"I said no running on the stairs Gold," I heard my mom but I didn't stop. I was beyond pissed off. However, the moment I reached the door, my younger brother had already had his car outside of the driveway, his annoying face all for me to see.

"This is the last time sissy, I promise!" he shouted, sending me multiple flying kiss before hitting his car's accelerator.

The next thing I know was me standing in front of my parents as I rant about my brother.

"Dad, I can't believe you didn't stop him," I pouted and my father chuckled, his right hand wrapped around my mother's shoulder as they sat on the couch together. As annoying as hell, my parents look so endearing and cute together. Scratch that, all of them look so madly in love. Aunt Max and uncle Tae were adorable. They fight like some kid at most times and uncle Tae always has the weirdest habits but he's the coolest when he wants to.

Uncle Storm and Aunt Cali is even sweeter. Ever since I was born, I was introduced to my parent's popularity and it's no secret about uncle Storm's lack of expressiveness. But to aunt Cali, he's the sweetest. He's like the coolest uncle. No wonder Ashton treats him like he was his second father. We heard he was aunt Zaya's best friend. And everybody knows uncle Seth was always pissed about it. It's so funny because uncle Seth looks so adorable whenever he gets jealous of uncle Storm.

Then there's uncle Raze with aunt Joy. We've never seen two people openly flirt with each other but the two. I really admire how Alex can stand seeing his parent's being like that. Even uncle Seth's flirting doesn't match.

Aunt Momo and uncle Demo are quite playful though. I don't get why Irish was so timid when her parents were so outgoing.

And lastly, there's uncle Mono and aunt Irene who looks a lot like she's not aging. I love how calm the two of them are.

All in all, the love that our parents have been beyond amazing. We were lucky to have them as our parents. We were not only given one family but a big one.

I can still remember those days when all of us their kids use to camp on each other's houses alternately. Ashton was always managing us but the fucker is also a devil himself so we always end up getting into trouble.

Our parents were never strict ones. My Dad always allows us to do what we want and our mother supports us all the way.

"Dad, that was a gift. Latch always gets my stuff, I am so close to turning my room into Latch-free zone, I swear!" I stomped my feet in annoyance and my parents laughed.

"Baby, that jacket was too big for you. And that wasn't a gift. You took it out of Z's wardrobe. Honey, you can't take everything from Z's closet. His mother will kill your mom," my father stated and I scoffed.

My mother was having the best time of her life as she eats the bar of chocolate my father got for her. I can't believe she can still eat that at this age. Truth is, all of them were able to maintain their figures. My Dad is especially a gym addict. I once cried coz he keeps on making me do push-ups with Latch until my mother kicked him out of the house.

It's quite funny because my father literally brought a large tent at the backyard and soon enough, all my uncles were there to accompany him. My father was their youngest, their baby.

"He told me I can get whatever I want on his closet," I answered. It was partly true though. Uncle Tae and Aunt Max's fashion sense was superb sometimes I envy their kids for having those clothes.

"Because you keep on pestering him. Why don't you get Elle's clothes instead of her brother? You don't even get Y's clothes but only Z. I wonder why that is..." I raised an eyebrow at my mom's expression. She was looking at me weirdly and I feel uncomfortable with it.

"Mom, Z is my best friend. There's nothing wrong with that. Even Aunt Zaya has uncle Storm as her best friend. I see no difference,"

I sat on the couch opposite them, before reaching for my phone in my pocket.

"Zaya doesn't wear your uncle Storm's clothes. Imagine how your aunt Cali and uncle Seth will flip if that happens,"

I scowl at my Dad's words.

Just then, I saw Z's name appearing on my screen.

"What's your brother doing here wearing my goddamn jacket? And who told him he can take Elle out for dinner?"

Even with him being so far, I can imagine how serious he looks. Y and Z are both serious and most people easily get intimidated by their aura. But not me. I annoy Z to the fullest and I declared myself as his best friend since ten years ago.

In anger, I quickly type a response to him.

"Pick me up. I'm going to kill him,"

Quickly, I stood up from my seat and was about to run back to my room to change but my Dad beat me to it.

"Tell Z to bring his father. I have this feeling that I will have to talk to him about something important," he stated and I saw my mom hitting on the shoulder, laughing out loud. They are so weird.

And why would he need to talk with Z's Dad?

"Dad, you can call Uncle Skyon the phone. Or video calls him. What's with you and Mom, really?" I rolled my eyes and my parents were simply laughing. I marched my way back to my room and started choosing from my set of clothes.

Okay, I am lucky to have them as my parents so scratch that question.

"This will do," pulling a black short and a loose white printed Gucci shirt that I took from Z's closet. I saw him wearing it one time and it's cute.

He doesn't really stop me from getting his clothes. I guess he had already given up.

And then I remember my father asking about Z's father.

What could they possibly talk about apart from their usual weird conversations?

I shrugged my shoulder.

Yep. Our parents are weird.

Chapter 5

Y's POV

"Nice jacket kid," I whistled as I watch Latch jumping out of his car.

I was sitting on the porch while checking my phone every now and then.

This kid. My twin will kill him. I was so sure that jacket was Z's because I have the exact same design except for a different color. Mom bought it for us just a month ago. I wonder when Marigold took it from my brother's closet.

My brother, he's okay with Marigold getting his clothes but he'll be pissed off to see the younger Simons wearing it.

He walking on the pathway and I raised an eyebrow at him.

"Did your Mom send you here?" I asked and he grinned. He really looks like uncle Grey, his bunny smiles and the forehead. But he got his quirkiness from his mother. At least that's what my mom always tells us.

She always tells us about her good old days. As if she's still isn't famous until now. They have so much devoted fans, both WHISTLE and SHADOW. I wasn't alive yet then but I heard they dominated the world. They paved the way for everyone and I will never tell but I am so proud of my parents.

My parents were called human fashion brands and the deadliest airport fashion icons to this date. Even the younger generation of idols can't compare. And even now, my parents still get invited to fashion shows and are ambassadors of so many brands.

Too bad Z and Y didn't inherit anything related to fashion. We just let our mom buy our clothes. I wear what is given to me.

Z and I were very much alike. We like the same food, hobby, movies. We agreed upon everything which surprises our parents sometimes, everything, except for the woman we like.

I don't normally like the girls he dates. Not that he dates a lot but I don't know. It's like every woman he falls for, I don't find interesting. And I'm justifying that now because I know my brother very much. He is my twin after all.

However, I know something about my brother which I think he hasn't even realized.

Marigold.

That Simons had been messing my twin's mind and the fool haven't even noticed it. In fact, the two of them were so clueless.

Marigold thinks of my brother as her best friend while my brother had long given up with Marigold's stubbornness so he lets her do what he wants.

The two of them, they are stupid.

"Nope. I'm here to pick up Elle. We're having dinner," he grinned and my eyebrows raised even more.

"You're taking my baby out for a dinner?" I question and the fucker just smiled at me.

Sometimes I hate that he got aunt Tokyo's sunny attitude. Latch is not even scared of us anymore. He only listens to Ash since he's the oldest. Sometimes to Zammy because that girl hits people. Plus, uncle Storm is quite intimidating.

I turned on my left and screamed. "Z! Can you come here really quick?" I called my twin brother and I saw the change on Simons' expression, a grin now plastered on my lips.

And I was right. The moment Z saw Latch outside, his face scrunched as he leaned on the porch just right beside me.

"I don't remember letting you wear my jacket," he hissed angrily. He pulled out his phone and was crazily tapping on its screen.

I smell a fight.

"You gave it to my sister and I borrowed it," he grinned.

Before we can even react, we saw Elle running. Mom and Dad weren't home at this time.

"Elle, where are you going?" Z asked and our sister grinned before grabbing Latch by the wrist.

"Tell Mom and Dad I won't be home for dinner," she winked before dashing.

"Elle!"

"Let her be Z. You know you can't control that kid. He's too spoiled with Dad," I shake my head in disapproval.

Out of us three, Elle had gotten Dad's carefree spirit and Mom's jumpy side. And she's the youngest so we spoil her a lot especially Dad.

"Are they dating?" Z asked and I chuckle.

"No. They're like you and Marigold. They're best friends. Unless you and Gold aren't, then that's a different case," I teased before jumping off from the porch, tapping my twin's shoulder.

I saw Marigold's response. The brat wants my twin to pick her up.

My brows furrowed. And what's with uncle Grey asking Dad to go with Z?

I was walking back to my room when a realization hit me.

Looks like everybody noticed except the two. Soft chuckles escaped my lips.

My brother always tops the class but when it's Marigold, he's so clueless. Marigold is like an unreadable book for him.

Just then, I saw the chat head of our family GC. It's a group with all of us, our aunts and uncles, and us their children. We have a separate one without our parents and I bet they do have another without us too.

I saw uncle Raze's chat. I heard him and aunt Joy was on a vacation.

"Ashton, can you pick up Louise? She needs to buy something at the mall and Xander was out,"

Lou, my baby Lou...

Before I knew it, I was already typing.

"I'll go with her Uncle Raze. I have something to buy too," I sent the message immediately. I was so sure Ash was with Zamara though. They were like joint at the hip. Wherever Zamara was, so was Ashton. He's like uncle Storm's second child. But everybody knows Ashie has a thing for uncle's daughter. I don't want to see the end of it though. Uncle Storm is quite strict.

"Great. Take care of her Y," uncle responded and I left a thumbs up on his response.

After changing, I grab my keys and headed to the garage. I can literally feel my heart hammering inside my chest.

I don't remember how it started but I woke up one morning and all I can remember was Louise's timid smile. She's always aloof with people except for us. Now I was actually glad she's that shy because I will be secured that no man can come near my girl.

Every chance that I get I grab it to be with her. My sweet innocent Lou.

Before I knew it, I was already outside their house. She must have been waiting coz I saw her coming out of their front door.

Slowly, I went out of the car and jogged to the other side to open the door.

The moment our eyes locked, her innocent smile greeted me and I was worried my heart dropped on the ground.

Fuck.

"Thank you, Y," she leaned a little and kissed me on the cheeks as a greeting. Something all of us are already accustomed with.

However, this girl right here doesn't even know how dangerous that kiss had been to my system.

"Anything for you my sweet Lou," I whispered and her cheeks blushed red. I always call her that and I'm not sure she knows what it meant for me or she just thinks I was teasing her. All of us teases her anyways to make her feel comfortable with us. It's just that, mine had a different context to it.

I mean it. She's mine.

The moment we were inside the car, her sweet perfume filled my nose and it took me ounces our courage and self-control not to park the car and do something that might get me into trouble.

Calm down Y. Uncle Raze and Xander will kill you...

Silence filled the car. Which is a good thing coz it was testing my self-control.

However, the moment we passed a Unicorn themed cafe, I noticed how her eyes followed it even after we already went past through it, the expression on her face didn't go unnoticed by me.

"Do you want to drop by and get some coffee over that Unicorn thingy?" I asked her and her face snapped towards my direction. The way her eyes sparkle brought serenity inside me.

Good Lord, I am so in trouble.

"Can we?" she whisper-shouted. Her voice ended up sounding raspy my grip on the steering wheel tightened.

Oh God, she doesn't have any idea.

"Of course baby. Anything for you," I whispered.

I'd give you anything. Even my Mom's closet.

But of course, I didn't tell her that. Some other time maybe.

When she's already mine.

Chapter 6

Mari's POV

"Hey, Gold," My lips automatically puckered when I felt an arm resting on my shoulder, a familiar scent filling in my nose, a scent I'm not really fond of.

I didn't even bother looking. Instead, I gave my books to him rather forcefully that it hit his chest, a loud *whoof* coming out of his mouth. Nonetheless, he still took the books from me like he always does.

"What got you grumpy early this morning?" Y asked and I just grunted.

"Latch took off in my car. One day I'm going to kill him with my bare hands," I gritted my teeth in annoyance, and his laughter echoed along the hallway.

My eyes caught the stares we are getting from the students. Something we're kind of used to. People always stare at us. They always do because to them, we're not just some students. We're those kids - the privileged ones.

Little do they know...

"So that's why Z was so grumpy this morning. He was walking like a zombie to his car when he doesn't even have a class today,"

I rolled my eyes and scowled. "Are you expecting me to wake up my father and drive me to school? That's like me bringing my own father to his deathbed. You know how people still go crazy over them even now,"

Y pulled me a little closer when a group of freshmen suddenly came out of one room, all giddy. I had to stop myself from snarling because, why not? Maybe I can spare these kids with my bitchiness, huh?

One kid almost slipped and Y's reflex was fast enough to prevent her from having her ass on the ground.

At that, her eyes focused on Y, her eyes widening, a reaction not really new to my eyes.

Ahh, poor kid.

Y, as much as I hate to admit it, has that kind of effect - like Z, Latch, Xander - *heck*, probably like every man I know that is close to me. They may have differences in appeal but at the end of the day, girls still swoon over their looks. Even Dimitri has tons of admirers since he was what, six?

I watch as her face started to change in color, her lips parting and a few of her classmates realizing what just happened. The sound of a few girls squealing slowly irritating my ears. But I stood still as I watch this painfully unfold in front of me.

Like always...

And like the usual scenario, the girl in front of us helplessly opens her lips, then closes it again, unable to utter a word.

And Y, even though he's known to be intimidating, is still nothing but a ladies' man. Of course, that is because uncle Sky had been insisting so kindly that the twins should treat girls with so much respect. And Y confidently smiling at the girl is part of uncle Sky's very helpful words of wisdom.

He lifted his hand and messes the girl's hair.

"I love you," the girl muttered unconsciously.

Not again...

Expectantly, I look at Y's direction and almost grimaced as he whispered the very words that will surely mark the end of the girl's slightest possibility, if there is any, of having a relationship in the future. Because, as Y nonchalantly says those words, it holds the hope and somewhat desperation of the girl that someday, Y will fall in love with her.

Which leads us back to Y breaking another poor girl's heart.

Like a record, I heard Y whispered to the girl, "I love you too,"

And then as if he did nothing, he pulled me away to the now frozen girl as he walks me to my next class.

"I'm going to tell Aunt Max of what you did you little piece of shit," I mumbled and he just laughs.

"What? It's not like Dad never uttered those words to some million girls apart from mom,"

I looked at him amused, "Heron, your Dad is a famous celebrity and those are your Dad's fans. You shouldn't be leading on those girls when we all know you won't even remember meeting them,"

"She's a fan too. And if I can make her happy by telling her those words, so be it. At least she won't easily be swooned by some undeserving man out there,"

Our eyes met and I made a face. He knew he got a point but I was simply not in the mood to argue. Plus, it's not like I'm good with explaining. Even though I know I still have a point, I just let it slide. So now the discussion's over.

"I still hate you,"

I reached for my books and hit his stomach as strong as I can and he just laughs at what I did.

"Be kind to my twin Gold. You're squeezing the life out of Z. Who even has a boy best friend nowadays?"

"Me, fucker. Now go to your next class and annoy Zamara instead. I heard she made a girl cry yesterday,"

Y's brows furrowed, "Are you serious? You got the wrong info young lady. She didn't make a girl cry. She punched her, straight in the face, twice at that. Why did Uncle Storm teach Zamara self-defense when she uses it opposite its purpose?"

He was shaking his head and soft chuckles escaped my lips when I heard what he said. Waving goodbye, I turned around and entered my class, Atlantis eyeing me suspiciously as a huge smile is still plastered on my lips.

"Did you kill someone on your way here?" she asked and I flipped her off.

"Na-ah, just Y. He just so kindly made another pure soul lose a colorful college life ahead of her. Now the poor girl would probably follow and admire him her entire years here,"

I sat down on the chair beside her and she leaned a little, relaxing her shoulders. She was smiling so prettily I can't help but reach for her cheeks and pinch them lightly. She looks a lot like her Mom and I adore Aunt Zanaya a lot.

"You should have seen those girls who followed my older brother when he came to fetch Zamara yesterday,"

"Did he went to the dean's instead of uncle?" I asked. Ashton is the oldest among us and he basically takes care of every mess we end up into just because he's the damn responsible one. Though in all honesty, it was mostly Zamara who gets in trouble.

"He's spoiling Zamara too much! Aunt Cali laughed when she heard Zamara punched a girl who said her mom hates our parents because they are full of themselves,"

"Damn," My hand reaches to cover my lips to stop myself from giggling. Of course, our parents have antis, then and now. You just can't please everybody and Zamara hates it the most out of all of us. You don't give Zamara an attitude because she knows she's got Ashton on her back - that little son of a bitch.

She pulled out her phone and started typing something. "Latch took your car?"

My blood started to boil at the memory of it. Dad took Latch's car after he found out that my little brother went for a goddamn race. Though Mom didn't sleep until she learns if Latch won or not. Nevertheless, Latch is such a pain in the ass and now I have to ask for the guys to drive me. I was

the only girl allowed to drive because Mom was okay with it. The guys have a schedule who fetches who.

I felt my phone vibrating so I pulled it out of my pants.

"Don't bother calling. I'm already on my way to fetch you,"

I snickered at what Z sent. He knows I'm going to pester him later. I know choosing him as my best friend instead of Y is the best idea ever. Besides, being with Z calms me. He doesn't talk a lot and unlike Y, he doesn't talk with girls so that's less of a pain for me. But Xander is actually much worse than he is. Uncle Raze's son just doesn't talk to other girls apart from us.

With a smile on my face, I put my phone inside my bag, and soon enough, our professor came. Atlantis and I didn't bother talking with each other the entire duration as we're both serious about studying. My Mom isn't strict about my grades but it's something about me and my pride.

This is my last class for the day so just after our professor said we're free to go, I tapped Lan and my heart fluttered seeing her angelic smile. I will kill any bastard who will make this sweet little candy cry.

"I still have another class," she pouted. I picked up my things and winked at her.

"You have someone who'll pick you up? Z's probably outside. We can wait for you. I can't trust your brother to pick you up. Not when he's probably following our brat around,"

We walked sideways and she tilted her head when she saw Z standing a few meters away from us, a girl on a short red dress trying to talk to him.

Our eyes met and I swear I saw him grimace. I'm pretty sure he's going to blame me for whatever situation he's in now.

"Nah, Dad will pick me up. He said he's going to take me out on a date because he and mom didn't get me anything from their business trip,"

My lips parted at what she said, " Why can't Dad be sweet like uncle Seth? All I got from Dad was an hour of gym session and that's him, me and Latch altogether. I'm going to exercise my right for a good pamper once I get home!"

We hugged and kissed each other's cheeks before we part ways. And not a minute passed and Z was walking in my direction. I watch as a few girls follow his every move while he walks in his striped button-down shirt tucked inside his pants, a black dress shoes finishing his look.

I raised an eyebrow at him, about to tease him of how dapper he looks but he beat me into it.

"Mom's idea. Now let's go before I call Ashton to pick you up instead," he scowled and he took the books I have from my hands as well as my bag and I laugh.

"Why? Not happy receiving another confession?" I teased him as I try to follow his every step. He really looked so pissed off I wonder what the girl said. Z won't be pissed off if it was a simple confession.

"Are you that sad you're picking me up?"

"Drop it,"

I pouted, "You don't want to see me,"

"I didn't say that,"

"Of course, because you always miss me," I said in confidence and I heard him scoffed.

"Didn't say that either,"

"So did she actually confessed?" I tried to pry once again, even leaning a little to check his expression and that's when I realize how serious he looked.

My lips parted at the sudden thought. I remember how two girls once approached us and invited him for a threesome. I had to pull Z away because I can literally feel him exploding at that time.

With that in mind, I decided to shut up and stop teasing him. I don't like Z mad. The last time he got mad, he didn't talk to me for days and I had to ask for Aunt Max's help for it.

"Dev," we turned around and saw Alexander walking with Dimitri and some guy I didn't know about. They just went out of Xander's car.

My eyes studied the new man. I've never seen him with the guys before. He was almost as tall as Xander, eyes were onyx black and I have never wanted to question my daily skincare routine when I realized how smooth his skin looks like.

Our eyes met and I felt shivers crawl into my skin. He was staring at me intently, emotionless to be exact, and for some reason, my body started moving autopilot and I slowly hide behind Z.

He turned around and was startled at my reaction.

"You okay?" he whispered, my hands suddenly reaching for his shirt as I stare down on my shoes.

The man scares me.

"I'm bringing Mari home. See you later," he uttered and I was glad he pulled me closer until I was almost hiding on his chest before guiding me to his car. He didn't utter a word. Instead, he reached for the seatbelt and ensure that everything is set and well.

My eyes followed his every movement. So when he turned his attention back on the road, I was able to see how perfect his side profile is.

I know how insanely handsome Z is. I'm not blind but maybe because I have been with him and the rest of the boys since we were kids, I kind of have gotten used to his visuals.

"I'm craving for some beef and mushroom stew, you?" he asked before turning on my direction.

"That'll work. Having you as a meal will probably work too," I teased and an amused grin escaped his lips before turning his attention back on the road as he started driving.

My laughter echoed inside the car and I giggle as his cheeks burn red.

It has become my thing and Z had been used to it. Or so I thought.

My uncles always have fun telling their pickup lines and I get to hear all of them. So to tease Z, I always tell him those lines to throw him off but every time, he'd smack me at the back of my head and will tell me to shut up.

"Stop practicing those lines to me. It's not like you can use them to flirt to someone else. Do that and you'll see how your dad will finally lose it,"

I lifted my feet on the car seat and opened the compartment to try to look for something, any evidence that my best friend has found love life.

"When are you going to introduce me to your girl?" I asked before closing the compartment after seeing nothing but photos of us. Sometimes I'd pull him on some photo booth and every time, he'd just throw them there.

"Tomorrow," he suddenly whispered and my eyes shut straight to his direction. My lips parted, excitement building up inside me.

I have never met any of Z's previous girlfriends. I know he had a few but he never introduced anybody, so afraid we'd tease the girl. Of course, I wouldn't. I'd love his girlfriend like how much I adore Z. Heck, I'd probably accept anybody the other kids love if that person will make them happy.

"You're not kidding me, right?" my eyes were so wide I honestly feel like I am palpitating.

He laughed at my reaction, amusement visible in his expression.

"What has gotten you so excited? I'm kidding,"

My expression automatically changes at his words.

Damn.

I rolled my eyes on him and snickered. "Find a girl so I can have someone to tell how bad you are. People will think you are in love with me if you don't find a girl. Though I can't blame you when I'm so gorgeous!"

One thing I like about Z, he allows me to feel good about myself. I don't lose my confidence despite the fact that I haven't had any boyfriend like ever.

I watch as a small smile escaped on his lips. And that made me smile too.

Oh Z, how lucky am I to have you as my best friend?

With that in thought, I leaned forward and gave him a quick peck on the cheeks. He was startled for a moment but allowed me nonetheless.

"Thanks for picking me up, Z. You're the best!"

I grinned. The best that I have.

Chapter 7

Mari's POV

"Okay, who among you shits did it?" Ashton scowled as we all sat on the couch. He walked straight on one of the bean bags because a few of us were occupying the couch.

We were all gathered in the living room, Ashton's living room to be exact. This motherfucker has a living room inside his freaking bedroom, perks of being the first of our generation. All of our uncles have spoiled him when it's still just him. And then Alexander came, then Zamara. The rest just came like traffic after.

"Why do you even bother asking? It's either Y, or Latch," I scoffed. My eyes caught how he eyes the to warily.

"Or maybe Zamara," I added and I wanted to roll my eyes when I noticed how quickly Ashton's expression has changed.

This little adorable piece of shit.

Y laughed at what I said while he lay on the couch, throwing a stress ball upwards and catching it. His other foot resting on Dimitri's lap while the other just reads a book, typical of uncle Mono's child.

"I didn't do it. Why would I volunteer to organize such a hassle?" Y answered, a smirk now forming on his lips.

I lean a little and rested my head on Z's shoulder. I felt him adjust on his seat so that I would be comfortable. Muttering a small thanks that only him could have heard, I lifted my legs and tucked them closer making them rest on the couch.

I know why Ashton was being grumpy. It's the first Friday of the month and this is when each of our families finds time to dine and gather. It's past 8 in the evening and we're still waiting for the others.

According to his mom, someone volunteered to organize a party for our father's anniversary. I mean, their fans still celebrate that but we also celebrate with family. Though this would be the first time that we would be the one organizing and uncle Hope is so excited.

I wonder who it is.

Back then, we used to eat in the backyard and dwell into everything the family host prepared but they got tired and just let us kids do our thing while they do their own.

So, we still meet on a certain family's house, this time it's Aunt Zanaya's turn so we have camped here in Ashton's room while the elders stay at the backyard, probably drinking.

"I'm starving," Elle piped in. She was sitting on the carpeted floor playing some game with Latch who was wearing a snapback.

"You're just saying that because I'm crushing you on this game," Elle immediately grabbed the cushion beside her and hit Latch straight in the face, soft chuckles escaped my lips.

"Go, girl," I whispered and Latch turned around to glare at me only to be hit again on the face by Elle.

"Focus, you idiot," she snarled. I knew Elle is a force Latch have to overcome in the future.

"Where's Louise?" Y asked and I smiled coyly. I watch as he slowly sat straight and parted his legs, an annoying smirk showing on his face. It amazes me sometimes how he and Z are twins.

"She won't be here. I heard she's finishing a project or something," I heard Atlantis mutter. She was lying on her brother's bed, in a fetal position, body covered with a huge blanket, and only her face showing. Alexander brought her here earlier, on his arms if I may add.

"Really?" Y tilted his head as if thinking of something.

I just dismissed whatever thoughts in my head are and slid even more until my head is already resting on Z's lap. I grinned when our eyes met. He was on his phone playing games.

Just then, the room burst open revealing a grinning Zamara, her phone on her hand.

"Ash!" she beamed and Ashton, the fucker was so quick to stand.

"Zammy?"

My eyes met Z's and we both shake our heads. Only Zamara doesn't realize how whipped Ashton is to her. It's basically disgusting I want to squeeze Ashton's face and feed it to the lions whenever he adorably smiles just by seeing Zamara.

"I ordered pizza and chicken, and it should be arriving at any minute. Can you lend me your card?" she muttered sweetly as she hops her way inside the room.

She didn't even have to ask twice. Ashton was already on his feet walking straight outside. But he pulled Zamara on her wrist to accompany him.

"Disgusting," I heard Alexander whispered. He was resting on the bay window seat, eyes fixed on Atlantis.

"You bet. Heck, I'm outta here," Y confidently made his way out of the room.

Z slow tapped my shoulder and I turned towards him. He tilted his head a little so I understood.

Slowly, I sat on the couch and watch as Z stood up, and followed his brother.

"Heron,"

Y turned around, his right hand in his pocket. His gaze met his brother's and not a minute passed and I saw Y raised an eyebrow.

"Bring Elle with you,"

Y turned towards Elle who was still playing before turning back to his twin.

"I'm not going home,"

This time, it was Z who tilted his head.

Y and Z exchange weird glances and to say that I was curious was an understatement.

Sometimes I wonder if what they say about twins having a link or connection is true. If it is, isn't that amazing? Like, I'd think about smacking Latch's head and my twin would do it for me.

"Text me if you're not coming home," Z turned around and walked back to my direction.

Right, you'd think that Y is older because his name comes first on the alphabet but it's actually Z. Though I'm pretty sure he doesn't exercise authority by that mere second age difference.

Z sat beside me and instead of lying down, I just lifted my feet and tucked it until I was already hugging my legs.

"Where is he going?" I can't help but ask. Z looked at my direction then shrugged his shoulders.

"Do we really have to do it?" Dimitri asked and I smiled at him. He's the youngest among us but every time I see him with Aunt Irene, I just can't help but be giddy. Aunt Irene treats Dim like a baby, it's so adorable.

"It's not like we still have a choice," Alexander answered and he stood up the moment the door opened, revealing Ashton and Zamara. Ashton was carrying three boxes of party size pizzas and three boxes of chicken on his hands.

"Ge'ez," I muttered when I saw how Zammy was bow carrying a big stuff toy.

Ashton is going to kill himself the moment Zammy falls in love with some guy. I just hope Zamara notice Ashton's feelings before Ashton gets himself in prison for killing a poor man.

"No!" Atlantis hissed at Alexander when the later woke her up to eat.

I didn't pay any attention to them as my eyes focus on the box of pizza in front of me.

"Give me one, Latch!"

"Na-ah, get your own Elle. You're not a baby!"

"Asshole!"

Z's gaze turned toward his younger sister and that made Elle shut up.

Even Latch kept quiet.

"Thank God, now can we eat in peace? Where is Irish?" I asked as Z gave me a slice of pizza. My eyes scanned the room and realized that Uncle Hope's daughter was not here.

"She's with her mom," Dim simply answered and I just nodded. Irish was too quiet and timid, much like Louise. That's why Atlantis and I ensure that they are included in every discussion. They are a part of this group as much as everyone.

"Okay, so I told aunt Zanaya were going to plan apart for our Dads!" Zamara cheered and the boys groaned in frustration. Only Ashton was stupid enough to grin, showing support to his baby.

Fuck this idiot.

"Zammy, don't you think they are a little too old for some party?" I tried asking but she was already engrossed in what she was searching on her phone.

Z gave me another slice when he realized that I already finished my pizza. I turned to him he just shakes his head.

"What?"

He leans a little, his lips almost touching my ears.

"Let her be. She'll probably do everything along with Ashton,"

For some reason, I felt shivers running down my spine.

Wait. What the hell?

I gulped.

I tilted my head and felt him pull away.

What the hell was that?

"Ash, the temperature in your room was too low. It's cold in here,"

Alexander looked at my direction and hissed.

"It's actually hot, missy. Dimitri turned the temp higher five minutes ago,"

My lips puckered at his words.

What?

"Was it because it's too hot then?" I asked myself.

With that in thought, I just leaned forward and grab another leg of chicken.

I didn't mind how Elle and Latch kept fighting. Or how Zamara and Ashton were too loud.

I was at my third leg when I felt Z's hand on my leg. I turned towards him and raised my eyebrow.

"I'm going first,"

"Why?"

Instead of answering, I watch as his brows furrowed. He grabs a tissue and wiped the side of my lips.

"I need to give something to my classmate,"

My lips parted. "You know someone in your room?"

I almost laughed when he scowled.

I was just teasing him. There was this rumor when some girl talked to him and said they were classmates but Z doesn't even remember. It turns out they were indeed classmates for four straight years and this snob never paid attention.

"I do. Wanna come with me?"

My mind drifted back on the pizza and weigh my options.

"I'm craving for dessert,"

Z laughed a little then nodded. In no time, the two of us were walking down the staircase. That's when Aunt Max came walking along with my mom.

"Sweetie..." aunt Max smiled at me. I moved forward and gave aunt Max a hug. From the corner of my eyes, I saw mom hugging Z too.

Aunt Max pulled away and glanced at my mom. "You're gonna have to pay me because half of Mari's wardrobe is my son's clothes. It's a pity your daughter doesn't approve of your taste in fashion,"

I stopped myself from grinning. I was wearing one of Z's shirt. It was a black Gucci printed tee that is big enough to cover my legs. I was wearing black shorts underneath.

My mom rolled her eyes and pulled aunt Max away.

"We both know you just love shopping so it's fine. It's not like my daughter..."

They were talking too fast with their voices too low that I didn't catch half what mom was talking about.

"Did they just ignored us?" I asked Z who already started walking in which I followed.

"Yeah. Let's go, Mari,"

He was walking ahead of me that a silly thought came into my mind.

Without giving a warning, I hop on his back and that caught him off-guard, his hand immediately resting on my leg to ensure that I don't fall.

Soft giggles escaped my lips when I heard Z groaned.

"How about we walk and you carry me?" I whispered behind his ear and I felt his shoulder stiffen.

Suddenly, he stopped on his tracks and I was confused at first.

"Devon?" my voice came out as a whisper and I felt him tilted his head away for a moment.

I clung on his shoulders even more. He's not thinking about dropping me, right?

"I'm not letting go Z. Don't even think about letting me go either or I'm going to kill you," I told him as I bury my face on his neck.

This is a little comfortable than I expected. My breath hitches as I smell his manly scent.

Yep, this is definitely comfortable.

I laughed when I heard Z cursing.

He's probably pissed.

My eyes closed for a moment. Maybe I ate too much that's why I am sleepy.

Goodluck to Z getting me inside the car.

Chapter 8

Mari's POV

"You're not going outside, not at this hour..." I turned around when I heard my Dad's voice. His legs were parted as he sits like he was still in his twenties. He was watching something and I heard my mom's laughter as she walks from the kitchen, a bowl of sliced apples in her hands.

"Dad, you agreed last time!" I exclaimed, stopping from my tracks as I was supposed to head outside. It was only nine in the evening and I don't have classes tomorrow.

My father raised his eyebrows as he looks at my direction, my Mom now sitting on his lap feeding him those apples. Ge'ez!

"Yes, but that's when you said you'd be out at 5 and will be home by 9. I know how to read time, Mari, do you? And are you going to the beach?"

My legs parted a little as my right hand landed on my waist. "Dad, please..." I whined. My Mom laughed at my father's words and hit him on the shoulder.

"You don't know about fashion, Grey, please,"

My mom looked at my direction, a proud grin plastered on her face. I was wearing a black halter top showing the piercing on my belly. Mom and I have one because she went with me when I decided to have them last year on my birthday. I paired it with tattered loose boyfriend pants while a huge white cardigan covers my body. My cap and shoes were white too.

"Dad, I promised Shay I will be there on her birthday. You said yes!"

Biting my lower lip, I turned my puppy eyes towards mom who just winked at me.

"Let your daughter go. She needs to socialize. It's not like she's going with some strangers," I watch as my Mom put down the bowl of sliced apples on the table. In just a few seconds, her hands were already caressing my father's arms. Lord, I just can't imagine what will happen next.

The moment I heard my father groan, I knew it's game over.

"Who's going to be with you? Mah Ri, you're not going to drive under the influence. Don't even lie, I know you're going to drink," he added even before I can utter a protest, a grin spreading wide on my face. My father really knows me very well.

"I can call Z to pick me up," excitement started building up inside me. I knew Z will pick me up.

A smirk slowly formed on my father's face, "Are you two together?"

"No, Dad. I'll be going alone and will just ask him to fetch me,"

To my surprise, my father ended up in fits of giggles.

Yes, the Golden maknae of kpop is giggling in front of his wife and daughter.

He leaned a little, arms wrapped around mom's who's also smiling, and grab his phone once again.

He was now busy on his phone, probably messaging my other uncles for God knows what reason. So after bidding my mom goodbye, I went to the garage and it wasn't even five minutes and I already took off with my precious car.

My body is convulsing in excitement. It's been months since I last got drunk and I kind of miss hanging out with a few of my friends.

I'm not really a party girl but I know how to have fun. I'm in my teenage year and somehow, it's hard to do whatever you want when you're a daughter of a former kpop idol. Though our parents are no longer that active on the scene, there are still so many eyes following us.

The moment I went out of my car, the loud blaring of music filled my ears, my smile immediately turning wide.

Pulling up my phone, I started typing a message to tell Z where I am. I haven't told him about this party and Dad will be mad if I don't follow his conditions.

"Z, I'm out for a drink. Fetch me later. Don't bring your car coz I brought mine. I told Dad you'd drive me home,"

Z can probably find me any time since all our phones are locked in through GPS, for our safety but I still sent him the address. He's going to get really mad at me. I know he's watching his favorite game.

Once I step on the garden, Zara, one of my friends screamed at the top of her lungs. I know she did because I can even hear her voice despite the loud music.

"Marigold, I'm glad the star has arrived!" she teased and I pulled her for a hug.

"Shut up, idiot. I won't let this party pass. I need some booze!"

"Are you alone? Where are those kids?"

My brows furrowed at her words.

"If you're looking for Xander, I'm not even sure where he is, probably at home or Lan's. Seriously, when will you get over him?" I pinched her cheeks as I swung my other arm on her shoulder, a wide grin showing on her face.

"Never!" she answered and I just laughed.

Too bad, Xander will never lay his eyes on her. I don't exactly know what's going on between Xander and Lan but I'm not stupid enough not to notice how the former looks at my friend.

When we enter the house, we were all greeted by the loud cheering of the girls and guys. Some, I am familiar with, most of them, I'm not.

At one point, Ceriz turned down the volume of the music so we can all hear each other.

"The Simons is in the house!" she screamed and I waved my hands to them.

And as expected, everybody cheered. I'm a 'Daughter of a celebrity' after all.

"Mari!" a lot of people had greeted me. There were probably around more than fifteen people, still few actually compared to that party they did last month but I guess these are her acquaintances.

One of the people I know pulled a chair so I can seat with her.

"I was kind of hoping you'd bring your brother, " she whispered in a flirty tone and I scrunched my nose and tried my best not to glare at her.

"Bitch, I won't accept you in our family," I teased and she giggles.

"And why is that?"

A sweet smile emerged on my lips. "You're too good for my brother. That idiot is one little piece of shit. Save yourself," I answered and she just rolled her eyes. She's so used to me saying bad things about my brother.

In reality though, as much as I know Lath will only break her heart, deep inside, I will always feel like no one will ever be deserving of my little shit too. Latch, as much of a troublemaker he is, is my baby. I won't tolerate him hurting or playing with girls but I won't let him be with a woman who doesn't deserve him too. He's still my precious brother after all.

The moment I was settled, I scanned the room and noticed a few guys at the far end of the table. They were a few of them I know. When I turned my head on my right, my breath almost hitched when I locked eyes with him, that guy I saw walking around with Xander and Dimitri the other time.

He was staring at me intently, his dark eyes pulling me in. His face screams seriousness and like the first day, I noticed how he wasn't afraid to stare at me - *openly*. And then I noticed something. What was it, was it confusion written all over his beautiful face?

"Why are you here?"

His deep voice resonated with my whole system and I felt like I was being thrown into a deep well or some sort. I noticed how his cheeks were already crimson red due to alcohol. He was wearing a black turtleneck sweater that fits on his whole body which made him even more attractive. Yes, He's borderline attractive almost the same level of Z's and everyone else from my group. Wait, scratch that, he's just so beautiful I suddenly wanna question my parent's genes though I was sure they were of topnotch.

I was out for a second, simply staring at his beautiful face that what he said didn't exactly register to me so when he snapped his fingers in front of my face, my cheeks immediately blushed red in embarrassment.

Fuck.

"Are you okay? Are you sick?"

There it was again, his deep voice. And for some reason, I feel like chills were running through my body.

I was startled when he suddenly lifted his hand, feeling my forehead. My eyes watch as his brows furrowed, his lips twitching a little and I felt a sudden sensation running through my body.

He tilted his head a little, leaning a bit forward. And that's when I was finally waking up from that trance.

"I-" I stopped midway, unsure what to say. I avoided his glance and grab the nearest glass in front of me, drinking whatever was on it. I grimaced the moment the alcohol greeted my lungs, fucking booze!

"That was my glass, you know," I heard him snicker before turning his attention away from me.

"Shit," I murmured to myself. What the hell?

I felt like my body was suddenly paralyzed and all the noise was suddenly blocked by my system. Oh God, this is so embarrassing!

The girl from my left took my glass and gave me something to drink and I just smiled in return.

Mari, you weren't even able to answer any of his questions!

I wanted to scold myself. This guy, there is something about him and I simply can't point it out!

I don't even know how long it had passed and he didn't bother talking to me again. Instead, he turned towards his right and listened to whatever the guy beside him was telling him.

I felt my cheeks burning, unsure of what to feel. For the first time in my life, I was confused as to what is happening and I wasn't sure of what to say. Why did I stutter and why did I even act like I was daydreaming in front of him? And I don't even know his name!

Between those hours, I just turned my back on him and chatted with my friends. That's what I am here for anyways.

"Mari, do you know Lennox? He's Xander's classmate!" Zara giggled from the opposite table and I smiled awkwardly. I removed my cardigan because I was starting to feel hot. I saw how a few of the guys turned their attention to me. I raised my eyebrow a little and stopped myself from grinning. I know I can turn heads like that. I wasn't a Jean and Manoban for no reason.

"Girl, do you even eat? Damn, I'd kill for those abs!" She added and I just laughed at her words. She then turned to the guy she called Lennox and I decided to do the same.

And once again, our eyes met, and again, I was at a loss for words.

Why does he always look at me like his eyes were piercing my soul?

"Lennox, do you know Marigold? You're friends with Xan, right?"

Lennox turned his eyes back to Zara and just shrugged his shoulders not even bothering to answer. My lips twitched a little and somehow, what he just did make me grab another glass of alcohol and drank it straight on.

I felt a surge of pain on my temple and that made me close my eyes a little. a groan coming out of my lips.

Suddenly, I felt someone grabbing the glass away from my hand and I turned to him and saw his dark expression. "You do realize this is vodka you've been drinking since earlier, right?" he sounded angry for some reason and my lips parted in shock.

He put down the bottle and grab another glass and I was sure it has only juice on it. He put the glass in front of me and that started to fuel the anger inside of me. What the fuck is he doing?

"I'm not a child!" I glared at him but that didn't even faze him at all. I scanned the looks of everyone and realized that nobody is paying any attention to us now.

"Whatever," he then turned his back away from me.

This Lennox is really getting on my nerves!

I was still drinking but this time, I just grabbed a flavored beer and decided to ditch the vodka. It's devil alcohol, I know and though I don't easily get drunk, as what I know, I still want to watch how much I drink especially since I'm not with the other guys.

My hands started fanning my face because I'm starting to feel really really hot.

"Yow, Gold! Jeff here wants to know if you're available on Sunday!"

My eyes shifted to the far corner of the table where a few guys were teasing an awfully red-faced guy who looks like he's about to pass out. I raised an eyebrow and saw how they were pushing the poor guy, teasing him endlessly. He can't even look at my direction. I'm no stranger to these kinds of scenarios. I get love confessions occasionally, and I all turn them down in one minute. That is after I ask one question.

"Sure, but he's got to go to our house and ask for my Dad's permission," I smiled cheekily and they cheered even more. However, the guys' face turned even paler. My dad is so kind but being known as a legend in the industry makes him very intimidating.

If they can't ask my Dad's permission, what right do they have to even try getting close to me?

I felt another surge of pain on my temple and I wanted to curse. I checked my wrist and had a hard time reading the time. How long was I been drinking?

Getting quite dizzy, I brushed my hair backward after removing my cap. I used the cap again to fan myself. Feeling the need to go to the restroom, I tried to stand up only to almost fall straight to the ground if not for the hands that were swift enough to wrap around my waist. I was too shocked that my hands automatically pressed on his chest, my eyes were basically wide in surprise.

"I told you to stop drinking!" I heard his stern voice and his face being a little close to my face didn't help. That made me realize how my descriptions earlier gave his face no justice.

We were still in that position when I heard someone calling my name, the music was already low so I heard his voice clearly.

"Marigold,"

As if it was magic, that familiar voice woke me up from whatever I was drowning me and closed my eyes for a moment. And once I opened them, a realization hit me. I was still in the arms of a stranger. So with all the strength left in me, I tried pushing him away from me a little. He looked a little hesitant at first but the moment I felt another pair of familiar arms on my back, Lennox released me from his grasp.

I lifted my gaze and was met with Z's beautiful face. His hair was messy and still wet as if he just took a shower and despite wearing a simple black shirt. But for some reason, he looks so different, something I am not used to seeing him. His expression was dark, his jaw clenched and I was afraid he was really mad that I asked him to fetch me.

I felt his arms wrapping around my waist in a more secure manner and I felt his palm pressing on my tummy. He wasn't looking at me though.

"Good, please send her home. She doesn't seem to be really good at listening after I told her not to drink that much," I heard Lennox told Z then suddenly, Z's eyes landed on my direction, his hooded eyes made my knees weak for a moment. My lips immediately pouting. His expression suddenly changed and I wanted to reach his face and apologize for ruining his night but I was too drunk to even apologize to my best friend. I leaned forward and buried my face on his chest.

"Yeah, she's only good at listening to me," I heard Z answered and I didn't bother listening to half they were talking about. I just closed my eyes and just clung my hands in Z's clothes.

"Can you walk?" he asked and I hummed in response. Damn, I will never drink vodka again.

Suddenly, I felt my body being lifted from the ground. He was carrying me bridal style so I clung my hands on his neck. I heard him saying goodbye to them and I just heard collective 'okay's' as a response. They weren't used to Z talking to someone else except us. He's not like Y who's more friendly.

"You should have called me if you wanted to drink. Y kept on pestering me to drink with him," I heard him whisper but I didn't answer.

I was almost drowning to unconsciousness that I can't even understand half of what he was saying. Instead, I just buried my face on his neck even more and I heard him curse.

And I was sure I heard him mumble something but I must be too drunk to even decipher them correctly.

"Damn Mari, what am I going to do with you, baby?"

Those were the last words I heard before I indulge myself in the darkness and fell asleep.

Chapter 9

Mari's POV

"No,"

My lips pouted the moment I heard Z's answer. This was the first time he said no to me and I'm not liking it.

"Why?" I started whining. He was sitting in one of the benches where we usually hang out. Y was smirking from the other corner and I rolled my eyes at him.

"Stop smirking, you idiot," I pointed my hand at him before turning my attention back to my best friend. He was on his phone, his legs parted and I lean a little to see what he was looking at.

Is he texting his girlfriend?

Much to my dismay, he moved back a little, hiding whatever he was checking out on his phone. This made me pout even more.

"Really?" I asked, appalled. He just looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. He just stared at me, his eyes not even wavering no matter how much I pouted my lips.

My lips parted as the sudden betrayal slowly sinks in my system. Z doesn't hide things from me.

"You're being too nosy, Mari,"

"Shut up," I hissed towards Y who, for some reason, finds it amusing whenever Z doesn't give in to what I want.

"You were asking too much Mari. You know uncle Grey will kill Z if he finds out you're not really going with him but with some of your friends," Zamara chimed in and crossed my arms as I glared towards Z.

Atlantis was on the bench along with Dimitri. The two were reading books like always. Xander still has classes. Irish and Louise are probably at home since I knew they only have morning classes now and it's already past three in the afternoon. And Ash, I'm pretty sure he's still at work but I'm guessing at around five I'd be smelling his annoying ass from afar. Zammy's class ends at five and Ash is like her magical fairy - so annoying.

"It's just one day! It wouldn't hurt him!"

"You'll be gone for three fucking days Marigold. How the hell did you get into uni when you're so bad at Math? You sure you're not flunking?"

"Yah!" I glared at Y and was almost about to throw my books to him but Z stopped me by holding my hand. That made me calm down a little.

I gritted my teeth in annoyance as I sat beside him, his phone no longer in his hands.

Y is so annoying. Latch tells me it's because I always pester his twin that's why he acts like that but I knew he was just annoying in nature, that's just it. Z always has his back and it annoys me even more.

"Mari," I heard Z, and my lips quiver.

"What?"

"I have an exam for those two days. Can't you just ask them to change their plans and move the dates?"

I'm not really whiny at most times but I always end up being like this when I am with him.

To be honest, I was being like this because I agreed to go on a trip with my friends but Dad will never allow me. He only trusts our uncle's kids meaning, I won't be allowed unless I drag one of the guys. Z has grades to maintain. He's one of the top students here in school and I don't want to be the reason why he'll miss his exams. That'll be so selfish of me.

Ash will never go with me unless I bring Zamara. Atlantis will be too lazy to even go. I bet she'll just sleep the whole day. And I can't bring the other girls. Y might come along if I bring Elle but that also means Latch will have to come along if I bring her with me, so scratch that. Irish and Louise are too timid and Xander might kill me if his little sister cry.

Just then, Xander arrives with Lennox with him. My brows furrowed as he sits beside me making me scoot a little closer to Z. I felt Z's hand wrapped around my shoulder and I turn my attention to him. I turned behind me and realized that there isn't an empty spot, the reason why he decided to sit with me.

What I am confused about though is why he is always with Xander and why he is suddenly hanging out with us.

My eyes scanned his appearance. He was wearing an off white jumper paired with black pants and a pair of boots. He was gazing in front of us as he watches a few of the students passing by.

I almost flinched when I felt Z's arms tightening and almost pulling me closer to him. I tilted my head when I realized how his forehead wrinkled as he looks at Lennox beside me. Even I was a little confused.

When was the last time I talked to Lennox by the way? Was it at the party?

My lips puckered at the memory of it. I woke up the next day and saw Z sleeping on the couch in my room. Mom scolded me for it. Apparently, Z brought me home that night but I was being too clingy that I won't let Z go. I was too drunk to even remember and when I finally went to sleep, it was already too late so mom called Aunt Max to let Z sleep in or house.

"You guys know Lennox?" Xander stated and I didn't bother answering. I only knew his name at the party and this is basically our third time meeting. Though we had a few exchanges of words that night, he's still practically a stranger to me.

"Our moms are friends and he just transferred. I hope you don't mind him hanging around with us,"

Suddenly, I felt someone staring at me so I turned on my right and saw Lennox looking at us, particularly on Z's hand. I raised an eyebrow and he shakes his head.

"You shouldn't be going to a party without your boyfriend. Don't you even know how half of the guys wanted to hit on you?" he suddenly stated and my lips parted. Why is he so straightforward? And did he actually just thought Z and I were dating?

My cheeks turned red when I heard Y's laughter erupting. Even the others were smiling. What's with today's weather, why is everybody so annoying?

"Marigold isn't my twin's type. She's too hard-headed. She's lucky Z can even tolerate all her bullshi-" he wasn't even able to finish his words because I removed Z's hand on my shoulder and made a dash towards his twin.

"You little piece of shit!" I exclaim as I run for his dear life. I really hate Heron!

We were running around the bench and even Atlantis and Dimitri stopped reading.

"Smack him on the head," Zamara cheered while Xander just shakes his head.

"This isn't a park, you know,"

"I am one, though," Atlantis grins and Xander just pinched her cheeks.

"Y, stop teasing her," I heard Z. Y stopped running and let me hit him on his shoulder. I'm just glad Y still follows Z just because he's still older by a few seconds.

"The day I see you head over heels with someone, broken-hearted and your love unreciprocated, will be the same day I'm going to tease you, maggot," I hit him one last time before turning on my heels to sit beside Z again. I can still hear Y's loud laughter.

"Right, I heard you're going on a trip, Mari. Lennox is going too. Maybe you can go with him. He's going to drive straight after class,"

Immediately, my head turned to his direction to ask but he wasn't looking. Instead, he was on his phone typing something.

"You're going?" I can't help but utter. "Can I tag along?" I suddenly asked. I was too excited to even know someone that my family might know is also coming. I almost forgot we weren't even close and that this guy was very intimidating!

"Wow, look at Mari throwing off my twin as her best friend just because she found a new one, the loyalty," My eyes closed when I heard what Y said. I can feel my anger building up inside me. Normally, I can tolerate Y's teasing but today, I'm about to lose it.

"I am going to kill your brother," I hissed at Z who, I didn't realize was staring at me since earlier.

"Don't mind him. Let's go back to what you were saying. Are you sure you're okay with going with him? That's three days Mari," he sounded concerned and that made my heart warm inside. Though I am always the one to insist that we are best friends. there are a lot of moments when I feel that Z had come to accept the title himself. He's always there for me and he's the only person who can tolerate my attitude. Just how many times had he saved me from all the mess I was in?

"I'm not even agreeing yet. I don't like having her with me. She doesn't have a sense of control with alcohol,"

Z lifted his eyebrow while looking at me.

"That was one time. You know Vodka is not my type of alcohol," I explained before turning my attention back to Lennox.

"And it's not like you took care of me, mister. I was perfectly in control the entire time, mind you," I heard him scoff and I grimace.

I really hate this day. Everything is not going according to my plan and it's getting me really fired up.

Just then, Xander and Zamara stood up to go to their class and the rest did the same including Y, thank God.

"I need to go to my next class," Z muttered and he looked at Lennox who was still sitting beside me. Dimitri is the only one left with me.

"Okay. Mine will start in twenty," I told him. Z normally sends me to my room and he isn't really comfortable leaving me alone because according to him, it's dangerous to leave me alone. I'd say otherwise though. the only reason I get into fights was because of my brother.

He stood up and turned his attention towards Lennox who's still typing something on his phone.

"What time is your class?" he suddenly asked and Lennox lifted his gaze. Like always, his eyes were dark and somehow, I'm starting to get intrigued by his thoughts. Most often, guys easily say yes to what I am saying, except for my friends of course but he, it feels like he doesn't like me.

I heard him sigh before turning his attention towards me, "In thirty, I can drop her on her class if you're worried about this little princess," he uttered nonchalantly and my lips mumbled at his words.

"Thanks," Z answered before looking at me. "I'll fetch you later," before I can even respond, Z started walking away and I was left confused.

Wait, are they ganging up on me?

"I'm not being a princess," I said, annoyed. This incident is really making me feel so upset. First, Y and now I have Lennox. Just why am I being surrounded by guy bitches? "I'm not a child," I mumbled. My heart suddenly felt so heavy. They're making it seem like I am a stuck-up bitch that they need to attend to. I crossed my arms and pouted even more. I am really really really upset now. I hate them. I bite my lower lip and tried my best not to utter another silent protest.

Suddenly, I heard soft chuckles coming out of his lips. I turned towards him and my brows furrowed when I realized that he was looking at my direction.

"Are you making fun of me?"

He brushed his hair backward and I failed to stop myself from following his every movement. He kind of looks hot doing it.

He was still laughing for a few seconds before he finally answered. "I didn't know you're the whiny type. Fine, I'll let you tag along only if your parents agreed to let you. But I'm not going to be your chaperone and follow your every movement. You're a grown woman. Please know how to take care of yourself,"

Before I even knew it, I was already nodding in agreement though I wanted to protest a bit. Z never tells me that I need to take care of myself because he does the job for me. He always takes care of me so I don't really have to worry. But Lennox is the exact opposite of him.

A huge smile emerged on my face.

I really want to be on this trip. Being with this guy wouldn't hurt, right?

Chapter 10

Mari's POV

"You did not just?" my lips parted as I watch my favorite perfume fly like a fucking beautiful stone outside the car, my heart dropping the same time it hit the cement, exploding like a small balloon, and my head snapping back to his direction in a matter of two seconds.

Fuck.

"Hey! Are you crazy? " I wasn't able to stop myself and screamed at the top of my lungs. He had lowered the car's window earlier so the impact wasn't as loud as I anticipated. Still, my eyes were burning in anger.

"That was a limited edition!" I screamed at him and he didn't even bother looking at my direction and had his head leaning on his hand as his elbow rest on the side of the car's window, his right hand still on the wheel.

Jesus Christ! I knew I shouldn't have gone with him. I'd rather be with an annoying Y Heron rather than with this prick.

Yeah, but you had to talk to your father about it, didn't you? All for a fucking trip.

"I told you I don't like how it smells. This is my car and you asked for a favor,"

The beating of my heart is still going wild. I'm about to go ballistic now.

That perfume he so carelessly, and heartbreakingly threw was a gift from Zammy on my last birthday. That's the one thing I like best from her. She knows how to give presents, like good presents and now Lennox just has to throw it outside.

I want to cry and I regret not listening to Z.

I was just at a loss for words, my lips still parted and no word comes out of my mouth at this point. I just can't believe what just happened.

This insufferable human being in front of me is a devil. He's a demon disguised inside a man with a beautiful face but his inside was rotten. He was stinking bad tomatoes and oranges, and everything rotten.

Grabbing my phone inside my bag, I started typing curses, erase them, then started typing again. I'm going to send them to Z!

I hate him. I hate him so much

Instead of answering back, I tried to even my breathing and focus my attention back on the road, my phone still in my hands. Too frustrated, I can't even type proper words!

This wouldn't have happened if Z was with me! So in annoyance, I started tapping my phone again.

"This is your fault! If you were with me, I wouldn't have to stay with this prick for a few days!"

Without even thinking, I hit the sent button. I don't even know why I'm getting really frustrated. Why is he like this to me? I mean, I have only seen him a few times but all those times, he'd been so annoying, so snob and borderline a jerk.

Just why?

Before I can even stop myself, I was already voicing out my thoughts.

"Why do you hate me?" My breath hitches the moment I asked the question. But I didn't falter. I am a *Simons*. People get intimidated by my presence and moreover, people normally like me. Because I am Marigold, shouldn't he be the same?

This treatment is putting me off, to be honest. Why is he like that?

From the corner of my eye, I saw how an annoying smirk slowly formed on the corner of his lips.

Tsk, what a jerk.

"Why? Does it irk you that not every man falls in your charms? Does it bother you that people don't follow whatever you want?"

My lips parted at his words and I can hear my ears ringing. "Excuse me?" I exclaimed. What did he just say?

My lips quiver as I feel my anger slowly building up inside me.

This is just so upsetting! How can he judge me like that?

"You know what? Just don't talk to me," I hissed before turning my attention back to my phone. My chest tightened as I try to stop myself from getting angrier by the second.

I should stop talking to him. He is just a mean human being and I will make sure I won't have to be with him again, ever.

How dare he accuse me like that? I admit that I am used to feeling like people tend to make me feel important, that they like to be closer to me but that doesn't mean I love being treated like that and I want to be treated like that. That's a different thing and him accusing me like I am someone who seemed to be an attention whore or something, really upsets me.

I know I may be a bitch and a spoiled brat to Z, but do I deserve this?

The entire ride, I didn't talk. My heart feels so heavy and I don't think I can enjoy this trip. I checked my phone to see how far we are and I realized we'll arrive in less than five.

Good, I won't have to deal with his shits ever.

So the moment we arrive, I took my things and didn't even bother waiting if he'll help me carry my bags. It's just two bags, nothing I can't handle.

"Simons," I heard him calling me but I kept walking my way inside the place. They rented a whole villa where we can stay and as much as I want to enjoy, I've been too much annoyed I don't think it will be possible for me even smile.

I wish I can have a room to myself, but even that, I don't want him to use it as an opportunity to insult me even more.

"Are you okay?" Shiela, one of the girls asked when she saw me looking outside the window. There was an infinity pool outside and the view was so beautiful.

If this was a different scenario, I'd probably be out there already, in my swimsuit enjoying the sunlight. But No. He had to ruin my day and possibly, my whole vacation.

"I'm fine. Just a little tired from the travel I guess," I told her.

The car ride actually took us five hours, and our flight actually started not even an hour after we took off. So that means I was sulking the entire time, the entire fucking *four* hours.

"Aren't you going to answer your phone?" she added and that's when I realized that my phone has been ringing.

I smiled at Shiela who then stood up from her assigned bed before grabbing my phone, a long sigh escaping my lips. I watch as Shiela went outside probably to check the place.

"Mari..." his hoarse voice greeted my ears and this is one of those times in my life that I was goddamn ecstatic to hear from my best friend.

He probably just woke up because he stayed with me the whole night when I asked him to help me pack my clothes. Which didn't actually happen because he ended up doing it for me while I munch on the pizza he brought. I knew his exams will be during the afternoon so it was safe to ask him to stay.

I was sure it's just past lunch now because we left at around seven in the morning. The moment I heard his voice, everything seemed to just hit me right on because the next thing I knew was me crying over the phone.

I wasn't someone to cry over the phone but I did. I was just so upset. Plus, this is Z. I can tell everything that I want with Z. I can cry to him and he won't mind.

"What did he do?" I heard his stern voice and crumbling sound from his end. I'm guessing that he was getting off his bed.

"I want to go home," I told him not even bothering to tell him what happened. I heard him sigh and for a moment, I wanted to just drop the call and not to worry him.

"Are you okay? Are you hurt somewhere?" he asked and I shook my head in response as if he can see me.

"I'm physically fine but I wanna go home. Can you have Ash or Xander pick me up? Please don't let my parents know," I stated. They might get worried and I don't like that.

He was silent, not even speaking so for a moment I thought the call had ended.

"Z?" I called for him again and I heard him sigh.

"I'll have that arranged so stop crying," My lips pouted and I had actually imagined him with his brows furrowed, looking all annoyed too. His annoyed expression, I love seeing that but Lennox's face, not one bit.

"Try going outside to have fresh air. At least enjoy for a few hours before going back home,"

Eventually bidding goodbye to him along with his constant reminder that I try to shrug it off and that he'll make sure I'll be home in no time.

I stood up and removed my hoodie. I was wearing a grey sleeveless shirt fitted crop top inside and black leggings underneath. I won't even bother unpacking since I will be home in a few hours too. I went to the restroom located on the corner and washed my face. I don't want people to know that I cried.

With a heavy heart, I decided to lay down on the bed set for me after removing my shoes. It's not that cold but my current mood tells me it's better to lay down under a blanket for a while. So I did. If Latch was here, he will pull me out of bed in a matter of five seconds.

I'm going to just lay down for a while and just go outside to find the others. Pulling the blanket even more, I decided to close my eyes and enjoy the silence in the room.

Somehow, I started to calm down a bit. However, fate must have planned something different for me because my plan of just resting for five minutes turned longer than I expected.

My body bolted out of my bed as I realized that I fell asleep longer than I intended. When I looked at the open window, I saw how dark it is outside.

"Shit," I whispered. I hurriedly went out of the bed and went to my bag to get my toiletries and a new set of clothes before heading to the restroom. I did a quick shower and dried my hair. I wore a simple white fitted turtleneck sweater and high waist shorts underneath.

A groan came out of my lips in disappointment. I should have gone out earlier to see the view. Now that made me upset even more. I reached for my phone and realized that I fell asleep the whole day. It's past seven now.

After releasing another sigh, I decided to follow what Z said and try calming my nerves. At least enjoy the villa, right? Plus, it's not like I have to deal with him after what happened. Also, I would have to tell others that I need to go home. Maybe I can just tell them that there was an emergency or something. I'm just not in the mood now.

I tried to be positive as I reach for the door handle but the moment I opened the door, I almost screamed in surprise when I saw Lennox leaning on the wall outside. His hands were tucked inside the jacket that he's now wearing and eyes still focused on my direction.

With his dark hooded eyes, he stared at me intently. He stood properly before walking in my direction.

I checked the surroundings and realized that it's just the two of us. "What are you doing here?"

"Is it too late for me to apologize?" he suddenly asked and I was honestly caught off guard, I wasn't able to respond. "I'm sorry. That was uncalled for," he added and now I was at a loss for words.

Suddenly, I felt the fast beating of my heart. Why the hell is he acting like this now? Did he realize that he was being rude earlier? And more importantly, why am I suddenly embarrassed?

Biting my lower lip, I tilted my head and refused to look at him. Damn, what now?

"It wasn't my intention but I heard your conversation over the phone,"

I crossed my arms at what he said and raised my eyebrows. "Were you here the entire time?" I mean, I talked to Z more than six hours ago.

He laughed at what I said and that made me scoffed. "Of course not. I followed you earlier to apologize but you didn't go out. Your roommate said you fell asleep so I decided not to bother you and asked her not to wake you up,"

"Oh," I tuck a few strands of my hair behind my ears, unable to respond.

"If it's because of what I did, I can buy you a new one," he said pertaining to my perfume. "If it's because of what I said, I apologize. I guess it came out wrong. For what it's worth, I swear it's not how I really perceive you as."

My brows furrowed at his words. "Right. You just said those words out of nowhere. It's nothing, really,"

I started walking along the pathway and heard his footsteps following mine. I won't accept a half-assed sorry nor do I need one.

We didn't talk the entire time and he just continually followed me. While searching for the others, I realized how spacious the villa is. Judging from the rooms I just passed by, the villa probably has at least five rooms. All of the furniture look modern and there was even a huge chandelier in the dining area.

It was when I reached the living room that I found the others. They were all seated on the couch, a bunch of snacks were on the table in front of them. The television was open too, though I am not familiar with the show.

Shay was the first person to notice my presence. "Oh thank God you already woke up. Shiela thought you weren't feeling well," she started before walking towards my direction and pulling me for a hug, a smile automatically showing on my lips.

"Sorry to make you worry. I just got tired of the trip, I hope that didn't stop you guys from doing any fun activity,"

Zara laughed and waved her hands. "Nah, we all took a rest too. Anyways, the guys were outside grilling seafood and meat. We're pigging out babe, I hope you're not on a diet,"

I turned around and realized that Lennox was nowhere to be found. Maybe he also went outside.

We ended up heading outside too. The open yard was huge and there were tables and chairs already set. There was a huge pool too and I was amazed to see the outdoor hanging patio lights around the place. My lips parted when I saw two grilling stations outside in which the guys seemed to take turns in cooking. My eyes caught Lennox sitting on one of the chairs and eyes focused on his phone.

Tss, and he was apologizing earlier but didn't bother waiting for me to acknowledge his apology. He's just a jerk.

In no time, we were all seated around the table. Each of us has taken a plate of our own and started eating.

"Marigold, here's a slice of meat for you. Zamara will kill us if she hears that we starved you," Alex teased and I just rolled my eyes in response. He was one of Zammy's senior if I'm not mistaken.

"Stop making a move on Marigold. It's not like you stand a chance!"

I laugh at Zara's words while the other guys teased Alex. They love doing that. We all continue drinking and eating. Different liquors were already set on the table and I was totally having fun.

"Mari! Mari! Mari!"

"Whoa, go girl!"

My eyes were closed as I chug the alcohol I have. It was a tall glass of beer and I had to drink it straight up because the bottle landed in my direction. I already had three glasses and this was my fourth.

Damn. I'm going to get really drunk tonight, huh?

"We have to go out again in summer," Shiela giggled, already drunk. Her cheeks were already flush red and I feel hot all over.

Fuck, it was an open area but I feel like it's getting hotter and hotter.

The bottle was once again turning and everybody had been cheering so I did the same. We were all standing but my right hand was leaning on my chair for support.

"I'm not yet drunk," I whispered to myself. So when the bottle landed on my direction, a huge smirk form on my lips while they all cheered for my name.

I was about to reach for the glass when my knees wobble a little but Zara was quick enough to support me.

"Whoa," I giggle. "I'm not yet drunk," I assured everyone when they ask if I can still take it.

"Don't force yourself," my eyes snapped on my left when I heard Lennox's voice. I rolled my eyes at his words and didn't bother answering. I took the glass from Alex but before I can even drink it, Lennox grabs my arm. "You're already drunk. Let me have that drink,"

Because of what he said, the others started teasing us.

"Wooh, are you a couple of something?"

"Is that why you were waiting for her earlier?"

"Tss," I scoffed at their words and tried getting off his grasped but he's obviously stronger. The moment I was ready to give up, I suddenly felt a hand on my waist, pulling me a little closer until my body is now leaning towards that person. Despite my current condition, my breath hitches at the familiar scent filling in my system. So when I lifted my gaze, a huge smile emerged on my lips when I saw Z's serious expression. The place got unusually quiet.

"Dev!" I giggled and automatically, my free hand wrapped around his waist as I smile at him. I saw how his expression calmed down a bit and I smile even more.

"You don't have to drink it for her. I got her," I heard him speak and I felt him grab the glass of beer from my hand. That same moment, I felt Lennox remove his hand over mine.

I watch as Z drink the glass of beer in on straight up and I almost cheered when he finished it in one go. Without even thinking, I hugged him even tighter, burying my face on his chest.

God, I'm starting to feel really dizzy.

"Z, we didn't know you're coming. Mari said you have an exam set for today," I heard Zara asked and I lifted my gaze only to meet Z's intense stare. He was staring at me intently and I wasn't sure if it was because of the alcohol, I felt my heart skipping a beat when he suddenly smiled. It wasn't even a full smile but the corner of his lips twitched and that qualifies as a smile if it's Z.

He turned his attention towards them and my eyes studied Z's beautiful face. My best friend is really handsome, huh.

"This little brat called because she wanted to go home. But I know she was looking forward to this trip so I had to ask my professors if I can finish all of my tests in one go. Sorry, it took me a while," the last sentence, he actually said it while looking at me.

"You really are something, Z," they all laughed at what Z said and I nuzzle my face back on his chest.

I didn't know what happened after because I am really feeling so dizzy. Why do I end up getting too drunk these days?

After talking, they continued the game but Z was firm enough to tell the others not to include me so I ended p clinging into him the entire time.

Right, I have Z now. I can have fun all I want.

Chapter 11

Mari's POV

Z!!!" soft giggles escaped my lips as I sat on my bed. I was about to lift my feet but Z stopped me.

I don't even know what time it is right now nor do I care. I lost track of what was happening the moment I clung to Z's arm like a little kid.

Ge'ez, my head is spinning!

"Shiela will stay with me. Please take care of Mari," I heard Zara's voice and I laughed again. Her voice sounded so weird.

My eyes locked at Z's side profile. There he is, my handsome best friend!

"Z, sleep here in my bed. I want to cuddle like last night!" I cooed and I heard Z grunted while Zara's laughter echoed across the room.

"So you were with her last night?"

"Ahm, I packed her things," he explained and I grin after remembering how he removed half of what I packed. It was mostly underwear and crop tops but he said I should consider the weather and packed a few set of shirts and shorts.

"But you cuddle?" I saw her smirking in my direction but I was too drunk to even understand what they were talking about. Z didn't even answer her so I pouted. What's taking them so long?

So out of boredom, my hands reached for his arm and tried pulling him closer, which he tried resisting as he still talks to Zara, who looked even more amused while looking at us.

"We look so adorable, don't we?" I giggle and Zara covered her lips for a moment.

"God, I can breathe now. I mean, I was kind of hesitant to let you guys stay together in one room despite the knowledge of you two being the best of friends, but seeing how Mari is acting right now, I think she would actually throw a fit if I send you out,"

Z's hand reached for my shoulder and pulled me a little. That made me stop pulling him on my bed.

"Me and the guys are used to having sleepovers," he explained which got me a little confused too. Why does he have to explain himself? Does he like Zara?

With that in mind, my eyes shifted towards her direction, a fiery glare blaring through my eyes.

No! She can't take Z away from me! I changed my mind. Z can't have a girlfriend right now until I find someone who can take care of me as he does.

"Z!" I started whining again and Zara just smiled before turning around leaving us behind.

Finally.

The moment she closed the door, I pulled Z's arm and he yelp in surprise as he almost landed on top of me.

Well, technically, he is but he was quick enough to lean his other hand on the bed though so our body won't touch. I grinned at him when I saw how his face scrunched, probably in annoyance. I heard him groan above me and that made me laugh even more. I love teasing him. Normally, he lets me and just smiles. He also let me do whatever I want and let me get away with it. Come to think of it, I can pass as a spoiled brat considering how he was treating me.

My hands cupped his face and I smiled. "I miss you," I whispered and I saw him pushed his tongue at the side of his cheek. He avoided my gaze and I bit my lower lip.

I feel so frustrated. I felt like the people around me doesn't really put an effort to know me. Nor give me a chance to even show the real me to them.

"Today, Lennox threw the perfume Zamara gave me and he basically insulted me. He apologized for it but that didn't make me feel better," I started. I saw how he suddenly stared back at me as if waiting for me to continue. So I did...

"Tell me Z, am I annoying you too?" my lips quiver at the sudden thought. If Z is getting annoyed with me too, maybe people really don't like me. Maybe their judgment of me is true and I'm just being stupid for sulking about it.

My heart felt so heavy once again and for some reason, I wanted to cry.

There are times that I wish my parents weren't celebrities. I hate the fact that I am being judged according to what people think of us without them trying to know us beforehand. That's part of the reason why at some point, I tolerate Zamara's actions whenever she gets into a fight. She's one stubborn ass woman who gets into a fight if she's being insulted.

I heard him sigh and my hands ended up covering my face as tears start to stream down on my cheeks.

Why do many people hate me? It's so frustrating how easily they can hurt my feelings. I am human too. I may appear stronger than most people but that doesn't mean I don't get affected.

"You're not, Mari. I will never be annoyed with you, ever," I heard him mutter and I felt him brushing the tears falling down on the space where it isn't covered by my hand. But that didn't stop me from crying.

Maybe I was simply tired these days that I was too affected. This isn't the first time I heard words like that but why am I sulking like this now?

I felt him move off on top of me and the next thing I knew was my body being lifted on my bed. I released my hands off my face and looked at him, slightly startled. And then I found myself sitting on his lap as he carries me sideways.

"Z?" Despite my drunken state, I was aware of what he just did, and for some reason, my heart fluttered a bit.

"You're not annoying and you make a lot of people smile, including me. Why else would I let you ransack my wardrobe if I hate you?" he started and the glint in his eyes tells me he means every word he uttered.

My lips quivered at his words but nonetheless, I ended up smiling.

"I knew it, you are head over heels of me, huh?" I teased and I saw him smirk. I just buried my face on his chest and wrapped my hands on his body. I love sniffing his scent. It's calming and I love it.

"Or maybe it is actually you who likes me. Don't even think I never noticed how you keep on smelling me, you pervert,"

"Ha!" I scoffed before pulling away from him a little, my eyes caught the naughty glint in his eyes. "You're not exactly handsome-handsome like, the world would stop if I stare at you," I snickered even rolling my eyes a bit.

I had to bite the inside of my cheeks when I said that. Z Devon is handsome. What will you expect to the son of a man who was even hailed the most handsome man in the world? Plus, even aunt Max's face can launch a thousand ships.

"So, am I ugly?" he suddenly asked before leaning a little bit closer than he usually does. My eyes widened at the very close proximity as his lips were too close... Too close that one wrong move, our lips would definitely touch.

I gulped. I can feel his breath hitting a bit of my skin when he tilted his face a little

What the heck? My body stiffened as I feel his hand on my leg moved. Why does my skin suddenly feel like it's burning?

I bit my lower lip when my eyes suddenly fell on his lips. Are they usually this red?

"Answer me, Marigold Simons, do I look ugly to you?" his question came out as a whisper and I swear every hair at the back of my neck suddenly stood up.

Holy - did I drink a little too much? Why is my heart suddenly beating so fast?

"I - ahm," I didn't know why I was suddenly stuttering but my mind was simply blank at the moment.

"Cat got your tongue baby, huh?"

Baby...

He leaned even more until I felt his lips slowly brushed on the corner of my own. I felt chills running through my body and I almost fail to catch my breath.

Oh, God... What the hell is happening with me?

Suddenly, I felt his body moved until I realized that he was laughing, my lips parting immediately.

Was he playing with me?

"Let's get your feet cleaned up first, baby. And brush your teeth at least. You're too tired to go on a shower but you can kill me tomorrow for that," he stated before lifting me up making me cling on him tighter as he headed straight to the restroom.

My eyes were fixed on his face and it's funny how I felt lighter after our little teasing.

Z Devon, he does have a way to make me feel better...

Chapter 12

Mari's POV

A soft grunt escaped on my lips at the continuous sound of the knocking on the door.

Who in their fucking right mind would knock at this unearthly hour?

My eyes squinted as I try to open my eyes. But my eyelids were too heavy to even cooperate so instead of bothering to wake up, I buried my face back on the pillow I was hugging before I was literally distressed by the annoying sound.

But it wasn't even a good ten seconds when the knocking had started again.

"Marigold, breakfast is ready. It's past nine,"

My eyes shot open the moment I heard my friend's voice and that's when I felt my pillow starting to move. In surprise, I quickly sat on my bed, eyes widened as I check my surroundings.

It was the same room I slept in when we arrive. But then I remember the pillow so I turned on my right and my lips automatically parted when my eyes landed on Z's sleeping form. He was sleeping soundly that I was too afraid to wake him up.

Just then my eyes caught his form.

Fuck, why isn't he wearing any shirt? Did something happen?

I was no longer thinking straight that the next thing I knew, I was already reaching for the blanket at the same time that his eyes started to flutter open. And when I started pulling it to check if he was naked underneath, that's when his eyes squinted, a look of confusion written all over his face.

When I saw him wearing pants underneath, a sigh of relief escaped my lips but though sleepy, that didn't get past Z's vision.

Soft chuckles escaped his lips as he slowly moves forward and pulled me by the arms so I can lay back on the bed.

"You know, a normal girl would check herself first if she's feeling any different, if she's wearing clothes or scream," I felt him wrap his arms around me and my lips puckered upon the realization.

"What if I was indeed naked underneath?" he pinched my cheek and I grunted. I can still smell his cologne and it made me feel warm for some reason. I felt him snuggle closer and I closed my eyes.

Yeah, why didn't I think of that?

Calming down a little, I tried to remember what happened last night.

Despite being so wasted, I can clearly remember Z arriving and sitting with us for a drink afterward.

"You still reek of alcohol Mari. Ge'ez," he teased and I tried squirming out of his arms and he just erupted into fits of laughter.

Eventually, he lets go of me and stood up heading straight to the restroom.

How did he end up sleeping in here by the way? Where's my roommate?

Shrugging my shoulders, I went out of bed too, and fixed the blanket. I shake my head a little as I realize that Z didn't even bother using the other bed and bunked in with me. I swear Z was just in denial that I am indeed his best friend but has accepted that fact wholeheartedly.

After fixing the bed, I head to my suitcase and grab a huge jumper. That's when Z went out of the restroom. He washed his face and cleaned up a bit.

"Here, why are you not wearing a shirt?" I snickered before throwing him a jumper he used to own. Of course, that's after I took it out of his closet.

His eyebrow raised at my words as if I said something funny. He caught the piece of garment though and started wearing it. I saw how his muscles flexed at his action.

Instead of avoiding my glance, I openly watched him changed before me, sporting a huge grin on my face.

"Is that a hickey?" I laughed as I saw a red mark just right underneath his collarbone.

Damn, what did Z do before coming here?

The moment his head puff out of the jumper, he looked at me so seriously that I smiled to make sure he doesn't get grumpy early in the morning.

"I was trying to at least wash your feet last night before you get to sleep but you forcefully took off my shirt, missy," he pointed his lips towards my direction and that's when I realized that I was wearing a different shirt now, his shirt from last night.

"Oh..."

I lifted my gaze and gave him a peace sign which he just brushed off.

"You can use my extra toothbrush on my bag," I told him before heading to the restroom to wash my face and do my business. His bags are probably still in the car.

Once done, I didn't even bother changing clothes as both Z and I went outside to have breakfast. And when we did, every one of them are already gathered in the backyard. My eyebrow raised when I saw Lennox looking at my direction, his gaze directed to the shirt I was wearing. I felt Z's arm wrapped around my shoulder so I just avoided his gaze.

I laughed as the girls stood up to hug me. That's when Z walked ahead and pulled a chair for both of us.

"Girl, you were totally wasted last night," Shiela grinned and I brushed my hair with my right hand before sitting beside Z, who, I realized have been putting in dishes on my plate while I talk with everyone else.

"I can't even remember half the shits that I did," I grimaced. I saw Z putting some pickles on my plate and I was about to grab some and eat but he was quick to tap my hand off of it before giving me a spoon.

"Thanks," I muttered then dive right in.

I was just busy eating and chatting with them with Z continuously putting in food on my plate. I saw a piece of a chicken leg and was about to grab it when someone else beat me into it.

My eyes widened when I realized it was Lennox. His eyebrow raised and looked at my direction, "Do you want it?" he asked. I shook my head in response. I was startled actually but I noticed Z putting another chicken leg on my plate. I turned my attention back to him.

"I was gonna give it to you," I whispered and he looked a little surprised but smiled nonetheless.

"I'm full," he answered so I just grinned.

We finished breakfast in no time. After helping out in cleaning, the girls and I went to the kitchen to start washing the dishes while the boys remained in the backyard to have a chat.

"We didn't know you guys are really tight like that, I mean, to the point of sharing rooms," Shiela smiled cheekily while looking at my direction. I was drying the utensils while they wash the others.

My brows furrowed at her words. "You mean Z and I?" I asked. She grinned even more and I laughed.

"Maybe because your parents are all close and that you guys grew up together. To be honest, we all thought the two of you were dating. You were clinging into him way too much!"

I raised an eyebrow at her words. I noticed how they were all exchanging meaningful glances too.

Were they all that curious?

I sigh for a moment and tilted my head. I knew a lot of people are curious about us, about how we all grew up. Besides, we were children of the most powerful groups the world has ever had. Our parents gave a whole lot of different meanings to the world of music, fashion, and even other sectors.

"Well, we're all pretty much close. We always gather around especially since our parents wanted to stick together at most times too. But I guess I was the closest to Z. He is my best friend after all," I told them.

When I turned around, I saw Zara smiling. It was a different kind of smile that somehow, I have this feeling I wouldn't like what she's thinking.

"You don't like him more than that?"

I smiled weirdly at her. "That's Z, okay!" I chuckle. What is she even saying?

Soft chuckles escaped my lips at the absurdity of her words. But in all honesty, this isn't the first time someone thought Z and I were dating.

"I mean, Mari, you two practically slept with each other. Like, you were hugging him last night, clinging into him. Don't you even feel anything for the guy?"

My lips puckered at her words. Weird, why are they even thinking that Z and I can be together?

"Z and I have been together since we were kids. I'm used to hugging him. That's not something new to us. Besides, I'm sure Z sees me the same way that I see him,"

I lean on the kitchen counter and bite my lower lip. Z and I have been friends like forever. He treats me like how he treats Elle. I'm sure of that. Why would he put up with my antics then?

"So..." Shiela started and I turned my attention to her direction, curious of what's she's about to say.

"It wouldn't be a problem if I ask Z out, right? I mean, I know I'm a girl but I like him, so that's okay with you, right?" she asked. Her eyes gleaming and I was off caught-guard.

Suddenly, my mood dampens and I wasn't sure what it is I am feeling. Why am I suddenly getting annoyed? I feel like I wanted to tell her to back off because Z is my best friend but I also remember what I just said last just a few moments ago.

I smiled awkwardly at her and nodded. "By all means hunn. I mean, I can help you set up a date with him,"

Fuck. What the hell are you doing?

She smiled at me in gratitude and I wanna scold myself for even saying that. What am I actually doing? It's not like I can really do that!

Z and I were best friends but anything dating is a boundary we never once crossed. Sure he never had problems with me dating because I was never in a relationship but I never tried meddling with his. It's his personal space and I respect that.

I was startled when I heard someone clearing his throat behind us. I turn around and saw Z's serious expression.

He looked at my direction and I bite my lower lip when I realized how my heart suddenly started hammering inside my chest.

Why do I suddenly feel so nervous? Is it because I am afraid Z will be mad at me?

"Your Dad called. You weren't answering your phone so he rang mine," he stated before leaving once again. He didn't even bother to wait for me or anything.

I turned to the girls and smiled awkwardly.

"Gotta talk to Dad. He can really be annoying if I don't answer his calls," I stated and they all smiled in understanding.

I half-jogged as I try to follow him and I was sure he knows I was struggling but he didn't even stop to wait for me.

Did he hear us?

"Dev," I called his name just right when he entered the room and I soon followed. He didn't answer and just headed straight to the restroom and shut the door.

Fuck. Did I finally cross the line?

Chapter 13

Mari's POV

He is *mad*. That's one thing I fucking realized the moment he went out of the restroom and didn't bother looking in my direction. I was talking with my Dad over the phone but I was too distracted by the fact that Z just went out without waiting for me or even giving me the slightest idea where he was going. He doesn't normally act like that. I mean, *yes* - he acts like that, but not to me.

I am his best friend! Z always gave in to whatever I want. That's how it has always been.

Even when we all went out to visit some places near the villas, he didn't walk with me. Though I was positive that he was still making an effort to check on me from time to time, this is still wasn't what I am used to.

The whole afternoon went by with us not talking. He made sure to keep a considerable distance, and Shiela - asking me to help her from time to time isn't making it easier for me either.

So when the night came and he decided to say and talk with the boys he wasn't even close with, that made me really sad. With a heavy heart, I sneaked in a bottle of beer with me and headed straight to my room.

A long sigh escaped my lips.

What should I do? I am not used to Z being like this to me and it's bothering me so much. The whole two hours, my mind was filled with thoughts of him as I continuously drink my beer. At some point, I even went outside to get another bottle.

In desperation, I reached for my phone and dialed Zamara's number. After three rings, I was startled when I heard someone else answering Zammy's phone. And it's definitely not Ash.

"Yow, Gold," my eyes closed as I heard Y's annoying voice. Even though I can't see his ugly face, I know he is smirking. I'm not even sure I am thankful I'm not seeing him.

"Please spare my ears from your annoying voice and get Zammy for me," I hissed. His laughter rang through my ears, I tried my very best to stop myself from dropping the call.

"She's in the pool. Ash is teaching her how to swim. God knows why they were even bothering. It's been almost twenty years and all Zammy can do is ten percent bubbling while the rest is just her clinging to Ash like a giant squid,"

I tried to stop myself from laughing but I wasn't successful. I can clearly picture what Y stated because it was actually true. Those swimming lessons that they have have been going on for years and anybody can tell that water isn't really Zammy's best friend.

"Just call her coz I need to tell her something,"

"Rude," he snickered before I heard him scream at the top of his lungs and, almost curse when I heard what he said.

"Hey, Yoon Ji! Goldilocks wants to talk to you!!!"

After a good old two minutes of everybody screaming and a few occasional cursing, Y went back to the phone and chuckled.

"Okay Mari, the princess told me to relay your message to her. Now, control your demons and tell me something juicy. I need that as a payment for all the cursing I received from Zam,"

My lips puckered at his words. I debated whether to tell him it's nothing or ask for his help. I don't really know.

But I was damn desperate I don't even care if Z is his twin.

"Okay, lemme rephrase. What did you do this time Marigold?" he asked. His voice turned a little serious, somehow, the idea that Z actually called him came into mind.

I grunted. Puffing air out of my lips, I lay flat on my bed and stared at the white ceiling.

"Z is mad at me. He's not even with me now! I mean, since when was he friendly with other people? He's outside drinking with the others!" I whisper-shouted. I kicked the blanket off of my feet and was about to go full tantrums when I remember I was actually talking with Y.

Soft chuckles greeted my ears and it's starting to be really annoying.

"Did my twin finally got fed up with the great Goldilocks?" he teased and that made me snap. I am just too annoyed to deal with his bullshits.

"You know what? Fuck you!" I hissed.

"My brother wouldn't be so delighted to hear that though,"

"Ughhhh!" By this time, I wanted to pull every strand of my hair in annoyance. I hate Y! His laughter echoed from the other line and that moron is surely enjoying my misery.

"I was joking, Mari. Okay, Z isn't the type to easily get mad, especially not to you. Now, what did you actually did or said before everything went downhill?"

I stared at the ceiling and pondered on the words I said earlier.

Was that enough reason for him to get mad though? I mean, I know he doesn't like it when we meddle on his relationship but I was just answering my friend!

So I told him about it but Y just laughed at my words. This annoying rat!

I rolled my eyes as if I can see his face. Damn, I'd die to smack him straight in the face, oh God.

"You know what, I should have called Dimitri instead. Maybe that kid can actually listen to everything I have to say!" I scoffed, trying my best not to cuss him even more.

After his failed attempts into stopping himself from laughing, he had finally get a grip of himself.

"Before you drop this call though, which I know you're ten seconds into doing it, lemme just ask you something and I want you to really think about it, okay?"

I roll my eyes at his words. I don't even think what he is about to say is anything serious.

"What is it?"

"Can you deal with it? I mean, seeing my twin with another girl?" he started and for some reason, I felt my stomach churning at his words.

Can I?

I've always asked Z to introduce me to his girlfriend but there are times in which I am actually glad he doesn't. I am just so afraid but I don't exactly know the reason.

And now Y asking me the very same question I have been avoiding for so long makes me really wonder now.

"Maybe you're not getting the idea but let me show the picture to you," He was speaking as if he was very sure about something and it's making me afraid.

"Marigold, once Z decides to really date, there's this ninety percent chance that you can no longer ransack his closet..." he started. Just that specific thought gets me.

"You can no longer wear his clothes because no girlfriend would want to see another woman wearing his guy's shirt, not even a childhood friend. Additionally, you can't expect me or Xander to take our exams in one go so we can travel six hours to fetch you. We're not as clever as Z, sweetie."

Shit. He's right. Z normally fetches me especially when I don't feel like driving.

"And more importantly,"

Fuck, there's more?

"You can no longer cuddle with my brother. You can't call him whenever you want. All of those, the things you're used to doing with him, all of those will just be a memory of the things the both of you used to share... In the end, you won't be as special as you are to him. You'll be just *one of his friends*..."

My body slowly shifted its weight until I decided to just sit on my bed. Every word he uttered kept on sinking inside my chest like a damn metal. And it's piercing my heart.

Fuck.

I haven't actually thought of that. No, I refuse to acknowledge that fact.

I heard Y sigh from the other line and for the first time, he seemed to be serious. "Mari, one day, either of you will find someone, someone you guys can't live without. Because it's natural and it is what's suppose to happen,"

My lips quiver at his words and I felt my inside feeling heavier by the second. Suddenly, my heart feels like it's being enveloped with so much sadness and I just wanted to curve into a ball and cry under my sheets.

Will I lose Z? My free hand clutches on my blanket and I have this strong urge to break it and shred it into pieces.

I can't lose him. He's very special to me. He's my best friend.

Why? Why am I this sad?

"Mari?"

My thoughts were suddenly filled with images of Z sitting and chatting with someone else. He would be on the driver seat while I sat at the backseat of the car because his girlfriend was sitting shotgun.

Just the thought of it made me whimper in so much sadness.

"Marigold, are you fucking crying? Oh, shit!"

Before I even realize, I was already crying over the phone, my right hand reached for my cheeks and started wiping off the tears.

Ge'ez, why am I crying? Am I drunk?

"Gold, oh God, Z will kill me," He was trying to calm me down but the idea just keeps on appearing inside my head and it won't stop.

I can't do it. *No*.

"Heron," I called for Y's name, still sniffing a tear.

"I can't let Z go," I whispered, my voice even cracking at the end. Saying those words made me wanna cry even more. I can't see Z with some other girl beside me.

"But Mari, you can't do that to Z. You can't cage him with you because that'll be so wrong and unfair for him. You can't stop Z from finding a woman for himself,"

Hearing those words was almost a slap to my face. I know. But I refuse to accept that fact!

"No! He can't leave me!" I closed my eyes and started crying again. I don't want Z to have someone else. He can't have a girlfriend and now I am sure about that. I won't allow it. I don't like him to be with someone else but me!

Y laughed once again but this time, it seems like he was amused with something.

"Why can't he leave you? You're not his girlfriend. And you don't love him," he stated as if he was so sure about it. "You only love Z your best friend, right?" he asked and my lips parted.

It was as if I was in a daze and I can no longer think straight. His words kept ringing in my ears and I was starting to think that talking to Y is not a good idea.

"Take a rest, Mari. I'm sure Z will be fine tomorrow,"

I didn't even respond when he bid his goodbye. I just sat there in my bed, confused, unsure of what I am supposed to do.

Putting down my phone, my chest started to rise and fall as my breathing started to be uneven. Was it because of the beers? I only had two bottles.

Closing my eyes, I tried to calm myself but the more I try to tell myself that Z won't leave me, more scenarios kept on appearing and it's driving me crazy. That made me cry even louder.

Before I even realize what I was doing, I was already dashing outside. Not even minding how cold the ground was, I run barefoot to go to see.

And when I reached them, I saw him. I saw him talking with Shiela at the side of the pool. Shiela was smiling at him, that kind of smile a girl shows to someone thy like. And it hits me, I'm not ready. Call me selfish but I'm not ready to let go of my best friend.

Why? Why is he talking to her? Z doesn't normally talk with girls. Does he like her?

That thought made a new set of fresh tears go stream like a faulty faucet on my cheeks. My chest tightens as I find it hard to breathe.

"Dev?" I whispered, my voice low and I wasn't even sure anyone heard me because I barely even heard myself. But he did.

Z did. He heard me because it wasn't even two seconds when he turned his attention to me.

His eyes focused on my reflection and his eyes widened the moment he saw my face filled with tears.

I opened my arms and he understood.

I didn't have to talk. Z left the girl he was speaking with and made a dash to where I am. And I didn't wait for him, I ran to him and crashed my face on his chest, my arms wrapping around his waist almost immediately.

"Hey, what's wrong?" He whispered, his voice soft and it sounded soothing to my ears. Hearing him finally talk to me made me cry louder. I felt his brush my back with his hands.

"Sorry, Z. I won't do it again," I whispered. He pulled away from me a little and lifted his hands to cup my face.

"Do what, Mari?"

My lips quivered and I felt my cheeks getting damp with fresh tears. "I won't share you. You're mine. I won't let another girl get close to you Z,"

I didn't even check his reaction and buried my face back on his chest. I don't care if Shiela heard everything I said. I can live without them but I can't live without Z. This is selfish, I know but Z is mine and I am not ready to share him with someone else. With that in thought, I pulled him even tighter, afraid to let him go.

I felt his arms around me once again and that made me close my eyes. The warm feeling coming from him calms me down a little.

"Baby, let's get you out of here. you're freezing," he whispered. Suddenly, I felt my body being lifted from the ground, my arms automatically reaching to his neck. I buried my face at the crook of his neck, afraid he'd let go.

I didn't know why I was still crying despite Z's attempt to calming me down. He was whispering sweet words over my ears but I was too lost to my own emotions.

My eyes were still closed so when he slowly put me down, I clung to him even more, afraid he'd suddenly leave.

"Baby, we're just going to get you clean up, okay?"

That's when I realized that we are already inside of the restroom. Still reluctant, I slowly released my hands on his neck and he put me down on the bathroom sink.

My eyes met his and saw how deep his stares are. I sniffed a little and his hands reach for my cheeks, slowly brushing the tears on them.

"Take a quick shower so we can sleep after, hmmm?" he cooed. He pulled me closer and kissed the top of my head. When he pulled away, I stared at him and asked, "You won't leave me, right?"

I was holding my breath after. What if he says he will? What if he says he doesn't want to be with me anymore?

Z crouched down a little to level his face to mine. He was staring at me straight in the eyes and my heart started racing like a damn horse.

"Never, baby. Besides, Uncle Grey will kill me if I leave you after I do this," In a flash, I watch as his face slowly went closer to mine. The moment our lips touched, my mind went blank.

I was in a beautiful daze as I felt his lips slowly move over mine. Perhaps, it was his sweet scent that made my brain stop functioning, or was it the sweet taste coming from his kisses?

Before I can even stop myself, I found myself following the movements of his lips as I respond to his hungry kiss. He tastes so sweet, so delicious I wasn't able to stop myself from biting his lower lip earning a low growl coming of him.

So sweet... I didn't know kissing like this can make someone go crazy.

Because I'm slowly losing my mind.

I felt him reach for my hands as he guided them to wrap on his waist before reaching for the back of my head so he can deepen the kiss, shoving his tongue on my mouth. A soft moan escaped my lips.

"Z" I whispered. I was drowning. I felt my heart beating wildly and it's like whole damn reptiles were going frenzy inside my stomach. I let out another moan as I felt his tongue meeting mine.

Damn. I was catching my breath but I don't want him to stop.

I don't want to stop. Wtf.

Chapter 14

Mari's POV

Most often, almost half of what I did whenever I get drunk, I tend to forget so it's no surprise that the memories from that night were a little foggy.

Yep. I almost forgot half the things Y told me which I was so damn sure was nonsense anyway since it was from, yeah - Y. I have no memory of talking with Shiela despite the fact that she asked me what was last night all about. So when she hugged me telling me she kind of understood and was half-expecting that to happen, I just nodded my head and didn't bother asking. Somehow, there was a little voice in me that whispers how bad I actually did Shiela but seeing her smile at me genuinely, that made me calm down a little.

How did I manage to find a friend like that? Or maybe she doesn't really like Z that much?

So all in all, we had fun. We enjoyed the trip. Everything was perfect.

Except for the fact that I remember. Yes, I fucking remember everything that had happened between Z and me - the kiss...the cuddling in my bed after...the way he showered my face with sweet kisses until I fell asleep.

Everything was crystal clear in my head. Which puts me into this embarrassing situation.

Fuck.

"I'm not looking at your face, Mari. Remove that jacket or you'll get suffocated," he muttered for the nth time. I can honestly feel my neck sweating despite the max airconditioning inside his car but hell, I won't remove this goddam cover on my face until I reach my own room and scold myself in front of my vanity mirror.

Like, what the fuck! Z and I actually shared a fucking kiss! A steamy french not for a kid kiss and it annoys me how he is so calm about everything!

I woke up with his arms around my waist and like the other day, he was not wearing a shirt. It wasn't even a good ten seconds that I realized that I was wearing his shirt instead.

Then I remember, we were making out in the restroom. I didn't know what has gotten into the two of us but we did it. We crossed the line.

But no, we didn't have sex. Thank God Z is sane enough to stop both of us from possibly being killed by both our parents.

And we were just there, panting trying to catch our breaths.

I still remember that time when my breathe hitches after he removed his shirt and lean a little to give me a quick peck on the lips.

He told me to wash up so we can sleep. Still drown with the ecstasy and of course, a little drunk, I simply followed his words and didn't mind cuddling after, his body warm even though he already took a shower. That didn't stop me from hugging him, and sniffing him, and biting his chest from time to time.

So the next morning when I woke up, I wanted to drown myself into the toilet bowl after realizing that all of Z's hickeys were from me. And that one big mark from the other night probably was from me too.

Which leads me back into this awkward situation, of me staying with him, alone in his car. And what? We still have almost four hours top until we reach home!

Okay, I'm going to die!

The moment I went inside his car, I covered my face with a jacket so I won't see him and he won't see how red my face was. I was just fucking thankful the girls knocked inside our room and like took me outside for photos so I wouldn't have to deal with Z.

But of course, that is after all of their squealing when they saw Z's bare upper body because he's the one who opened the door for them.

I had to really calm down a bit because Zara saw all of Z's hickeys and they were teasing me for it. Even Shiela was laughing like a maniac. It baffles me how she can laugh like that when she said she likes Z. Shouldn't he be angry at me?

So now, I was sure I only have ten minutes left before this stupid act of mine backfires. It's hard to properly breathe.

"If you don't remove that damn jacket, I'm going to dial your father's number and tell him we had sex,"

At that, my hand immediately pulled the jacket off of my face, my head snapping to his direction. And there it was, his beautiful smile that I recently discovered was very alluring. Why did I just notice that?

"Really?" I snapped at him. My brows furrowed but I can't help but gulped when my eyes landed on his lips. How was it redder than my own?

And there it was again, the memory of us kissing, how I was biting his lips...how it tastes so sweet, so addicting, how I kept wanting for more.

"Ahhh!" I screamed. I covered my face in embarrassment. What the hell am I thinking?

I heard his laughter resonating inside the car and I have never heard Z laugh so loud like that. I turned my attention back into him and just wanted to punch his arms.

"Stop laughing!"

He turned back to me and smiled. "You were staring at my lips," he started and reached for my hair and tried pulling them.

This is it. I'm going crazy!

"I hate you!" I shifted my gaze outside of the car while my lips quiver in so much embarrassment. I can't believe I am caught up in this situation.

"You used to tease me. You said you're going to eat me, all those stuff. What now, Mari?"

My eyes closed as I feel my heart skipping like it has a jumping rope inside. Goddamn it.

"There is a reason why it is called teasing, Z. And when did you suddenly get so talkative?"

He just winked at me and I just covered my face yet again.

"I'm going to sleep. Don't talk to me," I rolled my eyes at him and I watch as his tongue made a quick a run on his lower lip.

Good Lord.

So the entire time, I tried my best to fall asleep which I did. Maybe because I was too nervous and still a little tired too so I actually fell asleep.

When we reached our house, it was already four in the afternoon and Z didn't even have the chance to wake me up because my silly brother had been knocking on the car's window, a huge grin showing on his face.

Our father was also there outside, standing, his hands on his hips as if he was actually waiting for us. Something in me started to feel so scared. I felt my stomach now churning.

Why is Dad outside?

Shit, did he found out about the kiss?

With that in mind, my head snapped into Z's direction, who, I didn't even realize has been staring at me for God knows how long.

"You didn't tell my Dad, did you?"

Oh God, what if Dad gets mad?

He shook his head in response. Suddenly, I felt his hand over mine and I look at his face in confusion.

"Don't worry, baby. I got you," he whispered, and before I knew it, I was already nodding my head.

The two of us exited the car and Z didn't even have the chance to open the door for me because Latch did it the moment the door's lock gets lifted.

"Dad was fuming," Latch immediately stated and that got me even more nervous. "Uncle Sky and Aunt Max was inside. Goodluck Dev," he grinned before reaching for my luggage. He left the two of us outside and I was left confused. Dad was already inside too. That's when I noticed Uncle V's car parked a few feet away from Z's car.

I felt chills in my body and I reached for Z immediately. I'm getting so nervous. How did Dad found out?

"Z..." I whispered. I am so scared. I reached for the hem of his shirt. I feel like I am about to cry.

His left hand landed on my back and I lifted my gaze. He doesn't seem so fazed about what's happening.

"Let's go," he gently guided me inside, his hand still on my back and for a moment, I was debating whether I'd ask him to just leave.

But after a few minutes, we saw both our parents in the living room, as if they were indeed waiting for us. I saw mom's understanding gaze but dad's face was blank and for once, I got so scared with my father.

My gaze landed on the floor. I don't want to disappoint my Dad.

"So..." Uncle Sky started. My hands balled into a fist and I am sure my knees are getting weak. "Care to explain what happened, Z?"

"Yeah, what did you do to my daughter?" My dad's voice was stern and that made me look at Z's direction. "You know, the two of you have been best friends and I see you as almost my son too. So I want to know your side and tell me what happened,"

I bit my lower lip. Dad rarely gets mad and this is making me really nervous. Even mom is not talking. Normally, mom would stop Dad but she's letting him. What if Uncle Sky and my father get into a fight? Additionally, I don't want to cause any problem between mom and aunt Max.

"Dad," I started. I reached for Z's hand. I won't let him get angry with Z. I kissed him back so it wasn't entirely his fault.

"I'm talking to Z, Mari. Don't get involved, okay?"

"But Dad -"

"Just let your Dad talk baby," my Mom.

"I won't tolerate-"

"Sir, I -"

"I kissed him back, okay! So it wasn't entirely his fault!" I exclaimed. My grip over Z's hand tightened and I turned to his direction and saw how his eyes widened.

"Don't scold Z. It's also my fault so scold me too..." I added. My lips quiver, trying my best not to cry. I can't let my Dad get angry with Z.

I didn't even realize that the room got quiet. All I can hear was the sound of my heart beating. It's going crazy inside my chest and somehow, I feel so glad that I speak up.

"Shit, I'm telling this to everyone." we all turned or heads to Latch who's grinning like a mad dog. He was standing at the bottom of the stairs, his phone now on his hands.

"Okay, we were just concern about you crying over what Z did, but okay, we can work with that!" Aunt Max exclaimed and I turned my attention back to my father who's face turned pale. My mom was laughing and Uncle V's eyes were wide.

Confusion filled my expression as I listen to what Aunt Max just said. What did she mean by that? Isn't dad mad because we kissed?

"It's fine, baby. Just go to your room and bring Z along with you while you're at it. But please don't do anything outside of kissing yet, okay?" my mom grinned and I started whining in embarrassment.

"Mom!"

It was as if my father gets awoken from shock and was about to stand but Mom pulled him back, hands covering my father's mouth.

"Go," she instructed, and out of nervousness, I pulled Z's hand so we can stay away from my dad.

"I'm proud of my son,"

"Max, Oh my God!"

"I know! This needs an emergency meeting. I'll call Chaeng and unnie,"

"Skskskd"

"Shut up Simons,"

I didn't even catch half of what our parents were talking about. but that didn't make me forget about kicking my brother who's still laughing.

The moment we entered my room, I let go of Z's hand and threw my body on my bed.

Ge'ez! What a mess!

My eyes were closed and I was trying to calm my nerves. My dad is so annoying! My lips pouted at the thought.

"Don't mind Dad, Z. He's just overreacting," I started and opened my eyes. I saw Z leaning on my bedroom wall, eyes focused on me.

His eyebrow raised at what I just said but what he responded to made my jaw drop straight to the floor.

"He's not overreacting. I'd probably even be worse if I learn that our future child is already kissing a boy,"

What did he just say? Did he just said 'our future child'?

He did, right? -----

Chapter 15

Mari's POV

"So, how was your trip?" I heard Atlantis asked when she saw me on our usual spot and sat on the chair beside mine. She was wearing a cute blouse with a unicorn print in the middle, her hair was braided on one-side and I'm pretty sure aunt Zanaya did that. Atlantis looks like a modern princess, like her beautiful mom.

"It's fine" I muttered before putting my attention back on the book I was reading. I have an exam later so I need to study.

The entire incident that day was so weird. Z and I didn't really talk inside my room. For some reason, everything seems so awkward between the two of us. I don't even have the courage to ask about the incident because it scares me.

I mean, we're the best of friends! Best friends don't kiss! And the fact that I kind of told him that I wasn't ready for him to have a girlfriend says a lot, like really a lot.

When Z and I went down, almost all of my uncles and aunts were there except uncle Raze and Aunt Joy. I heard they were on a business trip or something.

The moment Dad saw us though, he immediately stood up and was about to say something but Mom covered his mouth once again. They were all acting so weird, to be honest.

Uncle Skyand Aunt Max were cheering Z who just groan in response. Not fully understanding what those reactions from the elders meant, I walked with Z outside and when he reached for my cheeks to bid goodbye, I swear my knees got weak like jelly. And the moment he said goodnight, it suddenly felt different.

I don't even understand. What changed? I'm pretty sure that one kiss wouldn't change everything between the two of us. But something did and I was goddamn afraid to find out what it is.

Z went home right after and I just stayed inside my room to sleep.

At one point, Latch came inside my room to pester me but I was too sleepy to listen to whatever he was saying.

"Ahm, Mari?" I heard Atlantis once again but I didn't bother lifting my gaze off of my book. The amount of focus I need to do just so I can understand this shit is testing my patience. It was because, since last night, the memory of that kiss keep on bugging my system.

"Yeah?" she seemed to have something she wanted to say but she sounded hesitant. Her voice is a little thinner than usual.

"You see-" before she can even finish what she wanted to ask, Y's annoying voice filled my ears. We were in our usual spot and a soft grunt escaped my lips when I saw him walking along with Zammy and Louise.

Zammy was sporting a fitted denim dress that compliments her figure, her long black hair was tied in a half-ponytail. Louise, on the other hand, was wearing a longer laced dress that reaches just right above her knee. I smiled at the two but gave a glare to Y.

"Who do have here? Ahah! The girl who apparently shared a kiss with my twin!" I rolled my eyes at what he said and focused back on the book I was reading.

"Is that true Mari?" Zammy asked the moment she sat on the empty space in front of me. I lifted my gaze and realized that the three girls were indeed waiting for my answer. Y, on the other hand, was sitting on the table, his right hand resting on it, leaning forward like he's waiting for some good news coming from me. To be honest, it looks like they were all looking at me like I am some criminal on a trial.

I tried my very best to act as usual. The fact that everyone knows about it now irks me a little. I am going to kill Latch later. He's such a tattletale.

"None of your business guys, ge'ez, especially not yours, Heron," I snickered pointing at his annoying face and they all laughed at my response. He was wearing a black button-down shirt paired with denim pants.

I bit my lower lip. My hand is sweating a little. After that creepy smile my mom showed me earlier this morning, I should have known that these guys would tease me as well.

"Are you and Z dating? Mari, I need to talk to the two of you after class today okay? And no more kissing!" My father asked earlier, his big bright eyes wavering and I wanted to laugh actually. He seemed nervous about something. He seemed to want to say something more but mom stopped him.

I just shake my head then went ahead and drink the milk mom gave me before leaving them so I can attend my classes. The fact that my father decided to wake up early so he can ask me that question makes me realize how it must have been a big deal to him.

My father is a heavy sleeper. Mom said Dad must have been trying to make up from those sleepless nights they had when they were still active as an idol.

"You two look good together, unnie" Louise whispered, a little shy and I didn't have the heart to snap at her. This little sweetheart is too precious, and she's too pure for me to lash on.

"We were simply drunk at that time. It's not a big deal," I answered and Zammy giggled at my response. Z and I haven't really talked about it and I don't really know what to tell them to be honest.

"Really? Y told me you were crying though. What was that about then?" I lifted my gaze and gave a glare to Y. He was grinning and I just want to rip that stupid grin off his face.

"I was drunk and I guess we fought. You all knew Z and I rarely have a fight,"

"So that's you two kissed and made up, is that it?"

I gritted my teeth at what Zammy said. Zammy has a knack in annoying people. She sees things differently yet she can't see how whipped Ashton is with her. Yeah, like, the whole world knew except her.

"We didn't. Ugh! Just forget about it, please! Stop listening to what my brother is blabbering about, okay?"

"Tss, so you don't want to date my brother?"

"I really hate you, Y. You know that, right? Why don't you go find a girlfriend to annoy or something? You always tease me, I'm two seconds away from killing you, just know that," I hissed and he just smirked.

"I know you love me, Mari. I'm your future boyfriend's twin brother. How can you hate this handsome face?"

"Shut up,"

"Kiss and make, ki-kiss and ma-"

"Yah!" I glared at Y and I was about to hit him if I didn't hear what he said next.

"Oh, Z! I just said hi to my future in-law!" Y even stood up, waving his hand to someone behind my back.

I gulped.

Fuck.

I looked back real fast only to be greeted by Y's laughter.

"Do you miss my brother? I can call him for you!"

"Ahhh!"

They all laugh at my reaction and I just went back to reading.

I really hate them.

A long sigh escaped my lips. How long will I have to endure this?

Thankfully, they all started opening their books. Atlantis was also reading something while Louise sat on the bench opposite ours so Y can help her with her assignment. Zammy was on her phone and I didn't bother asking who she was texting because I am two hundred percent sure it was Ashton.

Thirty minutes had already passed when a bottle of drink landed a few inches away from my book. And it wasn't even a second when a familiar scent filled my system. He smelled like lavender and cotton candy. Or was I hallucinating?

But it was more than enough to keep me out of focus, to keep me floating. As if on a trance, I lifted my gaze only to be greeted by a pair of beautiful orbits that I was used to seeing since I was a kid. Yes, I have seen them a thousand times but why do they keep getting brighter these days?

And his hair, it was a mess but it suits him. Suddenly, my eyes landed on his lips. Like always, it looks so soft, and redder more than mine. It was parted a little like it was inviting. My gaze shifted back on his eyes and my stomach started churning at the intensity of his stare.

And then as if we were in a movie, he slowly leaned forward...until his lips landed on my cheeks. I was sure it was just a mere second but I felt shivers going ballistic all over my body. I was electrified and my heart was going crazy. It was as if it was goddamn eager to jump out of my chest.

Slowly, he backed away and the moment he whispered those words with a smile on his lips, I nearly lost it.

"I miss you..."

Oh, God. What game are you playing?

Chapter 16

Mari's POV

"What? Walk naturally, Mari. Breathe..." I heard him whisper, his hand now resting on my waist. And damn, the amount of self-control I had to exert just to ensure he wouldn't feel my body shivering, Latch will tease me if he sees me.

How can I breathe when all I can think about now is what happened that night?

I tried to forget about it. We're best friends. We've been like that since forever. And now just because of a kiss, my mind seemed to stop functioning.

"What do you mean?" I fake a laugh. "I'm fine, Z. I'm at my most natural state,"

He raised his eyebrow but didn't utter a word.

After what he said earlier, the rest of the guys started teasing us. Zammy and Atlantis even stood up to occupy another table so we can be alone.

The only reason why Heron kept his mouth shut was because Z gave him a stare. This

And that's when all the awkwardness started. I can no longer focus on what I was reading. Instead, every breath, every movement, every little thing that he does, my mind gets aware of them. It tingles my whole system, and it's starting to betray me.

The smell of his sweet scent, his gentle and delicate movements, his shallow breathing, and the way the wind blows and graces on his beautiful face...

Ge'ez... What the hell is going on with me?

So when it was time for me to go to my next class, I was so stiff. Like usual, he was walking along with me, my books in his hands but my mind is elsewhere.

Suddenly, I get very anxious with all the stares we were both getting when I was so used to it before.

This isn't anything new. People use to stare at me, at is, simply because of our last names, of we are.

But what changed?

The moment we reached my next class, breathing had started to become a struggle.

"Hey..." he whispered. I felt his hands on my shoulder just right after I took my books from him.

Why? Just am I feeling this way?

I felt his right hand on my chin and my eyes met his.

A long sigh escaped his lips.

"If you're acting like this because of what happened, can you forget about it for now?"

I gulped.

"Yah, I'm okay. What are you talking about? I wasn't even thinking about the kiss. Why would I think about it? Yeah, wh- are you laughing?"

He bit his lower lip and my eyes can't take my eyes off it.

He wet his lower lip with his tongue and my lips parted immediately. Suddenly, images of us kissing each other flashes before me. The way he bites my lower lip, the sound of me moaning and making out his name, the way my hands started pulling out his hair...

My breath hitches at those images and my knees wobble in instant but he was fast enough to wrap his hand around my waist.

"Careful,"

His breath hit the back of my neck and automatically, a soft moan escaped my lips.

Our eyes suddenly met and my eyes went wide.

"Yah! It's not what you think!" my cheeks blushed red and I wanted to hit my head out of stupidity.

Why the hell am I even thinking? I look like some lunatic, a pervert! It was as if I was the one imagining things, oh my God!

I was startled when he leaned forward and kissed me on my forehead. I was sure I heard a few girls squealing!

"I know you have an exam later. I promise we'll talk about it after so stop thinking too much, okay?"

I would have said that we have nothing to talk about. What do we have to talk about? It's not like he has feelings for me.

But as if I was in a trance, I started nodding my head in response.

My eyes closed a little and I had to breathe to calm down my nerves.

But he did it. He pulled me in, engulfing me in a warm hug, electricity started running along my spine.

Yeah, something is wrong with me.

But I felt it, my nerves starting calming down a little. So I did what I was used to doing, I buried my face on his chest while I do a simple breathing exercise.

Right, why will I feel so awkward? I mean, this is Z. It's just him, my best friend. Maybe I was just getting confused because I've never kissed someone before. I was surprised.

He tells me he misses me before too. And it's not like a kiss is something I should be crazy about. I mean, I kissed his cheeks from time to time. And we were both drunk then.

Right, that's just it. I told to myself.

That made me feel a little better. Why am I this bothered?

Ha. This is just Z. Just Z.

So when he pulled away from me a little, I tried to muster my sincerest smile though I swear I'm still shaking a little deep inside.

"Just meet me at home. You no longer have classes, right?" I asked him. I saw how his eyes waver for a moment but I didn't give any thought about it.

"Bring two boxes of pizza tonight because I need to study for another exam," I smiled at him and he messes with my hair a little.

That made me feel better.

In a few minutes, I was already taking my exam. This time, I felt lighter.

"Tss, Y's dead once he pesters me once more," I whispered.

Thankfully, I was able to study well despite all that had happened earlier.

"Bye, Mari!"

I wave my classmates goodbye as I gather all of my belongings.

So when I finally went out of the room and saw Lennox standing on the wall opposite the door, my brows furrowed. He was wearing denim jeans and white hoodie.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. My grip on my books tightened.

We haven't really talked that much since last time.

My eyes met his gaze, his black orbs pulling me in once again.

Slowly, he walked closer to where I was standing.

"I was waiting for you..." he whispered.

"Why?"

My eyes landed on the paper bag in his hands.

"I threw your perfume so it's just right that I give you a new one,"

My lips parted at his words

He reaches for my hand and gave it to me.

"You didn't have to. And, you already apologized for it,"

"But you were upset about it. Again, I'm sorry,"

I was caught off-guard at what he just said. It was true that I was upset about it especially since it was a gift from Zammy but I wasn't expecting him to replace it.

My eyes study his expression. A smile escaped my lips. "Thank you,"

I didn't think he'd really come and talk to me again, moreover, apologize when he already did.

But what he said next shocked me the most.

"Can I court you?"

Chapter 17

Mari's POV

Hiding my face using my right hand, I smiled awkwardly to Lennox, who, in the entire period we were together, kept staring at my face which made me really uncomfortable. Not to mention the weird stares we keep getting from the students passing by.

So, after he asked me if he can court me, I wasn't able to give an answer. It was like, I was caught off-guard and the words he told me didn't really sink in. I mean, I was indeed shocked about what he said. We started off really bad.

"Again, why?" I asked for the nth time. I just don't understand why he suddenly wanted to court me. Of course, I felt overwhelmed too. The fact that someone, with a face as surreal as his, asked for my permission.

A small smile escaped his lips and I avoided his gaze.

Ge'ez. Why does he look so handsome? I mean, just because he told me he wants to court me doesn't mean the way I see him has to change. But why the hell it was changing?

Suddenly, his jaws seem more defined to me. His smile seemed to be so captivating and I get so shy just looking at him straight in the eye.

Do I like him?

"I like you so I want to know you better. You've been asking me that question since an hour ago..." he chuckled and I scratch the back of my head.

"It's because I don't understand! It's not like we were in good terms or something. From the first time we saw each other, I don't remember anything that shows the slightest idea that you like me. And this!" I pointed out the bag that he gave me. "You even threw my perfume! So, like, how do we talk about that?"

I quickly grab the cup in front of me and took a sip of the hot choco I ordered. The two of us ended up in a cafe near the school, one reason why a lot of students had been looking at us. Part of the reason was, people rarely see us with other people than my friends. And when I saw friends, I meant the BlackTan kids like what they call us.

"That's not something I can't compromise with," he answered.

Putting down my cup, I wipe the invisible sweat on my forehead. What he did next made my heart do a mini-somersault. With a handkerchief on his hand, he leaned a little and started gently wiping my forehead. My hair was up on a loose ponytail and that made it easier for him to do that.

My lips parted at what he did which made me put down my hand a little slower than the usual.

I turned my head a little and that made him moved back. When I looked at him, he smiled once again and I felt something kicking inside my chest.

Ge'ez.

Every second that passes, I feel like I'm getting nervous even more. A long silence took over and I just don't know what to say.

Do I say yes?

For some reason. I feel like this, him, I feel like it's different. I've had suitors before and I remember telling them to ask for Dad's permission. But now, why do I feel so scared to tell him the same words?

Was it because I have this feeling that he will really ask for Dad's approval?

"So..." he whispered, breaking the silence between us. "It's already past seven, let me drive you home?" he asked.

"Ahm, I have my car, thanks..."

"I'll fetch you tomorrow then since I'm going to start courting you..."

I covered my face in panic. "Oh, God..." I uttered in helplessness. Why the hell am I this indecisive?

"Hey, you don't need to decide now if you're not ready," he mutters in pure concern. I lifted my gaze and stared at him helplessly.

"Can I do that?"

"Of course." he smiled.

I don't even understand how I was able to manage myself and got home. The moment I reached the garage, I saw Latch smiling creepily.

"Come here, you idiot. You told everyone what happened, let me just kill you!" I growled at him the moment I get off my car. But my little brother surely knows I can't hurt him. He just walked towards the backseat of my car and took my bag and my books.

"It's not like I told them a lie though. Besides, knowing how Dad and Uncle Skyknows about it, it's just a matter of time before the rest of the guys would hear about it too,"

"That's why you told them yourself, is that it?" I swung my arms on him and pretend like I was giving him a headlock while we walk our way inside our house. He was chuckling and I did the same.

"Why are you home though, don't you have a date or something?"

"Nah, I realized that it's fun to see how your love life will go so I decided to stand back and watch for the meantime," after he said those words, he made a dash and went inside the house while I mutter him sweet curses that Dad won't be happy to hear.

"Latch!" I screamed the moment my feet stepped inside the house only to be greeted by the loud noises in our living room. My brows furrowed when I saw all my uncles and aunts inside, drinking.

My lips parted at the sight of my father twerking. I shake my head a little, giving up internally. This isn't a new sight actually.

"Yah, Grey can really copy how Storm hyung twerks!" Uncle Seth was laughing hysterically. Aunt Zanaya was with him, clinging into his arms.

"Stop that Grey!" my mom was dying of laughter. All hell broke loose when Uncle Storm, with the possibility of being drunk already, stood up and twerked with my father.

"You got home really late," I almost yelp in surprise when I heard Z's voice. I turned around and saw him leaning on the wall a few feet away from where I was standing. His voice was deeper than usual and for some reason, he looked a little annoyed. What's his problem?

"Yow!" There was a couch near him and I saw Y grinning. He was eating an apple while looking at me. Then there is Xander who was leaning on the one-seater chair, also looking at me. Suddenly, I got a little nervous. Why are the guys here?

"Why are you all here?" I can't help but ask. Z walked forward and I gulped. Suddenly, my heart started beating rapidly, like how it does whenever I remember that kiss we shared.

I brushed those thoughts away from my mind especially after he leaned forward and gave a kiss on the cheeks, something that I should be used to. Y stood up too when we came and was about to kiss me on the cheeks but pinched his chest which made him yelp. He kissed me anyway, while Xander just stood up and messed my hair before sitting back on the chair.

"You're so unfair, Marigold. You don't physically hurt my twin like you do to me!" Y started whining and I just pouted.

"He doesn't t annoy me as you do!"

"Yeah, right. I don't kiss you as he does too, huh," he teased and I swatted his hand when he pinched my cheek. I was already sitting beside him, Z no longer around.

Where did he go?

"Lennox was courting you?" I heard Xander asked and I turned towards him immediately.

"How did you found out?" I whisper-shouted, afraid that my father or any of them will here.

Xander smiled smugly, "Everybody knew about it, Mari. We even saw photos of you guys on a date,"

I turned towards Y who was chuckling. "You got Z pissed off. He was waiting for you here since two hours ago and you went out on a date, you sneaky little girl,"

My eyes widened at his words, "He knew?" I asked appalled. I don't know why but I suddenly got so nervous.

"So now you know why my brother looked a little pissed,"

"But why?"

Y raised an eyebrow at my words as if what I just said was funny. He turned towards Xander and sigh in defeat. "Please, X, can you please enlighten this lady over here,"

Xander chuckled and that got me annoyed even more. Why do they act like they all know something that I don't? "You guys are annoying. Where are the girls?"

"Upstairs in Latch's room. They were having a party on their own but your guy was too pissed off we decided to stay with him while he waits for her girl who, apparently, went out on a date,"

"I can tell her what she wants to know Xander. Stop giving her ideas..." I turned around when I heard Z's voice. And I wasn't sure what is more shocking, Xander's words which didn't really sink in, or seeing Z with a bouquet of flowers in his hands.

"Z..." I whispered. Before he can even say a word, my father's voice echoed across the room and that made my system go frenzy.

"Okay, Z boy. Sit down with us here and ask for my permission. I know Marigold will probably allow you to court her but this is something we-your uncles- talked about back then. You gotta undergo an initiation young Z," my father slurred but every word he uttered was like a bomb in my ears.

And then my eyes landed at Z.

"Z?" I whispered.

And then Z's smile caught me off-guard as if confirming everything.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner but Mari, I like you," he started. "I like you so much I'm willing to cross that line between us and cut our ties as best friends,"

My breath hitches at his words...my heart almost stopped beating and I wasn't sure what to feel.

What the hell?

Chapter 18

Mari's POV

"We did not sleep together, Dad,"

Dad's eyes squinted a little as he studies my expression. Z had long gone home since he woke up earlier this morning. That is even after Mom asked him to stay for breakfast.

"Stop pressuring her, Grey and sit down before I hit you square in the face,"

My dad gave me a last glance before he sat back in his chair. He can never ignore the words of my mother. Latch smirked but still continued to eat.

A soft snicker came out of my lips and before focusing back on my cereals.

"He should have slept in Latch's room and not yours,"

I raised an eyebrow at his words and look at mom.

"Grey, you carried the boy to Mari's room last night saying something about Latch snoring so he better sleep with Mari,"

I checked Dad's reaction and almost laughed at him as he looked like he wanted to fart or something.

"Thankfully, you put him on the couch instead of my bed," I added. I could have said that sleeping next Z is nothing new to me especially since we slept on the same bed before but seeing how Dad's face had been turning paler and paler, I decided to keep that to myself.

"If you're that worried about him, why did you made him drink too much that he can't even walk straight,"

My Dad's eyes widened. Yep, the same bunny eyes Latch has and the whole world was once captivated. Or perhaps until now.

"Yah! me? It was his father who gave him multiple shots!"

"Dad, you did half the job. Do you remember giving me my own glass?" Latch Chimed in and I shake my head a little. Dad's eyes widened. Latch was just a little over seventeen.

"You gave me one too, three shots to be exact. You were too drunk, Dad. You, Uncle Sky and uncle Storm were twerking in the living room. Do you even know that Y was recording everything?"

My father gawked at my words. Last night was really a sight to see. Our uncles made everyone drunk, Aunt Irene had to pick them up and drive them all home. Thank God, we really don't live far from each other's places.

"What are you doing?" Mom asked Dad, her brows furrowed as my father frantically typed on his phone.

"I'm texting Mono hyung. I can't possibly take all the blame on this," He was so adorable, and I can't help but laugh. After all, he's their baby.

After our meal, I went back to my room so I can prepare to go to school. My eyes drifted back on the couch Z had used last night. My cheeks blushed red the moment I remembered his words before Dad not so kindly pulled him towards the elders. By the end of the night, Y, Xander, and Latch were drinking with our uncles too.

I didn't really get to talk to Z and after what happened, I honestly don't know what to say. My hand reaches my chest as I remember how nervous he looked while holding those flowers.

I gulped, my body shivering with just the mere thought of it.

I have never seen Z that nervous his whole life. Not even when he was trying to shake off aunt Max when he enrolled him on a ballet class when we were young. She thought Z wanted to do it. I'm not even sure how aunt Max thought Z wanted that but she ended up laughing when she heard that Z said he's dropping the class the moment his mom was no longer around.

Aunt Max apologized to and Z afterward with Uncle Skysmirking altogether. Both his parents were laughing over the mishap. It turns out, Aunt Max misheard something.

They have a very cool family if I may describe it.

Shaking those thoughts, I went inside my restroom to do my stuff. I have classes in less than two hours.

Humming another of my favorite songs. I took my time showering. I wanted to clear my mind.

"Why?" I lifted my head and let the cold shower wash away my worries. My heart feels heavier than it usually does since last night.

To be honest, I don't really know what to do and I'm just too lost.

Why is Z suddenly doing this? I mean, we've known each other for too long, even before I started to count. He is my best friend. Sure we shared a kiss last time but I was already in the process of pulling myself together.

Without even realizing, I started touching my lips, that kiss I thought I already forgot suddenly bugging me now.

"Why did you let him kiss you in the first place? Why do you have to be that jealous best friend and started to be so clingy?"

My eyes closed as I wipe the water off my face.

And then I remember Lennox, how he asked for my permission... How he didn't try acting differently towards me from the start and how he never tried pleasing me just because I am a Simons.

I turned off the shower and sigh. Despite the evident coldness, I was starting to feel numb.

Settling for tight-fitting pants this time and a red tank top, I was on my way to the school bopping over some indie song on the radio I didn't know the title was.

Dad was giving me so many tips for dating needlessly. From the corner of my eyes though, I saw Mom behind Dad, waving her hands as if telling me that Dad sucks at it. I wanted to ask why she still chose him though but decided not to argue. I knew Mom and Dad will just end up getting all mushy and that will really make me cringe.

The moment I parked my car, I grunted internally when I saw Lennox leaning beside his own, a few meters away from where I parked mine. And since my car wasn't heavily tinted, I can clearly see how he was smiling just by looking at my direction.

And what I hated, even more, was the fact that he looks dashing in a white long jumper that he pulled upwards. His tight-fitting pants partnered with black boots makes him more appealing as he stood there, crossing his arms.

"Oh God, Mari!" I whispered to myself. I rested my head on the steering wheel.

Fuck! Why am I feeling this way now?

Should I tell him not to court me? But what should I tell him?

"Ah, Dad!!!" I started whining.

And how about Z? I can't tell him not to court me. Despite the fact that I don't really know what I truly feel for him, I also have this fear of our friendship getting ruined in case our relationship doesn't work out.

I was startled when I heard the sound of knocking from the outside. My eyes widened when I saw Lennox raising his eyebrows. He was looking at me amused and I wanted to kill myself for it.

Why am I foolishly making myself stupid in front of him?

Gathering my things, I went off my car and he was quick enough to get my books from my hand.

"You didn't have to do this. Don't you have a class?"

I was startled when he reached for my left hand and intertwined it with his. I stopped from my tracks in surprise and tried pulling away from him a little but he didn't let me.

I quickly checked our surroundings and almost cursed when I saw a lot of students looking at us.

My heart was beating rapidly I was afraid it'll jump out of my chest any minute.

"Yah!" I hissed at him in panic but he just winked and started walking once again.

"Are you crazy?" I asked him, my other hand trying to hide my face but that didn't make me feel better.

Before we can even turn a corner, the sound of my phone ringing caught my attention. I stopped from my tracks making him halt as well. I wanted to get my phone out of the left front pocket of my pants but he refused to let go.

"Oh my God." I glared at him but he just shrugged his shoulders. "I can't believe this,"

I struggled to take my phone out and when I saw Z's name, I visibly froze in front of Lennox. Suddenly, I felt my body shivering and my heart immediately sunk straight to the ground like it was forced thrown there. Why am I suddenly feeling so guilty?

I met Lennox's stare and before I even knew it, I was already answering Z's call with my eyes locked to the man in front of me.

"Where are you?" I was startled when I heard Z's stern voice. Again, it was like something inside me was going wild. Perhaps it was because of last night?

For some reason, a huge lump seemed to have gotten stuck on my throat.

"I-In my c-class?" I didn't know why I stutter but I did. Why is it suddenly hard to breathe?

I was even more shocked when I heard his next question.

"Are you sure?"

I got silent for a moment, my eyes drifting back to Lennox and I's intertwined hands.

Fuck.

And I did. I fucking lied to Z. I lied to him when I never did in the past.

"Okay..."

I can hear how dejected he sounded and it scares me. There was something in his voice that makes me so nervous.

"Where are you?" I asked. I feel like I needed to know at least.

"In my class too," he answered.

Lennox raised his eyebrows as if asking me if the call will take longer.

"I'm hanging up. Enjoy your meal later," he added and unlike how he usually does, he didn't wait for me to end the call. For the first time in my life, Z cut our phone call from his end.

My chest clenched painfully. I feel like I did something wrong.

I stared at my phone for a few seconds. Why does it feel like I did something horrible?

And why did you actually have to lie, Mari?

"Let's go?" Lennox whispered and I nodded. My heart feels heavier and heavier.

It wasn't even ten steps when I saw Y walking past us. He didn't call me like he usually does. It's impossible that he didn't notice me because he knew me too well. And he told me it's pretty much hard not to notice my current hair color.

Why is he alone?

"H-Heron!" I don't know why I got scared of calling his name. I thought he didn't hear me because he did a few more steps before slowing down, then finally turning around. He looked at me like he was bored. The usual playfulness I was used to seeing in him no longer present.

"Simons," he answered. I felt chills at how cold he sounded. I wasn't sure if it was simply my imagination but his eyes landed on Lennox and I's intertwined hands.

I gulped. *Fuck.*

"Where's Z?"

He didn't see me, right? He didn't.

He tilted his head a little and chuckled. "Weren't you just talking to him thirty seconds ago?" he asked, a smirk now forming on his lips.

"He was with you?" I asked confused. Y knew I just talked to his twin. *If Y was just behind us, then?*

He nodded.

"He told me he's in his class! He lied to me?" I asked confused.

Y's faked his laughter. He was looking at me like I grew another head. "Are you serious?"

I didn't respond and I watch him brushing his hair backward. "You lied to him too, Simons. The golden rule, huh?" he chuckled. He gave Lennox a salute before turning his back once again leaving me in a mess.

So Z saw us? He knew I was lying...

My eyes closed for a moment.

Oh, God. What do I do now?

Chapter 19

Mari's POV

"I'm fucked up," I whispered as I nonchalantly threw my phone on my bed before proceeding into pulling my hair out of frustration.

"Is he mad at me?" I sat down, my lips puckered and I have never wanted to wipe that annoying smirk my brother has in his face as much as I do right now.

Latch lifted his arms and stretched them, he raised an eyebrow at my words.

"You're his best friend. You very well knew how Z hate it when people lie to him. You knew that's one of the reasons why you first fought in the past. It's like, do the stupidest thing in the world but never lie to Z. Even Dimitri knew Z hates it when people lie to him,"

"It was not a big deal!" I reasoned. "He's not my boyfriend and I'm not dating Lennox too,"

"I said you lied. I never said he's mad you were dating someone else," he snickered and that made me shut up a little. He has a point though.

After that incident, everyone in the group found out what happened.

First, photos of me and Lennox holding hands circulated. Second, a few students heard what Y said and it spread like wildfire. And three, Z decided that it's fun not to talk to me and it's been what, eleven hours! It's past nine and I won't be able to sleep without talking to him.

"Y isn't responding to my messages too. I asked him where his twin was but he just left me on seen. I guess he knew you were asking. Sorry sis, I tried!" he grinned.

Heron does that. He may be playful but he never does anything that will make Z upset. He shuts up when his brother tells him to. And he gets affected whenever Z changes his mood. Maybe it's a twin-thing. Z watches over Y too, like he's always there to protect his twin.

"Check your phone because Zammy is bombarding me with messages," Latch rolled his eyes and I grabbed my phone to check on it. I've seen her messages earlier and all she did was congratulate me for finally fucking up. That asshole.

"What did I do so wrong that even she was scolding me?"

"You lied to your best friend. That's what you did,"

"I was nervous, okay? I mean, how do I tell him that someone else was courting me too? Plus Lennox grabbed my hand!"

Latch raised his eyebrows, "When did Z ever get mad to you for something that will make you happy?"

"Huh?" I asked confused.

"Z loves you. That has been established the moment he informed you of his feelings the other night - though to be honest, almost everyone already knew. But, what I'm trying to say is, Z will never force himself to you. You know he will always put your happiness first, *always*,"

His words hit me straight in my chest. I feel so guilty and I don't know if it's because that I lied or because I never told him about Lennox.

Latch went out of my room and I ended up staying up all night. I can't sleep a wink and I swear the bags under my eyes will have a field day tomorrow.

Morning came and I barely had gotten any sleep.

"Honey, you look like you ate something funny. Did you sleep?" mom asked out of worry. I sat down on the couch and grab the nearest cushion and hugged it.

I feel so lightheaded and that's not a good thing.

"Z won't talk to her,"

I turned around and glared at my younger brother who seemed to be annoying me a lot these days.

"How about you shut up?" I snickered. Mom laughed at both of us. Latch sat beside mom and hugged her.

"Where's Dad?"

I looked at Mom and she smiled. "He went out for a jog. Raze oppa came here with Xander,"

"Why is Dad so competitive about his body though?" Latch asked and Mom chuckled.

"It's their way to bond. Anyways, what do you mean Z won't talk to your sister?"

I saw Latch lean and whispered something to our mom.

"Yah!"

Mom's eyes widened. "You cheated?" she exclaimed. Her hands were on her chest as if I actually did something horrible, which I'm starting to feel like I really did.

"Can you stop telling people stupid things, Latch Justin!" I threw him the cushion in my hands which he just swatted away. In the end, he just stood up and headed to the kitchen, that is after he gave me a wink.

He's just so annoying!

My mom cleared her throat and I released a long sigh.

"It wasn't like that Mom, okay. Z called me asking where I was and I said I was already in my class even though I wasn't,"

"And?" she asked as if she was very sure there's more into it.

I closed my eyes for a moment. Somehow, I find it so hard to tell everyone now what happened because then I'd hear how it was my fault yet again.

"I didn't tell him because Lennox - I'll talk about him later mom -" I stopped her when I saw how she was about to ask, "Lennox was holding my hand,"

"Oh," her lips was left in an o-shape and I saw her grab her phone.

"So your hands were intertwined?"

"He just grabbed my hand and just lead the way. I didn't know what to do! I haven't even allowed him to court me!"

"Juicy..." she giggled but still urged me to continue. I swear my Mom is weird sometimes.

"Yeah, so it turns out Z was watching from behind, and yeah, he caught me lying. I don't lie to Z..." I said the last words in a whisper, unable to lift my head and meet my mom's gaze.

"Your Aunt Max said Z went out to workout though. And he isn't acting weird or anything. Maybe he isn't mad,"

"Mom! Z answers my call every single time. Like, if he doesn't, he would call me once he sees it. That's Z. That's how he is... That's how he was to me..."

"And so? Z is just your best friend. If you have that Lennox guy, you have to start getting used to being away with Z,"

My eyes widened. "Mom, I don't like Lennox!" I suddenly exclaimed.

"You sounded so sure about that honey, so you like Z then?"

My lips parted at her sudden question. Fuck. I didn't even realize I was too quick in deciding whether I like Lennox or not. I mean, I was sure he looks attractive and yeah, I guess he has that effect on me too. But I don't think I can live without Z as well.

"I'm not sure..." I answered. I suddenly feel so helpless. Why did things turn out to be so complicated?

Mom stood up and I was left all alone. Now I feel even more conflicted and I don't know what to do next.

I don't have classes so I ended up just sleeping the entire day. I didn't even bother taking a bath.

So when I heard the sound of knocking on my door, I was half debating if I should open it. But I did since it isn't stopping.

And yeah, my prick of a brother greeted before me, his annoying grin spread all over his face.

"WHAT?" I asked in annoyance.

He looked amused but smirked anyway.

"You have a visitor. I suggest you go down immediately because Dad has been all over him. And wash your face. You drool in your sleep," he teased and before I can hit him, he was already quick to run away from my sight.

"I hate that kid..." I whispered. But then I just realized what he just said.

Of course, Z can never be angry at me. With that in thought, I quickly washed my face and brushed my teeth. I just grab one of his clothes from my closet and wear a pair of short shorts. Why is Dad acting like a strict parent these days?

With a huge smile on my face, I was almost running down the stairs so I can see him.

"I knew you c-"

My words were cut off midway the moment my eyes landed on the person Dad was talking with.

Because there, in all his glory, was Lennox, with a bouquet of flowers in his hands and a small teddy bear on the other.

Fuck.

I hate teddy bears.

Chapter 20

Mari's POV

The following days were excruciatingly painful. I never knew not being able to talk to him for days will kill me.

Lennox came to our house and asked for Dad's permission to court me. And of course, dad had to call his entire squad just for the sake of it. Uncle Sky, much to my surprise was smirking, saying something about having a good competition. Uncle Storm came in super annoyed though. He even smacked my father when he came in. Zammy said her Mom had to wake up Uncle so he was pissed off.

They were the living room and I wasn't even able to properly talk to Lennox too. For one, I hate the fact that he came to our house without telling me nor asking for my permission. Things haven't been working in my favor these days too. And the fact that I had to deal with all of these dramas right now is making me stress even more.

I don't even remember how Lennox was able to get home. I feel like one of the kids had to drive him home because Dad had gotten him drunk too.

Latch was having the best days of his life seeing me so stress.

The next day, Dad asked me about Lennox and I just don't have the energy to tell him things about the man because I don't exactly know Lennox too.

The girls were all talking to me but the guys seemed to have made a pact and I haven't been seeing them lately, except Dimitri who came into our house the other day with her mom.

It's been a week now and I'm really having a very hard time. I can't call Z now because I don't even know what to say now.

I know I lied. I know I did and I am aware that he hates it, but I am so clueless now of what to do.

And I miss him. I fucking do.

"Where are you?" Zammy called. I was just getting off my car then. I headed straight to the entrance with my books with me. It wasn't even two minutes when I saw Lennox once again. A long sigh escaped my lips.

He was walking towards my direction and I ended up stopping midway and decided to wait for him instead.

"Can I call you back?" I told Zammy before ending the call.

"Do you have a class?? I uttered, the moment he stopped in front of me. He shook his head in response so I spoke once again. "Can we talk?" I still have at least one hour to waste before my first class.

Lennox raised his eyebrows but nodded nonetheless. When he moved forward to take my books, I just let him and didn't want to have an unwanted discussion about it.

We ended up in the same cafe we were the first time he asked for my permission.

"I haven't seen you these past few days..." He started.

I bit my lower lip and had my attention back on the frap that he bought. "I was just home after my classes,"

That's true though. I stayed at home for straight two days because I don't have classes. Then, during those times I had, I stayed in the library away from most people or go outside during my vacant so people won't see me. Then I'd go straight home after.

"You weren't answering my messages, and calls,"

I looked at him and stared at his black orbs, the very same ones that made me feel uncomfortable ever since day one. He was sitting on a chair opposite mine. He was wearing a gray shirt, black pants, and a pair of sneakers.

I was at a loss for words. I don't really know why I called him and what I wanted to tell him. All I know is that I am confused about what is happening.

"You're nervous..."

I smiled timidly at him.

"If I'm being honest, I'm not really sure what to tell you. I mean, things had gotten out of hand since so..."

"So you want me to stop?"

My lips parted at how nonchalant he just said those words. I stared at him and he just chuckled.

He leans forward and had his chin resting on his hands. "It's okay, Marigold. I kind of figured that out since we were at the villa. But I was kind of hoping I still have a chance but I guess, I finally know the answer,"

My lips quiver at his words.

"I wanted to give you a chance though," I whispered, my gaze now back on my drink.

"But it's a fight between me and him,"

I gulped.

"Z is my best friend," I whispered. I don't even know if I am telling it to him or more to myself. Because Z is really my best friend. But why does it feel so weird calling him my best friend now?

"Really?" he raised his eyebrows and I wasn't lost. "Is he just a best friend to you?" he asked and I wasn't able to respond.

What do I say at this point?

He leaned back on his chair, but his gaze still on me. "If Z suddenly calls you and introduces you to his girlfriend, what would you feel?"

Why is everybody asking me that question? Why is everyone assuming that Z will introduce me one?

"He won't do that," I said, suddenly annoyed. He looked at me amused.

"Why though? Hypothetically, he can and someday, he would,"

My hands balled into a fist and my heart started hammering inside my chest. Just the mere thought of losing him is making me lose my cool.

Suddenly, my phone started ringing, a video call coming from Atlantis.

My brows furrowed. Atlantis doesn't really video call me if it isn't important.

"Lan?" I greeted after answering. But Atlantis and Zammy were like fighting over the phone so I wasn't able to fully understand what is happening.

"You wouldn't believe this, Z is walking with a girl!" I heard Zammy screaming from the background and the next thing I knew was the camera zooming in a specific direction. It was a little far but I knew every bone in Z's body. I can recognize him even if he's a thousand miles away.

And indeed, he was walking alongside a girl, whom I don't really recognize. They were back facing us so I can't see her face.

"I guess Z found a new girl, Mari. So now you can just date that Lennox guy," Zammy added and my heart dropped on the floor.

Fuck.

She's joking, right?

Chapter 21

Mari's POV

"Why the hell are you crying?" Y asked, his brows furrowed as he came to our usual spot. He stood in front of me, his eyes wandering among the people who had been staying with me. I'm not even surprised by how he found out.

I skipped my classes because I won't stop crying. Lennox went back to the school with me but as Zammy and Atlantis saw me, I just ended up crying the entire time. Lennox had to go to his class but I don't even care.

"Who made her cry?" Xander came and sat beside Atlantis.

Atlantis scratch the back of her head and wasn't able to respond.

"I didn't do it, idiot. I haven't even talked to your sister for a week," Y said as he talks on his phone.

Was that my brother?

My gaze landed on my lap. I was wearing black leggings and a yellow crop top which I paired with a denim jacket.

Why is Z dating another girl now? I mean, didn't he ask for my permission and said he will court me?

"I'm hanging up. Whatever," I heard Y answered.

"Fuck, Ashton's coming. Why did you call him?" Y turned to Zammy who just grinned.

"Because I need a ride anyways. What's he coming here two hours earlier?"

"You do know that Ashton has a job, right?" Xander asked.

"Why is she crying?" I heard Louise's soft voice. And before I knew it, she was already hugging me.

It looks like someone left a message in our group chat about me. I'm betting it was Zammy.

Instead of answering, I ended up crying even more.

Fuck, why can't I stop?

The moment Zammy said those words earlier, I have never felt scared like this my entire life. Sure I have thought about that before, especially when we were in the villa but half the time, I was drunk. And the other half, I was so damn sure Z won't stop talking to me.

By this time, I can see a few people looking at our direction so I turned to my right so I can hide my face to Louise.

"How do you make her stop?"

"What even happened?"

"She just came here with Lennox and then the next thing we knew, she was bawling her eyes out,"

"Did he hurt her?" I can hear the annoyance in Y's voice.

"I don't think so," Atlantis interjected. "Lennox was trying to coo her and make her stop crying too but she won't,"

"Huh? What's her deal then?" Y asked and I pulled Louise closer and cried silently in her arms.

"I want to go home..." I whispered. I don't think I have the energy to attend any more classes. My heart feels so heavy right now and I bet my eyes were swollen from all the crying.

"Are you guys sure Zammy didn't smack her or something?"

"Or let me just hit you for real Heron and we can all die happy?"

I wasn't looking but I was sure Zammy was smiling when she said those words.

Soon enough, Ashton came and as always, a lot of students were looking at him. He already graduated but he's still popular in our school.

Actually, he may be the most popular among us kids since he's the first in our generation. He got a taste of the limelight especially after he was introduced to the public, though I was pretty sure everybody tried to keep him off the public's eyes as much as possible. But growing up with famous parents will never be easy.

To be honest, we all had training and lessons for it. When we are at the age where we start getting curious about why we were getting so much attention, our parents would sit down with us and explain it in the simplest way possible. It's something every one of us had to go through.

So fuck those people who keep saying kids like us had it easy. Because it wasn't. It never was.

Ashton took me home along with Zammy and left my keys with Xander. He said he'll drive it home after his last class.

"Are you sure you will be okay? Do you want us to stay with you?" Zammy asked, concern laced on her voice. She was wiping the tears on my cheeks as we stood just right outside our house.

Even though Zammy acts harshly sometimes, she still the best in taking care of us.

I shake my head in response. "I'll be fine. I'll just shower and rest, probably be asleep the entire evening,"

Ashton went out of the car and gave my stuff, "Do you want us to have a drink?"

I tried laughing off their worry. I look stupid crying when they don't even know the reason why. And what's even worse, I can't tell them the reason because, why the hell should I be crying anyway?

Mom and Dad weren't at home when I came so I just went inside my room, took a bath, and dried my hair. The moment I went inside my walk-in closet; I feel like crying all over again after realizing that more than half of my shirt are Z's. Now, I get why Aunt Max always calls out my Mom for it.

Fuck. Mom must have saved a lot.

Wearing the last shirt, I took out of Z's closet, I tried to get some sleep which wasn't really hard. Maybe because I cried a lot. Besides, I'm starting to feel hot too.

"I heard she cried," I heard my mom's voice but my head really aches a little so I kept my eyes closed for a moment, feeling her hand gently brushing my hair.

"Did you ask the kids, why?" Dad's worried voice filled my ears and I wanted to open my eyes and tell them I'm fine but I feel like I don't have any energy left in me.

"Grey, I think she's running a fever,"

I blacked out half the time my parents were talking with each other. All I know is that at one point, Mom woke me up so I can eat and drink meds.

"Baby..." my lips puckered when I heard mom's sweet voice. I just finished the food the porridge she gave me. It wasn't much. I guess Mom knows I don't really have any appetite. But then again, don't we all lose our appetite when we're sick?

I stared down at my hands and wasn't able to speak. I know I got them worried.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked.

I shake my head in response. I can't tell my mom how weird I have been these days. How the hell can I tell her that it's boy problems when all I should be doing now was focusing on my studies?

I'm starting to feel like I am just a disappointment to her and Dad.

"Oh baby, if you need someone to talk to, your Dad and I are here, okay?" she whispered and my eyes closed when I felt her kiss my forehead. She lets me lay down on my bed while she brings the tray of my finished food outside.

I turned to my side and was glad Mom turned off the lights.

Somehow, I'm starting to feel even sadder each second that passes by. My lips started quivering and I feel like any moment, I will start crying again so I closed my eyes.

Just then, the door on my room opens. I don't have to guess who it was though because not a minute passed and I smell Latch's perfume.

"You okay, sis?" I heard him. He sat on the corner of my bed but I didn't turn around. I just want to be alone. I didn't even bother opening my eyes.

I heard him sigh.

"Goodnight, sis," he whispered and I felt him getting off my bed. I wasn't sure if he was hesitating but he left the room anyways. I'm pretty sure he'll be back though, probably to give me a glass of milk which he knows I enjoy especially when I feel so down like this.

I hate Latch half the time but we both know when to act like a brother and a sister to each other when we have to.

And I was right, it wasn't even ten minutes when I heard the sound of knocking on my door before it suddenly opens.

It's kind of new he was knocking though.

The light in my room opens but I didn't bother opening my eyes.

I felt his presence getting closer and even heard the sound of the glass when he put it down on my bedside table. He then sat on the space before me, pulling my blanket closer.

For some reason, my stomach started churning and a familiar scent suddenly fills me in.

My heart started beating rapidly. It was going crazy inside my chest I was afraid it'd jump out.

This presence, I knew this was familiar. But it wasn't my brother's.

"Get well soon, baby..." I heard him whisper. The sound of his voice sent chills all over my body and I have never missed hearing his voice as much as I do now.

Before I knew it, I was already crying once again...

Fuck. I miss him. ----

Chapter 22

Mari's POV

Hearing him speak, I simply lost it. This time, I wasn't drunk but I was probably feeling a little dizzy due to the medicine but I'm sure as hell I was god darn happy when I heard his voice.

So I lost it.

I started crying and I couldn't hide that from him. I covered my face and cried.

I was having a breakdown. The thoughts of losing him started filling my mind, that moment I saw him with someone else, those days I wasn't able to talk to him and hear his voice... Not being able to see him and the fact that he didn't really contact me between those days...

"Fuck,"

In a flash, he was able to scoop me from my bed and the next thing I knew, I was sitting on his lap, my body wrapped around his arms as I bury my face on his chest.

"Shh, baby, I'm here..." he whispered

I was crying there, to the point that it has gotten so loud so I wasn't surprised the room burst open.

"What's happening?!" my father roared in anger when he saw me crying.

"Grey, let them talk," I heard Mom. They were exchanging banters and at one point, I heard Dad saying something about his little girl crying and I felt so bad getting him worry.

My Father can be so playful but I know he'd go crazy if it's about me and Latch.

Mom must have convinced Dad because they both went out after, closing the door so Z and I were left alone.

"Baby, stop crying... Please... I hate seeing you cry...", he was brushing my hair with his hand and I felt him kiss my forehead.

Somehow, it calmed me down a little but I was still crying.

I removed my hands off my face and wrapped around his body tightly, afraid that he'll go if I don't hold into him.

And then, he removed his hand on my head and started wiping the tears on my cheeks.

I was hiccupping, having a hard time catching my breath as I try to calm down and stop crying.

"Good girl..." he whispered. He was just cooing me, whispering sweet words that started to melt my heart.

How he can easily calm me down beats me. His touch calms my nerves and just hearing his voice makes me feel at ease.

I have never felt how impactful Z's presence to me until now. It's like he can easily take control of my emotions. Like, losing him is like losing a piece of me too.

When I finally stopped crying, he effortlessly lifted me and had me seated properly so he can see my face well. And then, his hands reached for my cheeks, cupping them fully while drying the tears on my cheeks. I was still sniffing.

"Why were you crying?" he asked softly. My lips quiver as I try to avoid his stare.

I bit my lower lip and wasn't able to respond.

A long sigh escaped his lips. "Did he hurt you?" I heard him ask.

Wait, is he talking about Lennox?

With that in mind, I shook my head to answer.

"Then was it because you weren't feeling well?"

I didn't give any reaction. It is true that I wasn't feeling so well but that's mainly because of those ideas that had started to cloud my thoughts.

"Then..." he started. I felt his hand on my chin as he guided me so I can look at him. "Was it because of me?" those words came out as a whisper. It was as if he was having a hard time too. My lips quiver and my heart feel like it's about to burst.

Before I knew it, my hands reached for his neck as I hug him. I buried my face on his shoulder and I was crying once again.

He pulled me closer as he gently brushed my back as if trying to calm me down.

"I'm sorry baby... I'm sorry if I made you upset...sorry," he stopped what he was doing and just hugged me tighter.

"I miss you..." my heart clenches at his words. It was as if he was struggling like he was having a hard time too.

"You don't even know how hard it was not to keep myself from seeing you. But I don't want you to feel pressured. Seeing you with someone else made me realize how I am willing to let you go, as long as you will be happy..." he whispered. My eyes closed and I wanted to cry even more.

"I was trying to take my time, conditioning myself so I will be ready to see you holding someone else's hand again... I wanted to be ready if I'm going to let you go..." he added and I can no longer take it. I pulled away from him a little, my hands still in his neck while his hands were on my waist for support.

Why does he have those thoughts in him?

"Y-you said," I take a deep breath before speaking once again. "You said you were gonna court me. Why were you giving up?" I asked. He looked taken aback at my words. His lips parted and I noticed how red they were again.

"Well, I thought you liked him," he looked confused for a second before swallowing hard. "You allowed him to touch your hand and you even lied to me. You will never do that unless you really like him," he avoided my gaze and that made me bite my lip once again.

"So you avoided my calls and refused to see me? Do you even know how hard these days have been for me? I -" my voice cracked at the end and for a second, I wasn't able to speak. "I feel like going crazy because I can't see you. I miss you so much," finally, I was able to say those words.

I hugged him once again, unable to face him now.

"I'm sorry I lied. I didn't do it for him, or because I like him. He just held my hand and wouldn't let go. I was in a panic and when you called, I just couldn't say those words to you..." I admitted.

He pulled me away from me a little and tried meeting my gaze, "Why?" his voice softened and my gaze landed on his chest.

"I don't want you getting hurt..."

He was silent for a moment. None of us spoke and I wasn't sure what that silence meant for either of us.

"So... you were crying because you miss me?" he asked and I didn't hesitate to nod.

"And because I was jealous," I added, my voice was too small he had to lean closer and asked again.

I swallowed the huge lump on my throat before repeating my words. "Zammy said you were with a girl and she was video calling me. She said I can date someone now because you were dating someone else so I - I got jealous and cried,"

I saw him bit his lower lip and I was mesmerized.

"What you said at the villa, do you still feel the same. Do you not want me to be with someone else?"

I gulped.

What should I say?

He cupped my cheeks once again and made sure I was looking at him. That made me nervous even more.

"Are you jealous as my best friend, or is it more than that?"

My lips parted at his question and my heart was doing so many things inside my chest. It was so hard to focus especially since he was looking at me like that.

He was looking at me like he loves me...

Fuck.

"Will this help you decide?" he lean forward and kissed me on my forehead. My eyes closed automatically. It was a slow kiss like he was being careful and like I am so precious to him. Then he kissed me again, this time, on my left cheek...then to my right... And then the tip of my nose...

And then I felt it, his lips grazing the side of my lips... I felt my body shivering from that sudden contact.

My eyes opened and I saw his hooded eyes staring at me like he was pulling my soul outside...

And I understood right there and then...why I was acting this way... Why it hurts so much...

Before I knew what I was doing, my hands reached for his cheeks, cupping them like what he was doing on my own. And in a second, I crossed that little space between us and found my lips pressed into his.

He was startled by my action, but I didn't stop. I started moving my lips over his, his sweet taste making me go crazy.

And I knew, the reason why I was jealous...

It wasn't just because he was my best friend.

Chapter 23

Mari's POV

There are five things I realized after what happened.

First, kissing is an effective way to stop someone from crying.

Second, my Dad is such a pain. The moment he can no longer hear me crying, he immediately barged into my room so it's not my fault why, *in his exact words*, he almost had a heart attack because he saw his daughter making out with a guy.

Third, I really have a very cool mom. She was able to make Dad get out of my room by simply screaming out his full name, insert the word "*fucking*" in between. Though I swear Dad was acting like a silly child, stomping his feet while glaring at Z. I didn't get off his lap though. I was too drained from all the crying, plus the kiss so how can I? And I don't really want to.

Fourth, I like kissing Z. I like the feeling of his lips with mine. Heck, I like him, that's just it.

And lastly, Z is the most precious in the world.

After Dad went out of my room. He kissed me once again before making sure I get to sleep comfortably.

He promised to see me tomorrow. I wanted him to stay but he said he's afraid we might have to bring Dad to the hospital if he sleeps beside me so I kind of agreed because I was also feeling guilty.

I drank my milk and Z left after I fell asleep.

Dad was sulking the next day though. I was feeling better but still running a mild fever. I saw Dad but he just avoided my gaze, his lips pouting and he just looks so adorable. Mom said Dad barely slept. And that Dad had woken up Uncle Skyas early as five in the morning, insisting that they actually need to talk.

He was making everything seem so serious but I like it that I wasn't keeping any secrets from Dad.

"Z, in under any conditions, can no longer stay with you, alone in your room," he commanded. Latch was laughing hysterically at Dad's seriousness though. I can never take Dad seriously when his bunny eyes showing even when he is mad.

"Fine, I'll just stay in his room then," I teased and Dad chokes on his food. I bit my lower lip as I try to stop myself from laughing out loud. Mom was laughing her ass off too. It's fun to tease Dad but I love him so much.

I spent my whole day in my room and Z messaged me the entire day. During his vacant, he tried calling me but the guys were too loud, and they were teasing him so much so we just ended up messaging each other again. I slept in between due to the medicine though and Mom also talked to me in the afternoon.

"I'm trying not to be strict to you because I trust you, baby. Z is almost my child too and I know he won't do anything that will hurt you - deliberately. But you have to remember that you two are still young and I know you both have so many things in your lists that you want to achieve," she said to me coolly. She was lying down with me on my bed and it was the weirdest conversation I had with her but I wouldn't have it any other way.

"And your Dad, you know your Dad loves you right? He's just being overly dramatic. He always camps in my room too back when we were having our secret relationship," she chuckled and I covered my ears in case Mom says something nasty. Because she does sometimes, it's horrible. I don't want to know how he and Dad had coitus or whatsoever.

"Mom, please spare me the details!" I whined and she just laughed.

"Are you two official now?"

I bit my lower lip. "Not yet Mom. We haven't really talked about it, to be honest. He wanted me to take a rest last night,"

She turned her head on my direction and saw her doll eyes that made millions of hearts flutter, especially dad's.

"Z is such a sweet man. He won't force you if you're not ready..."

I pouted a little, a thought came into mind. I've been thinking about these ever since the villa but I refused to accept that we will really go there. But since things are happening now, they might as well lay everything on the table.

"Mom, what if it doesn't work out? Z and I had been best friends for so long. What if-" I wasn't able to finish my words because it got stuck on my throat. Because just the mere thought of it scares me. To be honest, that is one of my fears. I don't want to lose Z in the end just because things didn't work out.

"Baby, stop thinking about those 'what if's'. Think about what will make you happy now. And if you're scared, then make it work no matter what,"

"It's not that easy, Mom,"

"It's also you who's making it difficult,"

A smug smile show on her lips, as if she was sure she said something amazing. She hugged me so tight and I fell asleep in her arms.

When I woke up, it was already seven. I fixed myself and went down the stairs and I wasn't even half the stairway, I can already hear Dad reciting some weird memorandum shit. Who is he talking to?

"Curfew is at ten. It's either you go out or stay here. And you two can't stay inside Mari's room,"

"Grey, you do realize you were sneaking in inside Tokyo's room back then too, right?" I heard Aunt Max speaking.

"It's not the case right now!"

"Oh, c'mon! I can enumerate the things you did with Tokyo and -"

"I was way over twenty at that time!"

"But you were still acting like a kid then,"

"Really, Tokyo? You're not backing me up?" I heard my Dad's voice, he was starting to get upset.

"What now, young Z?" My father raised his voice and I heard everyone laughing at my father's frustration.

"I will respect your rules sir," I heard Z's voice and my heart fluttered a bit. A small smile escaped on my lips.

Oh God, I just saw him last night and even talked to him earlier but why do I miss him this much?

"Thank you very much. I hate your father, by the way," my father snickered. He seemed to look at someone else because his tone actually changed. "Hyung, just remember I'm dropping honorifics once your son breaks my daughter's heart, okay?"

"Whatever floats your boat, Grey," Uncle Sky answered.

I know Dad was just panicking. Maybe because he was the youngest and people always look out for him. So now that he has someone to look over with, he's starting to really feel pressured. Plus, he loves me to death - that I know.

Unable to handle my father's antics and adorableness, I decided to show myself to them. My arms wrapped around my father's waist as I hug him from behind.

"Dad..." I cooed. I felt his body loosening up from the tense and I hugged him tighter. Everybody was sitting on the couch and only Dad was being frantic, walking back and forth.

"Why are you up? You're still sick, baby " he whispered. He wrapped his arms around me too and I saw how his face softened. My father must have been so stressed since last night. It easily shows on his face whenever he is thinking too much.

I smiled at him and hugged him tighter. "You know I love you, Dad, right? I love you and Mom, and I will always love you, and cherish you, and love you so so so much forever, right Dad?" I whispered, I looked into his eyes and pouted. I am feeling really warm and I am just so happy I have him as my father.

His eyes closed for a moment, a soft grunt escaping his lips. "I hate the fact that you got your mom's ability to make me crumble. Damn, I hate it. I hate that you have already grown up," he whispered. When he opened his eyes, I saw how it was starting to get moist.

"Dad, why are you crying?" I whisper-shouted, unable to handle my own emotion. Before I knew it, I was already crying too.

"Yah!" We heard Aunt Max screaming, her voice cracking too. "They're not yet getting married, I hate you guys, I don't want to cry!"

Dad kissed my forehead and before I knew it, he was already letting me go. He smiled at me and I kissed his cheeks. Mom just gave me a wink and soon enough, the four of them were drinking in the living room while Z and I decided to walk around the garden.

The moment we went out, he removed his jacket and put it on me to keep me warm. I was only wearing a shirt and a pair of shorts.

Before I can even say anything, he reached for my hand and engulfed me in a hug.

"It wasn't even that long since I last saw you but I missed you so much, baby..." he whispered, his right hand on my back while the other behind my head. He was hugging me so warmly; I have never felt this contented on my life.

"I missed you too..." I didn't bother hiding what I feel.

"Baby..."

"Hmmm?" I closed my eyes as I enjoy his warmth all over me. I automatically smiled the moment I realized that him calling me baby seemed so natural to both of us.

"I know I have always been just a best friend to you in the past and I don't have any plans on changing that. I realized it would be harder for you so instead, I want to add the role of being your boyfriend in your life. I can be both. I can be everything you need me to be, will that be okay with you, baby?"

My stomach just felt like Anacondas just swarmed inside it and my knees are almost shaking.

Holy Shit. Is this how loving Z feels like?

Chapter 24

Mari's POV

A yawn escaped my lips as I try my best to keep myself awake but every time I try to open my eyes, they automatically close too as if they have their own brain.

It is Friday today and I have my exams. I reviewed my lessons all night but I am no superhero. I'm not like Z who can remember everything, probably memorize the whole book. Besides, I have multiple lessons I need to study for different subjects. You can't expect me to remember all of them.

"Hey Kate, have you reviewed your notes on this subject?" I asked my seatmate. She looked taken a back for a moment, probably confused how I actually know her name. Some of the students here are aloof. Scratch that. Well most of them. It's either they are scared to approach us due to our social status or they hate us because of the same reason. That's just it.

"I did," she smiled timidly after she was able to regain her focus. She was smiling at me so shyly I felt a little bad that I am only talking to her because I needed some help.

"Do you have your notes with you?" I asked her again. She nodded too eagerly which made me sigh in relief.

"Yes. Do you need it?" she answered.

"If possible and only if you are done reviewing," I said, not wanting to impose. "I haven't reviewed much about our lessons last night because I reviewed the other subject" I said reluctantly.

"Ohh, here is my notes" she said and handed me her notes. I smiled at her and which she returned, I only have, roughly five minutes to scan her notes. I hope this will make a difference though especially since I am too sleepy to even focus.

Before I could even open her notes, our teacher already went inside our classroom. All of my classmates stood up and greeted her.

"Good morning! Okay, now prepare your papers. Let us now start our exam" she said that made me nervous.

"Shit," I whispered. Kate looked at me apologetically but I just smiled at her. It wasn't her fault. I don't know if I can answer our exams. It's my first time not reviewing carefully. She started walking and handed out our exam papers.

Mom and dad will not kill me if I fail this exam but I will never hear the end of it from Latch.

When she gave us the cue to answer, I immediately looked at the questions and I grimace when I realized that most of the questions there is something I haven't really studied. I did not get to review these items. I don't know what to answer. I already know some of these but many of these are unfamiliar to me. I just answered all the questions that I know and just guessed the others, hoping for my own luck.

"Time is up!" Our professor said and she started getting our papers. She then started handing the papers randomly to us so we can check it and she started dictating the answers.

When we're all finished checking, I saw my score. Not even half of the total score. I failed.

"Hey Marigold, what's your score?" Kate asked me but I was too ashamed to say my score so I just changed our topic, "Are you going home after this?"

We finished all of our exams in our other subjects this morning and I got a high score there but I'm still bothered of my failed exam. It's my first failed exam. When it's time for lunch, I said goodbye to Kate

It was just a tiring morning a while ago and I am now heading to the school cafe. I wonder if the guys are there. I saw how the other students were looking at my direction because I was alone but it did not even take that long. On my peripheral vision, I saw Z walking towards me but I didn't bother looking. For some reason, I was afraid to tell him what happened on my exams.

He sat in front of me and looked at me. I think he already knew that I have a problem. I bit my lower lip in embarrassment and hated the fact that Z can easily read my thoughts.

"Hey, are you okay?" He asked, but I just nodded. Z wasn't convinced so he asked again, "Are you sure? You look like you have a problem".

He went beside me and hugged me. It gave me butterflies on my stomach but I did not let him notice it. I was sure I heard someone squealing and that made me blush even more.

Damn Z for being able to make me feel like this.

"Mari," He whispered which made me smile a bit and blush.

A long sigh escaped my lips. I know I won't be able to hide it anyways. This is Z. I can't and I don't hide anything from Z. Even when I was just treating him as my best friend.

"I failed my exam" I answered honestly. I saw how his expression changed. He's probably upset or disappointed because I have never failed an exam before.

"You failed your exam?" He asked again to clarify it and I nodded.

"I'm stupid, I know" I said and it made me upset even more. I should have tried my best. It was simply my fault. I don't even know why I am this upset right now when I'm not usually like this. "Mom and Dad will go crazy about it and I will never hear the end of it if Latch finds out," I told him.

Z hugged me again and said "No, they won't, you're their daughter, you're their princess. They'll be disappointed but they won't be mad. You see Marigold, I also don't like the fact that you failed your exam. I know you can do better than that. People makes mistakes sometimes, take that mistake as a motivation to study harder and don't mind Latch. I can handle your brother," I can still see disappointment in his eyes so I just nodded and hugged him back.

"Thank you Z, you made me feel at ease somehow. Don't you think this is the best opportunity for you to tutor me?" I said and I bit my lower lip as I try my best not to laugh and Z replied, teasing me, "Why do I feel like you intentionally failed your exam for this reason?"

I slightly hit Z's chest and we both laugh at the current situation. I've been seeing Z laugh openly now.

"Fine, I'll help you study. But we have to do it in your house, on the living room because your dad will probably kill me," he stated and just thinking about it makes me laugh once again. If I tell dad I will be studying in Z's house, despite the fact that Uncle Sky and Aunt Max is there, he'll probably flip. He's been even more protective of me the past few weeks.

"Hey, guys!" my smile automatically faded the moment I saw Heron. The grin plastered in his face tells me he's up to no good once again. I saw Atlantis following him. She was smiling at me so I did the same.

"You know, sometimes I hate the way your face openly shows how you are judging me, Gold," he teased and I just rolled my eyes.

"Shut up. Just go and buy us something, I'm starving,"

Z and Y stood up to grab something to eat. Atlantis looked at me and raised her eyebrow.

"What's up?"

A long sigh escaped my lips.

"I failed one exam," I told her and she just patted my back. At least Atlantis won't laugh at me for it. I put a mental note and reminded myself to ensure that Y never finds out.

My eyes drifted to where the twins are and then solely to Z.

I'm just glad I have him.

Chapter 25

Marigold's POV

Days passed and things stay the same. I get occasionally teased by the others especially Y. I hate the fact that he is Z's twin but even before Z and I ended up being like this, Y is just that annoying friend that likes to tease everybody.

Shay, one of my friends have a part time job on a café near the university and for some reason, she had an emergency and here I am, trying to fill in for her. It's not something new to me anyways. Things like this happened before and my parents don't mind.

"Hi..." Z's husky voice greeted before me. He was smiling. He was fucking smiling I thought I forgot to breathe. From where I was, my eyes started focusing on his red lips. It gets me distracted every time. My lips parted a bit and I hate the fact that I am reacting as if this is the first time I am seeing Z.

C'mon! He's your childhood friend! I scolded myself.

I saw how his brows furrowed, the loud beating of my chest all I can hear.

Right, he was talking to me. Oh my God.

It was as if I can't speak. All I did was stare at him. Damn, why do I feel like I haven't seen him for so long?

"Hey..." he whispered. He looked a little concerned. "Are you okay?" his voice brought shivers on my body. How is he able to do that?

I know we have kissed a lot of times but, I can't help but wonder how he was able to make me feel like this.

"Why are you here?" I asked casually saving me from embarrassment. A relieved sigh escaped my lips.

Marigold, don't make a fool out of yourself.

He raised his eyebrow as if I asked something stupid. I bit my lower lip and chuckled. Why am I asking him anyways? Even before, Z will always be where I was, afraid I'd do something stupid like, being on a fight or getting myself into trouble.

From where I was standing, I can see how beautiful he looked. He was wearing casual clothes but he still looks surreal to me. Sometimes, I'm starting to hate the fact that he's got this effect on me

without him knowing. I am not sure if I should scold myself for acting so weird because I used to be just nonchalant with his presence. But now I can feel my knees shaking.

I turned on my back really fast and saw Diane, a crew there, grinning from the counter. I'm pretty sure she's going to ask me so many questions later. This isn't the first time I took over Shay's shift so I am somehow familiar with Diane.

I noticed how Z started reading a book that he must have brought along with him. He was now seated on a couch inside the cafe and I realized that a few students were looking at his direction. I put down the drink that he ordered and smile.

He's such a nerd.

My eyes shifted back to Diane and I shake my head. Suddenly, he shifted his eyes and our eyes met. My body froze in instant.

He was looking at me straight in the eyes and before I can even shift my gaze elsewhere, he suddenly smiled.

Oh, God. Shit.

In shock, I quickly turned my back and headed back to the counter.

"You're blushing. Now tell me again that there's nothing going on with the two of you," Diane frowned. She probably remembers asking it before.

"We're just..."

I don't really know what to say.

It wasn't even thirty minutes and my shift already ended. Diane was shaking her head when I went out of the employee's lounge with my cheeks now a little red because for the first time, I made a quick retouch on my makeup, something I don't usually do but I'm doing now because Z was waiting for me.

My heart is beating rapidly inside my chest.

"Girl, you even wore a perfume," he teased and I bit my lower lip.

In just a matter of five minutes, Z and I were already walking on the sidewalk. No one was talking and I was just starting ahead too, afraid to start a conversation. But I don't think I'd actually need that because what he did next was more than enough. He reached for my right hand and had our hands intertwined.

I looked sideways to stop myself from smiling. Or maybe I did but I just tried my best not to show because God, this is just so amazing. Just when I thought that we'd be going home already, he just went some place after asking me if I'm hungry.

"You stay here first, I'll just go buy us some food, okay?"

A long grunt escaped my lips as I watch his diminishing form, leaving me behind. I wanted to walk with him and grab his hand. For what reason? I can see a lot of girls staring at his direction since we came here.

It's annoying how I easily gets jealous of people when it comes to see and it's scary as well.

"Marigold..." he whispered. I was too lost into deep thinking that I didn't even notice him coming back. He was holding some churros.

"Oh..." My lips parted. Again, my eyes focusing on how red his lips are. Why are they always so red?

I was started when he reached for the side of my hair and put a few loose strands at the back of my ear. I was lost for a moment, his touch sending shivers through my body.

And then he cleared his throat, his eyes focused on the ground down below us. It was like he was trying to stop himself from smiling.

Calm down, Marigold. Focus! I scolded myself.

I was just mesmerized, too distracted by his red lips and how his hair was dancing on the wind and how his glowing skin makes him look even surreal.

"I-" the words I was about to say seemed to stuck in my throat and I don't know what to say. My hands acted automatically, reaching his arms, stopping him from further leaving when he was about to turn his back

"Where are you going?" I asked. He looked at me and smiled.

"I'm just looking for a place for us to sit,"

Without even thinking, I reached for his arms and pulled him closer, engulfing him in a hug.

It was cold but the warmth coming from him is enough to make my insides go frenzy and my heart about to leap out of my chest.

I felt him relax then lean his head on my shoulder and I was sure I felt him kissing the top of my head.

I heard him chuckle.

You really are in trouble now, Marigold.

Chapter 26

Mari's POV

A long sigh escaped my lips. I was feeling a little down because of the weather. And to add to that, we have so many requirements going on that annoys me a little. Z and I barely have time to be together. Even the guys are hard to find sometimes because we have so many requirements to finish.

"Hey Marigold, another freshman just confessed his affection towards you, and in front of so many students, huh!" Melissa teases while we all sat on the bench near the canteen.

I shake my head in response, my hands on my right cheek as I try to focus myself on reading the notes I have. We have quiz on our last class later and as much as I want to really talk to them, I also don't want to flunk on my subject. I have failed one exam before and that's something I don't really want to happen again.

Besides, is it something I should be happy about? I know that there are only few people who actually have the courage to confess to me, to us especially Zamara because the moment someone did, Ashton will be coming after him. But it's not something I also enjoy. Z is also not someone to be bothered about it.

A long sigh escaped my lips.

I try to focus my attention on my notebook, disregarding the chaos my friends are having. They were talking really loud and I don't have the energy to speak.

After Z and I went out last time, we just exchange messages most of the time. He calls me when he is free but sometimes I miss those calls because our schedules conflict. I told him not to go to the house if it's already late so he can rest instead. Z is a top student. Like me and the rest, I know he has so many requirements to complete as well.

"Mari, let's go," Diane called for my name. We have a project to finish and we are going to head on a café to talk about it. This is the only free time that everybody can meet.

Grabbing my things, I stood up from my seat and followed.

We were able to reach the coffee shop where we promised to meet our other members. There are six of us including Diane. We didn't waste any more time and started doing our project so we can all go to our next class. I still have to read a bit.

While seating on the designated chair for us, I turned towards my members, "I need to go to the restroom," I whispered. Diane was about to accompany me but I stopped her. "It's fine," I smiled and she nodded, returning to her seat.

In no time, I was already finished doing my business to the restroom and was simply washing my hands.

To be honest, I don't really want to come back now because it's a little exhausting. Aside from all the notes I had to type, I'm kind of feeling a little sleepy. But I can't just leave because we're close to finishing and again, I still have a class later.

After drying my hands, I went out but had stopped abruptly when I almost collided with someone standing right outside washing her hands. I apologized and she just smiled at me. I was taken aback at how beautiful she looks. Her aura screams with so much elegance and her movements were full of finesse. She was wearing a white button down shirt and a fitted black jean. She smiled at me again before turning her back after drying her hands.

Why does she seem familiar? Where did I see her before?

Shrugging my shoulders, I walked towards the front side of the coffee shop where my groupmates are.

I lifted my gaze and my eyes widened when I saw a familiar figure standing outside of the coffee shop. For a moment, I got a little excited thinking that he was there for me.

Did he follow me here? How long has he been standing outside?

In a flash, as if all the exhaustion, the stress, and worry in me seems to vanish. I had to stop myself from doing something stupid and reach out to him. I wanted to run outside and hug him.

I was about to step forward when the smile on my face immediately vanish.

Because in front of him was the same woman I just bumped with and as if in slow motion, I watch as they hugged each other tightly after locking eyes. Though he can't see me, I can actually see the smile in his face, something I was not used to seeing him do when he is with someone else.

My heart started beating erratically, I had to raise my hand to support my chest because I feel like it's about to jump any minute.

I can't believe this is happening.

Z, he will never cheat on me. He will never do that. But seeing it right in front of me makes me want to cry.

And he told me he likes me. Was that a lie too?

I bit my lower lip to stop myself from crying.

Don't cry, Marigold. Not here.

They pulled away from each other for a moment but it wasn't even a good minute but they hugged once again as if they were happy to be with each other's arms.

And that was more than enough to kill me inside.

You were just stupid, Marigold. You're stupid for thinking that he really likes you.

I wasn't even sure how I was able to get back to school in one piece that day. Or how we were able to finish the project with me still able to give an output to what we were doing because, to be honest, I was really so out of it that Diane eventually asked if I was okay. Of course, I said yes. How do I tell them that I wasn't?

I only took my quiz when I went home.

I mean, I can't possibly tell Diane that I was out of it because I saw Z time hugging another person?

The moment I reach the house, I went straight to my room and cry.

Fuck, Z! I hate him!

Does it hurt? It does.

it's just, I don't understand. We were okay. I thought we were fine. What changed?

Dad will kill him.

With a heavy feeling deep in my chest, I changed took a half bath to calm myself. At least do something to ease my boredom. I need to distract myself. I also turned off my phone so nobody can call me. I don't think I have the energy to talk with anyone right now, to be honest.

I knew I shouldn't let my heart focused on him. And now it's making me feel so upset. What's even worse is that nobody knows about it but me. I am left in despair on my own. I can't tell the others about it. I don't have the courage.

After doing a half bath, I went out of my bathroom to change. My steps were slow and unmotivated. Should I call someone and go out? I mean, I don't have any class tomorrow. What's a little drink going to do to me anyways?

With that in mind, I decided to grab a pair of high waist shorts, a white tank top and a black cardigan. I grab a pair of boots as well to match my outfit.

I was just drying my hair when I heard the sound of knocking just right outside my door. Is it Mom?

With a heavy heart, I headed straight to it and I wanted to scold myself because the moment I saw Z, the pain I am feeling inside almost vanish.

I hate this. I hate how this is starting to be unfair.

Chapter 27

Marigold's POV

"What?" I tried my very best not to show I was upset or I was glad to see him. I don't want to show him any emotion. I don't even want to talk to him because to be honest, I don't trust myself now.

With Z, I feel like I am starting to be stupid.

I clearly saw him hugging some woman I don't know yet here I am, liking the fact that he's come visit me. The truth is, I want to cry and scold him about it. I also want to shout and let my father know but I don't really want to go that low. This relationship is between Z and me. I should not be including our parents into it.

Trying my best not to look at him, I walked back to my vanity mirror so I can put some makeup on.

My plans are still the same. I want to go out. I don't even care if I haven't really called someone to hang out with. I'd probably just call Zamara or any of my classmates or friends to hang out. I mean, someone will surely be free, right?

Just when I sat in front of my mirror, I heard him speak. "You're going somewhere?" he asked.

My lips quiver at his words. Great. Now he's acting like he did not do anything wrong when here I am having a hard time and having an internal battle to myself.

"Just going to hang out with some friends," I answered. He was silent for a minute and I did not dare to turn to his direction. I know he's still standing a few spaces behind me. The silence in the room is killing me. I can feel the fast beating of my heart.

I heard him sigh.

"I am in trouble, right? Did I do something wrong? Did I forget something, a date?" he asked. I hated the fact that he sounded so worried. If I didn't see him earlier, I would probably be laughing at how scared he sounded but I am just so upset.

With that, I did not bother answering. Instead, I pick a nude shade of lipstick and applied it on my lips.

Why is it that I am dolling up myself in front of the mirror yet I feel so ugly and down?

Was I not good enough? Was I not pretty enough that he was able to find someone else that fast?

At that, my gaze lowered down until I was already looking at my lap. I was not able to control myself and tears just continuously started to fall.

“Mari...” I heard him whisper. His movement was so fast that he was already kneeling on front of me, his hands cupping my cheeks.

He lifted my gaze and I saw how worried he look.

“For whatever I did wrong, I’m sorry. I’m sorry, baby,” he whispered. He wiped the tears falling on my cheeks and I cried even harder.

“Why are you doing this?” I asked. Though hurting, I tried my best to ask that very same question that keeps bugging my mind since earlier. I feel like I would die if I don’t ask him this. “Why are you here acting like you still want me when you already found someone else?”

“What?” he asked confused. His brows furrowed and even while looking like that, he still looks surreal to my eyes.

Damn, the world is so unfair.

“I saw you,” I started. I removed his hands on my face. “I saw you hugging someone else,” I told him. His brows furrowed even more as if confused at what I said.

“Don’t even lie to me. I know what I saw. I was there. I was at the café and I clearly know what I saw. It was you!”

I stood up from my seat and walked out of my walk-in closet. I can feel him following. But I was just able to reach outside when he grabbed my right hand and gently pulled me back, I felt his other hand on my back but I immediately lost my focus on that after our eyes met.

The worry I was seeing in his eyes was already gone and instead, it was replaced by that playful glint I was all too familiar with.

“Are you laughing at me?” I asked incredulously. I can’t believe he has the nerve to laugh!

I hit his chest and tried pushing him away but he started laughing. Instead, he pulled me closer engulfing me in a hug. I cried even more.

“I hate you! I hate you, Z!” I told him still trying my bests get away from him.

“Baby, you’re cute when you’re jealous. You look so adorable,” he whispered and my lips quiver even more.

I can feel him caressing my back.

“Sorry if you were jealous. Mari, you should know I don’t look at people the same way I look at you. Didn’t you recognize her?” he asked before pulling away from me a little, our eyes meeting once again.

“Huh?” I asked confused. He gently brushes the strands of hair falling on my cheeks. I was pouting. He pulled me closer first and kissed my forehead before responding.

“Don’t you remember Helena?” he asked and at that, my brows furrowed.

Helena?

My lips parted a bit and my eyes turned wide. “Helena as in uncle Jessie’s daughter?” I exclaimed. I heard him chuckle before nodding.

Uncle Jessie was Aunt Maxie’s gay friend. But he ended up finding a girl he loves and married her, hence Helena. So that’s why she looks so familiar. She looks a lot like her mom! She probably did not recognize me too since we only met twice and that’s ages ago!

“Ugh!” I covered my face in embarrassment and cried even harder. I made a fuss over nothing. Why did I even think that Z will do that to me. Z loves me way before I started having feelings for him.

“Oh God, this is so embarrassing,” I whispered. He removed my hands and just smiled at me.

“It’s okay. It’s my fault for not telling you I am meeting her. It was a rush and she also had a different appointment so we parted ways after. And she was with her boyfriend,” he explained and that made me feel even more embarrass.

Despite him telling me it was fine, I still feel so bad about it.

We were sitting beside each other on the couch, my clothes already changed back onto pajamas.

“We had been so busy the past few days. How about we go on a date tomorrow? You don’t have classes, right?” he asked.

I smiled and tilted my head a little.

“I don’t. But don’t you have two classes to attend with?” I asked him, concerned that it will be very tiring for him.

“I can manage. We can go after my classes. I’ll fetch you. Besides, I miss my girl,” he whispered before pulling me for a quick peck on the lips.

Damn, I know I did something stupid but I was glad Z was here. And I can’t wait to be on a date with him tomorrow.

Chapter 28

Mari's POV

"No!" I pouted as I throw the dress on my bed, creating a big pile of clothes around it. Mom will be proud if she sees me trying on the clothes that she bought, to be honest.

"Too revealing."

I picked another.

"Too long..."

And another.

"Too ordinary..."

A long sigh escaped my almost quivering lips.

"Why is it that hard to find a something to wear?" I whisper-cry before plopping my body on my bed in surrender.

Z told me we'll go somewhere later and now I'm starting to freak out.

My eyes landed on all the dress scattered on my bed. I didn't know I have this many.

In all honesty, I probably had never worn more than half of them nor have I even saw them before. I pretty sure it was my Mom's doing.

I was startled when I heard the sound of the door opening, revealing my mom. Was it mother's instinct? How can she suddenly come when I am struggling?

"Mom," I cooed the moment I saw her. I sat on my bed and she smiled.

"I knew this will happen sooner or later," she chuckled as she walks to my direction, sitting on the space beside me.

My lips puckered as I listen to her words.

"I knew one day; you'll spend more than two hours thinking of what clothes to wear just so you can look presentable in front of someone. Not that I don't trust your fashion sense but were just so used in grabbing anything as long as you are comfortable. I can't blame you though, we both know you'll look good no matter what you wear,"

I smiled at what she said.

“Mom, stop boosting my ego. Or are you actually telling to my face that it was because of your genes and dad’s?” I laughed and she also chuckled. I felt her held my cheeks and gently caress it. She looks at me lovingly and smiled.

“I’m happy that you now know what you want and who you love. I can’t say that you and Z will be together forever and that he is your endgame but I am glad that you are giving yourself a chance to explore,”

I smiled at what my mom said. I know she and dad are always worried about me. I also know that they are afraid I’d break down after this.

Being with Z is a huge decision. I was willing to take a risk of our friendship. Being childhood friends and all, it’s not a line or something I can easily cross. Maybe that’s part of the reason why I was so confused of my feelings for him.

“Stop it, Mom. I only have an hour left to prepare. I realized we need to shop one of these days because I can’t seem to find what dress to wear,” I told her and she laughed at how I look. She seems to be having fun at my dilemma. I wonder if she was having a hard time like this back when she and dad were dating.

“Mom, how were you and dad when you were still dating?” I can’t help but asked. She seemed to be taken aback with my question but smiled nonetheless. It was even as if she was enjoying reminiscing their days. I know a few of Mom and Dad’s story but some of them, I only read online.

There was once a point when I got curious about my parents too. I know we were raised to be aware of our family status and what they do for work but at some point, I was crazy curious too. I even learned a lot of things about my other aunt and uncle too.

Uncle Seth and Aunt Zaya was a crazy case though. Even now, there has been no idol that had topped what they’ve been through. Aunt Zaya had been secretly married with uncle Seth even before she became an idol with my parents. But I heard Uncle Storm and Aunt California got together first before them. It was such a crazy situation but all of them happened in so much secrecy.

“Your Dad and I’s relationship was not all butterflies and rainbows. We also came into a rough time and there was a point when we broke up, and that’s both of our fault,” she smiled. She pulled me in for a hug and I wrapped my arms around my mom too.

“But I am so glad we eventually got back together and had you and Latch. Having the two of you are the best things that had happened to us. I will always be willing to sacrifice everything for us, for our family,” she added. At that, my eyes moistened and I hugged her tighter.

Mom is very cool and most often, she's the one to always back me up with dad. But that doesn't mean I love my Dad any less. I love them both equally and I will be forever grateful that I am their child.

"Okay, let us stop this drama and get you doll up,"

I bit my lower lip as I remember my current dilemma.

My mom probably saw how dejected I look so she smiled.

"You know Z has seen you in every form possible, right? No matter what you wear, or if you didn't comb your hair, Z will always look at you the same. That's how Z had always been with you. He doesn't even mind if you ransack his closet,"

Soft chuckles escaped my lips at what my Mom said. She's right though. Z was never like that. Maybe it was because of this new emotion that I am feeling. I want to please him.

For the first time in my life, I wanted to look different in his eyes. I want him to see a different version of me. Is that wrong?

I gulped. I don't want to change myself into something that I am not to please him though. And for sure, Z wouldn't like it either.

With that in mind, I decided to grab the best clothes that will make me feel satisfied myself.

Chapter 29

Mari's POV

"Why are you so quiet?" I heard Z asked and I shyly smiled at him, the images of what happened earlier still lingers in my mind. We just had a dinner at some restaurant on the outskirts of town. It was cozy and the people are very accommodating, not to mention the delicious food. I wonder how Z knew about the place since it was placed too far away from the city.

He was driving and I didn't dare ask him where we would go next. To be honest, I am still afraid that he'd suddenly turn the car and head back home, thinking that this escapade of ours should never happen to begin with.

Because it doesn't make any sense.

Before I went out of my room, I was thinking so hard how the hell everything turned out like this.

Was it that simple?

I guess I'm just so confused. Everything was just so new to me and I'm not even sure if that's normal. I've never been in a relationship before so I had nothing to compare with nor I have any ways to ask someone to confide with.

A few weeks ago, never in my wildest dream nor even went across my mind that one day, I'll be on Z's car - all dolled up in a dress and a light makeup and being like this. Heck, I didn't even think about talking to him in general about these kinds of things.

When I came down the stairs, Z and Latch were talking about something but I didn't quite understand what they were talking about. I thought Z was discussing things about Elle since the two were best of friends.

When my brother didn't say another word, it was then that I decided to make my presence known and when I did, all my worries had been washed away when Z locked eyes with mine.

His eyes were all focused on me and the glint on them made my confidence shot up to the ceiling.

After all the push and pull that I did with all of my dresses, I decided to wear a simple white sleeveless dress that hangs until just above my knees. It wasn't too long nor too short to my liking which made me more comfortable. And since just want to be comfortable, I just settled myself with a light powder, and blush and rolled my lips with some lip tint so it would look so pale.

"Perfect," I heard him whispered and my eyes saw how my brother was shaking his head at the sight of Z. That made me blush even more.

"Close your mouth, Z. Ugh! Go away you two. I'm gagging with all the heart eyes I'm seeing," he stated, cringing his body as if he's seeing something unappealing to him. Then, his eyes landed towards my direction, "Hey, call me if something's wrong," his eyes soften a little, "My big sister is off to her very first real date, I want to cry..." he whispered, his hands over his chest.

I gritted my teeth in annoyance, "Shut up!" I hissed and he just laughed before turning his back as he headed towards to the living room.

Mom and Dad was not around. I'm guessing Mom took Dad with him to distract him.

"Let's go?" I was startled when I heard Z's low voice but I am almost shaking when he went forward and reached for my hand.

"Calm down Mari, it's just me," he whispered before pulling me closer to him, my hands landing on his chest and I watch as he fixed a few locks of my hair that was covering my face. My breath hitched at the smell of his perfume.

Holy Fuck. My mind started digging into the back of my head of any memory about school teaching us how to calm down.

My ears started to get numb at the sound of my heart's loud hard beating.

It was too fast I'm not sure how I will be able to survive.

"Beautiful..." he whispered before giving me another kiss on my forehead.

I heard it. The sound of my heart exploding due to too much emotion it can't seem to handle.

Goddamn it.

Things were never like this before between me and Z.

"Let's go.," he whispered again before he gently guided me towards the door.

I was too lost in my own thoughts that I didn't realize that we were almost at his car in not for Latch's loud voice.

"Go get it Marigold!" I started coughing at what he said and I scanned the place afraid that our neighbors actually heard him.

"I'm going to kill that jerk," I gritted my teeth in anger, totally forgetting that Z was standing beside me until I heard the sound of his sweet laughter.

"Don't mind him, Mari. Elle will probably kill him sooner or later. I heard he made another of her friend cry again," he stated and I laugh. My brother just, huh.

In no time, we were already traveling and then he told me we're going to eat first.

He was the most gentleman. He opened the car door for me, opened the door of the restaurant and pulled me a chair so I can seat properly. But these things are something he usually does even before. What change though?

My feelings?

Everything was perfect.

And that scares me.

It scares me that I'll suddenly wake up and realizes that I had been dreaming about this. Or maybe this is just a figment of my imagination, that this is just my mind playing with me cause I don't know, may be because I have been mean to him the past few times?

I was startled when I felt a hand on top of my own. My eyes took a glance on my left and realized I must have zoned out as I try to remember everything that just happened.

"Something wrong?" he asked concerned.

How can I tell him that I am scared about this? About everything that's happening?

"Nothing," I tried answering and I wanted to close my eyes the moment my voice cracked. He looked at me even more concerned and I wanted to scold myself for it.

His eyes then averted my gaze as he stares in front though his hand never left mine.

And that's more than enough to make me feel at ease.

After a few minutes, the car stopped in front of a two-storey building not too far from where we had our dinner.

My brows furrowed when he went out and run towards the other side to open the door.

"Who owns this?" I asked confused when he guided me through the stairs on the side.

"I rented it. Don't worry about it," he mumbled and I just shrugged my shoulder.

It was when we reached the top that I realized that there was a secluded part of it my mouth went wide open when I saw a huge tent in the middle. A few lights were on and I was able to see the low tables situated inside.

But what surprises me the most is how clear the sky is as the stars twinkle underneath us.

Slowly, I made my way close to the railing and admire the beautiful scenery before me.

The stars, they were shining so bright and the glow they emit brings warmth to my heart.

It's so beautiful, so mesmerizing.

They were scattered like a moon dust in the dark sky. like diamonds, like fireflies but the mere sight of them feeds serenity to my weak soul.

Just then, I felt a presence behind me trapping my body with his strong arms as he rests his head on my shoulders.

"They're not as beautiful as you are," he then whispered in my ears and my eyes closed at how sincere his words sounded.

He was hugging me tightly and I didn't utter a word. The way his arms perfectly fits my body warmth my heart even more.

It was perfect.

A beautiful scene... a beautiful man... and all that's left is a beautiful story...

"Z..." I can't help but call his name.

He was hugging me like this. I wanted to be happy but I'm getting more and more confused.

"Hmmm?" he answered and I can't find myself to continue. My eyes landed on my hands as I play with them.

He must have felt my hesitation because he suddenly spun my body so I'm now facing him, his hands gently cupping my cheeks.

"Hey, what's wrong? You didn't like it?" he asked worriedly and my eyes met his.

I want to say I like it because I do but words seemed to get stuck in my throat and I'm finding it harder to express what I want to say.

A sigh escaped his lips and I felt his other hand caressing my right cheek.

"Do you want to know something?" he whispered and I just stared at his beautiful eyes. He was smiling, but I was sure there was reassurance in them.

"I love looking at the stars. They give me peace, they help me calm myself down whenever I feel like tons of shit is happening in my life," he mumbled and I was lost for a moment. Z had always been the quiet type. I never really saw him struggling over something. SO hearing him say these words startled me a bit.

I realized that even though we are childhood friends, there are still things I didn't know about him.

"And you know what? You give me peace too. You're like my star. You give serenity on my wavering heart," he whispered and my mouth formed an o-shape, confused about what he's trying to say.

He smiled at my reaction and my cheeks blushed when he squeezed my cheeks in an adorable way.

"What I want to say is," he stopped midway, and I was so sure my heart stopped beating too.

He looked at me straight in the eyes before whispering the words I wasn't sure I was ready to hear.

"I really like you, Marigold," he whispered and my eyes closed when I felt his warm lips meeting mine.

It felt like the world stopped moving and my mind blackout.

By this time, nothing matters. Not my worries about everything nor the fact that I am still confused with my feelings.

All I know is how his soft lips perfectly move over mine, the sweet taste of his lips overpowering mine. This isn't the first time we kiss but every time we do, it's like it's the first. The feeling is still surreal.

Before I even knew it, I was already copying the movement of his lips as he continuously devours mine.

His lips, they were soft. They were addicting. And here I thought the quick peck that he did is enough to make me lose my sanity.

But no, I'm losing all of me.

And I'm okay with it.

If it's him.

If it's my Z

Chapter 30

Marigold's POV

"Oh, fu-" my hands automatically covered my lips before I was able to finish my words, my eyes widening a little at the sight of Mina who was looking at me amused.

My body relaxed a little when I felt her hand on my shoulder.

"Gosh, Marigold, are you okay? You have bags under your eyes..." she asked, her voice full of worry.

I gulped, her question bringing all the memories of last night to me.

After the kiss that Z and I shared, I was so lost and confused about everything. I was floating at first, overwhelmed by the surge of emotions that I was feeling. The fact that Z and I kissed like that for so long still amuses me.

I mean, what that even real?

What's even shocking is that he gave me not just a peck but a full-blown kiss on the lips.

Now that is something.

The entire time, my head was wrapped in a bubble of happiness. After the kiss, we stayed there for thirty minutes in silence, his arms wrapped around me as we both enjoy the serenity that the night sky offers.

But I was dead silent and I don't know what to say. I know he was looking at my direction in worry while we were in the car back home and I wanted to speak to him so badly but the words seemed to stuck in my throat.

Once we reached home, he gave a quick hug which I reciprocated but still, I wasn't able to say anything. Instead, I made a dash towards my room leaving a confused Mom and Dad in the living room.

All I did was lay down on my bed and think about all the things that had happened. My innocent mind was trying to come up with an explanation how Z suddenly told me he likes me.

Z and Marigold is something I didn't even think will ever be in one sentence, like ever. I mean, if we're going to talk about something with a context of love outside friendship.

The whole night, I just turned my body in different positions rummaging my floating mind on every possible reason to all of this. But I came with nothing.

And that's what got me scared.

I was scared of the possibility that it was all in my head, that everything didn't really happen and that tomorrow, I'll find myself waking up from my weird dreams and that the reality is, Z didn't even remember nor thinks that he has feelings for me.

One hour...

Two...

five...

Until I realized that the sun is already up and I almost lost my cool when I saw what time it was already.

So now, I don't even know how I was able to survive three subjects alive. However, I am worried I might fall asleep on my last subject, which I have Mina as one of my classmates.

The whole day, I was so alert, afraid I'd see Z or any of the guys around so, in the end, I decided to camp inside the library every time I don't have a class. I didn't even go to the cafeteria during lunch and took a short nap in the library instead. As for my phone, I thought it would be better to leave it in the house afraid Z, Atlantis or any of the kid will call me.

All in all, I was so edgy the whole day and it's not even helping how I almost bumped into Z after lunch when I was about to go on my third subject. Thank God he didn't see me so I was able to turn my back and hide from him.

I felt her checking my temperature and I just smiled as I rest my head at the top of my desk. Our professor is not yet around which allowed me to at least take rest for a minute.

"Jesus, Marigold, are you okay? Are you not feeling well?" she asked before sitting in my left.

I groan in frustration as I feel my sleep slowly losing my grip on reality.

"I'm just sleepy," I whispered and she chuckled.

"Something happened? You looked so beat up over something," she asked but before I can answer, our professor came in so I tried sitting properly.

The class had been starting but I was getting too sleepy I had to use my hand for support with my elbows leaning on the table. After a while, I was already zoning out, unaware of what's happening around me, my hands slipping from the table from time to time.

It was until I felt someone pulling me a little, my head resting on something firm. My breath hitches at the familiar scent of me which earned a moan escaping from my lips.

I heard the sound of someone chuckling which I simply ignored as I get myself comfortable at the very relaxing position.

"Mari, wake up," I heard someone whispering behind my ears and I purred at the sound of it.

Again, I heard someone chuckling before I heard someone mumbling.

"Mari, if you don't wake up, your professor will realize you're sleeping," he whispered and my eyes slowly opened.

You know when they do things in slow motion in movies? That's how it happened.

I opened my eyes, squinted them a little as I try to adjust my sense of sight.

At first, it was all blurry but when my eyes found its focus, I found myself having an eye to eye contact with the reason why I am sleeping in my class - Z.

He was smiling at me cheekily, his eyes melting my sleeping soul.

For a moment, it's as if my heart stopped functioning, like every fucking sense that I have no longer matters.

Holy shit.

"Hi, Mari..." he greeted and I swear to God those words, no matter how innocent they actually were, brought the opposite thoughts through my mind, like an innuendo that the supposed demure me cannot handle. They sounded inviting, and it sends chills all over my now needy body.

Just when my mind was going crazy, he flashes me his most seductive smile.

And I lost it. I did the last thing a student should be doing when in class.

I screamed.

"Ahhhh!" a loud yelp escaped my mouth as my eyes caught an amused expression on Z's face as he sat on my right, too relaxed if I may add.

The room was silent and Z's soft chuckles broke the silence.

It was then that I realized that I am actually still in my class.

My eyes caught the wondering glance of my classmates, Mina was trying to hold back her laughter and my professor's eyebrow was raised.

"Yes, Miss Simons?" My professor asked and words suddenly got stuck in my throat.

"I'm sorry professor, a spider just crawled on her arms so she was shocked," I heard Z stated and my eyes went wide at the sight of him.

He looked ethereal as he smiled at our professor, I'm not even wondering why my prof's cheeks were blushing.

Why the heck is he here?

Chapter 31

Marigold's POV

My eyes caught the stares of my classmates and I can't blame them. Z is someone a lot of people admire with, even by boys and him being inside of my class is something that is close to impossible, which reminds me again how the fuck he was in this class.

A lot of people know we are close and that we are childhood best friends but Z was never in my class before.

My professor, even with her flushed cheeks continued the lesson but I don't have the slightest idea what she was explaining about.

My eyes were focused on Z's profile.

Is he really here? This wasn't a dream, was it?

"Please tell me you aren't real?" I whispered, my tongue making a run on my lower lip as I hear the sound of my own heart beating.

It was fast, it was racing - all the signs and calling of thy heavenly sleep earlier immediately vanished at the sight of him. Instead, it was replaced by a strong call of longing. The whole day, I tried my very best to hide from him, avoid him so I can think properly. I wanted to check myself, my emotions and what I really feel. But clearly, it didn't work, coz here I am, two seconds away from losing my shit once again with just the sight of him.

The sound of his low voice took me off from my trance, and thank God I was seated for the moment his hand touched my other cheek, my knees weaken, the little energy I have in me vanishing the same way.

"Can't I see my Mari?" he pouted and I almost cough at how cute he looked.

"Huh?" My cheeks blushed at the way he was staring and after realizing that I just technically woke up, I groan internally. I probably have drooled all over my face.

In embarrassment, I moved my glance to my front coz I didn't realize I was facing my right because of him.

Calm down Marigold. You're in class.

I was trying to keep calm, doing breathing exercise in secret but my eyes caught Mina's amused expression.

"What?" I whispered and she grinned at me before leaning a little closer to my ears.

"It's just that, I thought you weren't together? Do you know how everyone was shocked when he came in class and asked if he can seat in? You were sleeping soundly, thank God our professor didn't notice you," she whispered and my eyes opened in horror.

I was still facing Mina when I felt a jolt of electricity sparked after a hand rested on top of mine. My body stiffened when I realized that he was holding my hand which was resting on the top of the table. I turned to him but he was facing my professor and I'm not even sure how to react.

To my surprise, his hand started filling up the gaps in between my fingers until his hand was intertwined with mine.

Holy shit. Now how do I calm down?

As if nothing unusual is happening, his eyes were still focused in front when here I am, seconds away from fainting. Beads of sweat started forming on my forehead as my system starts to be aware of all the glances we're receiving around us and of course, I caught the eyes of a few girls who were almost sending daggers at me.

Oh, my God.

I didn't even realize that the class had ended until Z rested his arm on the desk, his face turned towards me and I gulped.

He moved giddily as he playfully tries to lock eyes with mine.

"So..." he whispered and I lowered my head in embarrassment.

There were too many people watching. Plus, I haven't really fully recovered from my shocked state from last night.

"So," he cleared his throat, "Would you mind telling me why you are sleeping soundly in class?" he beamed and I grunted rather louder than how I originally intended.

"I wasn't sleeping," I tried to say in denial but I know there's no use. And it's stupid.

"Really? Because I clearly saw you when I was passing by. I was afraid you'd get in trouble so I decided to seat in,"

If I could bury my face straight into my desk, I could have done that this instant for all the embarrassment I've been getting this very moment.

I heard Mina laughing and I grimaced.

"Sorry, Marigold but I need to go. I still have another class," she stated before leaning over me once again. "By the way, good luck because I'm pretty sure your face will be on the front page of the university forum in about, five minutes?" she teased and my eyes went even wider than it has been at her words. I wasn't even able to respond before she turned her back, giggling at my reaction.

My eyes wandered and I realized that a few of the students were taking pictures of us with our hands intertwined.

At that, I tried pulling my hand away but to no avail, Z didn't let my hand go.

"People are staring..." I whispered and he chuckled.

"Don't mind them. They're just jealous because I'm with the most beautiful girl in our university," he stated and my cheeks blushed. The way he said those words made me feel like I am really the most beautiful in his eyes even though people are most probably staring because of how handsome he looked. Additionally, I appreciate the fact that he didn't bother giving attention to anybody else, except me.

"This is your last class, right?" he asked and I shyly nodded.

He reached for my head and started petting on my hair, the sound of a few girls squealing reaching my ears.

Oh, my goodness.

"Were you not able to sleep?" he asked and I was caught off-guard by the glint of worry in his eyes. The next thing I knew was me nodding and I wanted to kill myself for it because I basically admitted I wasn't able to sleep last night because of him.

A loud sigh escaped his lips.

"Was it because of last night?"

Again, I nodded and the smile on his face vanished.

My insides flutter when he suddenly cupped my cheeks and looked at me straight in the eyes.

By this time, my heart was ready to jump out of my chest and I wouldn't be surprise if someone passes out inside the room at his actions.

"If you're thinking that this isn't real at all, that what happened last night is a dream, or that me liking you is impossible, stop it. I like you. I like you a lot. I like you so much I can't stand a day not seeing you." a smile escaped his lips when a thought seemed to enter his mind.

"Mari, I won't let you mope around thinking that this isn't real. And I definitely won't let you avoid me like what you have been doing since this morning,"

I bite my lower lip at his words. So he knew I was avoiding him. I felt bad when I saw him grimaced a bit.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, my glance avoided his.

He was silent for a moment but then I felt a hand on my chin, tilting my face a little so our eyes would meet.

"I guess I have to prove once again that what happened last night was real," he whispered and before I knew it, his face crossed the little space between us, his lips devouring mine.

It was quick yet sweet and lustful.

My mind went into a frenzy and my heart exploded right there.

We heard a few girls squealing, or are they crying?

But I no longer care. Instead, I let him carry my things as we walk outside, a few students checking our intertwined hands.

My eyes widened when I realized that my brother and the rest of the boys were actually waiting outside.

"Did you two enjoy putting up a drama inside?" I heard Y snicker and my cheeks blushed immediately. I felt Z's hands wrapped around my waist which made me blush even more. If that isn't enough, he turned my body towards him and I buried my face in his chest.

I heard the guys scream in protest.

"No PDA please!"

"I didn't know you're this flirty Z!"

"Ewww!"

"Hey, let's go before I kick this two,"

They were all laughing and my eyes focused on Z's smiling face, realization hitting me in full blow.

This is real.

Fuck, Z really like me, Holy Shit.

Chapter 32

Mari's POV

"What?" Z chuckles as he caught me staring at him while he parks his car in front of our house.

We just came home after a long day at school and it has been his habit to give me a ride home. Well, he does that even before but I also bring my car from time to time. But now, he tries his best to always fetch me whenever he can.

I'm not complaining of course but it's been more than a month and I'm still not used to the fact that Z is indeed already mine.

He is the perfect boyfriend. He'd greet me with a good morning and sweet messages. Bid me goodnights. He'd make sure to eat lunch with me and fetch me after class. Every week, we'd go out on a date or just stay at home and watch movies.

He showers me with small gifts and lots of kisses, He hugs me tight whenever he got the chance.

I mean, he's just so perfect, I can never ask for more.

But that's what's scary.

He is too perfect, sometimes I'm scared to know this isn't real at all.

"Nothing. I'm just," I stopped midway. Sometimes, I still find it hard to tell him what I really think because I'm afraid I'd suddenly wake up and realize that this is just a part of my wonderful dream. So as much as I can, I am trying to make the most of it.

"Just what?" he turned towards me, the engine already off as his attention all focused on me, his girlfriend.

A sigh escaped my lips.

"I don't know. Maybe I'm just afraid that one day, I'd realize this isn't true. That you," I gulped, my voice shaking a little, "that you aren't really mine, to begin with," I finished, my eyes now glued on the books situated on my lap as I try to avoid his gaze.

Just then, I felt a hand resting on top of mine. It was warm and comforting, it made me feel better which surprised me.

"Marigold, I told you to stop thinking about it a lot. This is real. We are real. And you have to get used to that fact because there's no way I'll ever let you go. I'll cling to you even if you get tired of me," he chuckled and I did the same.

"That's impossible. Why would I get tired of you?" I asked. He should know that I feel like I'm the luckiest girl ever since I have him.

I won't get tired of him that's impossible.

My eyes watch as he leaned forward and gave me a quick peck on my lips.

"I'm all yours, Mari. So don't be scared anymore. I won't go anywhere," he whispered.

And another kiss.

And another.

And slowly I was drowning myself into his sweet taste until we heard the sound of knocking from the window.

Immediately, I rolled down the car window and saw my brother, his hands resting on his waist as he looks at us. His brows furrowed and he seemed a little annoyed. From here, I can clearly see Elle and Irish was sitting on the bench in our backyard.

The others are also there. Are we having a party or what?

Ever since I get to know them, the boys seemed like comfortable staying in our house to hang out.

Why are they outside anyways?

"No sex in the car, you two. You do realize it's just five in the afternoon and you are all out eating each other in the broad daylight?" he snickered before turning his back, my face blushing red at his words.

Sometimes, I hate that Latch isn't that scared of me.

I mean, he wasn't as protective as before and maybe it's because he trusts Z but sometimes, he's still a jackass.

"Don't mind your brother," I heard Z chuckle. "He's just salty because his crush ignored him," he added and I raised an eyebrow.

Did someone ignore my brother? Wow, I need to meet that girl. She's the bomb.

In no time, Z had already gone out of the car to open the door on my side. It was something he had been doing ever since but it still made my heart flutter.

He took my bag and other books and I bit my lower lip when I heard the other boys cheering.

"Z, you're too whipped. Come over here!" Y teased and I wanted to smack the boy's head. clicked.

Once we reached them, my brother snickered.

"Thank you for not tainting our family's reputation by having sex on the streets, big sis. By the way, you two might want to come inside the house. Dad wants to see him again,"

"Hey!!!!" I screamed at my brother. "Stop kidding. It's not funny." I pouted. Dad is always nervous about me dating. When will he ever stop being so paranoid?

"He's not kidding though," Atlantis mumbled as she smiled at me awkwardly.

A bewildered sigh exhaled from my lips.

Impossible.

A weird feeling starting to succumb my earlier happy demeanor. My eyes turned to the window in hopes to see any sign of living or movement. I stomped my feet in annoyance. I don't care if I look some child but I'm not getting any of this.

Z chuckled and just pulled me in for a hug.

"It's okay, Mari. This isn't the first time," she smiled awkwardly.

Chapter 33

Mari's POV

"Where are we going?" my eyes drifted away from his gaze as I try to focus more on the surroundings, our car passing an unfamiliar route.

It was Saturday and he came to our house early in the morning to fetch me. Thank God Dad isn't around and Mom was just so cool about it. Latch isn't home too. Z said he might be with Elle as their youngest said she needs to buy some stuff.

"Somewhere," he whispered. From the corner of my eyes, I saw how he was giving me side glances but I decided not to look at his direction.

To be honest, I'm still feeling a little awkward about everything.

That night, he told me he will be courting me formally, but considering everything that had happened, how we already kissed and all, I don't really know if him courting me is still valid.

Zammy said we're practically dating! But I can't ask Z that. It's weird and my heart can't handle that.

That very same night, Dad called us back inside. He had been peaking like a perv - as Mom said - and him seeing us hugging outside burns his eyes - again, Mom's words.

I shifted from my seat, as I view the surroundings his car kept passing. I was wearing a loose black shirt - his shirt, and a pair of black shorts underneath.

"There are chocolates and candies, on the backseat," I heard him say and I turned my attention back to him. My brows furrowed a little. "And chips too," he added.

I was too quick to turn around and even saw a blanket.

"Where are we going?" I asked him. Z only bring this stuff whenever we're about to travel for more than two hours.

I saw him bit his lower lip, his other hand now pressed on his cheek as his elbow leans on the side.

"My Mom asked me to pick up something from their favorite store. And your mom said you should accompany me,"

"Huh?"

"Yeah, and it's quite far. We'll have to travel at least four hours,"

My lips parted at what he just said.

"Yahhhh!!!" I screamed. "Four hours? I have a class later!" I told him and he just chuckled.

"No, you don't. Your professor just attended a conference yesterday,"

"How do you even know that?" I hissed.

"Because I was supposed to be one of the student attendees but I declined,"

Right. Z is a model student. He probably has the best grades in his class or maybe, year but he doesn't really enjoy it when the school sends him to seminars and such. He finds it boring.

I glared at him. Why do I feel like he planned all of this?

"Hey, it's true. I think it's their gift to Aunt Chae," he added, soft chuckles escaped his lips.

My gaze never left his. Aunt Chae's birthday is indeed in a few days but still, they could have asked for it to be delivered. Why do we have to get it personally?

"Fine, I wanted to take you out on a date too so I volunteered. Dad was supposed to do it," he added and that made my cheeks turn into crimson red.

If it wasn't enough, he had to make my heart flutter even more.

"Can't I take my baby out on a date?"

"Stop teasing me," I scolded him before heading in the back to grab the blanket and the chips he was talking about. He had brought all sorts of my favorite.

"I'm not teasing you though. I mean it,"

My breath hitches at his words. I didn't bother responding. My heart was racing inside my chest.

Since I started acknowledging my feelings for him, Z seemed to be getting extra attractive in my eyes. His lips seemed even redder than before and his eyes always mesmerize me.

The entire car ride, it's either I eat or sleep. At one point, I started playing with my phone too.

"Mari..."

"Hmm?" I answered without looking at his direction.

"I love you,"

My head automatically snapped to his direction and he just gave me a glance before giving me and a warm smile.

What the-

"We're here," he uttered and I felt the car stopping. He removed his seatbelt before looking at me. And I was too out of focus that's why when he leans forward, I was unable to move. His movements were so swift and the next thing I knew, his lips were already on my forehead.

I gulped. He even leans forward and removed my seatbelt for me.

I felt him cupping my cheeks before grinning, "My baby is even more beautiful when you're blushing," and then he did it, he gave me a quick peck on the lips and that's more than enough for my brain to short circuit.

I was unable to move. My heart was hammering inside my chest and I can't function properly.

How am I able to survive a whole day with him now?

"S-stop doing that," I whispered to him. We were still inside his car.

"What? Making you feel loved? Not happening," he grinned. He opened the car door on his side and went out of the car. I watch as he jogged his way to my side and opened it for me.

Jesus Christ, why does he have to be extra sweet now?

He guided me outside and in front of us was a shop.

I grimaced at how sophisticated the shop looked. I checked what I was wearing. Compared to Z who was wearing tight-fitting pants and a polo shirt, I look like someone who's just passing by.

He seemed to have realized what I was thinking and pulled me even closer. He put his arms around me and kissed the top of my head.

"You look best with my clothes on you. Plus, your pretty face can put any artist into shame baby," he whispered. By this time, I've noticed a few people getting attracted to our presence. It's like lunchtime and we're in front of a very busy district. I didn't even realize that a valet had already taken Z's car.

"Let's go?" he whispered before leading me to a very luxurious jewelry store.

A small smile escaped on my lips as I realized how many envious eyes were following our movements.

Great, Mom said I inherited golden and royal genes. Plus, I have someone who's family is loved by both Chanel and GUCCI with me.

Yep, confidence baby. -----

Chapter 34

Mari's POV

"They really love each other," I chuckle as I carry the paper bag we picked up from that shop. I just had a glimpse of the jewelry when they were putting it in a box. It was a charm bracelet with their initials on it, I mean, the whole WHISTLE. That's when I realized it's a gift from all three of them to aunt Zanaya.

"Reason why we all still gather regularly; don't you think?" Z stated as I felt his hand on my back as he gently guides me back to his car.

Every step we make; we see a lot of people following our movements. There were a lot of people inside the shop and at one point, I was sure a few of them have recognized us because I heard our parent's name being uttered every now and then.

"So..." Z took the bag from me before grabbing my hand, intertwining them along the process. I look at him sideways, the erratic beating of my heart making it a little hard for me to focus.

We also bought Elle a present. It was a ring covered with her birthstones. Z bought the ring so I bought the necklace so she can use it as a pendant too. I'm going to ask Latch to pay me half though just because I want to piss him off. He has a huge sum of allowance anyway. He takes money from mom and dad. I don't use the card mom gave me because I love using my Dad's. Mom's happy about it though. Apparently, she gets so happy seeing Dad groan whenever he receives messages of billing transactions on his phone.

"What do you want to eat?" he asked.

We were walking side by side; all eyes were still on us as we take the side of the street. It was a busy district and cars are not allowed. There were so many stores and salons, I can't even remember the last time I went out to shop.

I was too busy with school and the only free time I had, I spend with my friends. I almost laugh as I remember how Z and I went on a trip and now we're walking hand in hand like this. It's just so ironic for me.

"I'm craving for fast food, or some burger and chips?" I told him. He leans a little and brushed my hair to the side and smiled. My heart skipped a bit with his simple gesture. It's not something he did spontaneously, or something unusual because he's usually like that even before, but for some reason, it was a different kind of shit in my heart. My heart fluttered, ge'ez.

I've been feeling so weird lately. I mean, I was used to the attention I was getting since I was a kid. Of course, I am a Simons, it's not something new. But ever since I found out Z's feelings, ever since I realized I'm feeling something that's more than just being a childhood friend with him, I feel like every eye on us, every stare, it holds a different kind of interpretation now. And I'm not used to that. I'm not used to people looking at us as if they knew something is different.

We entered a busy fast-food chain. People, some in formal attire while some seemed to be just hanging around were eating, most so loudly that I actually considered asking Z that we just go find another place. But I took a quick glance at that lady's burger and I can feel my mouth watering.

'Fuck it, let's eat here,' I whispered. I heard Z chuckled and when I turned my attention to him, he kind of looked, more at ease.

I gulped.

"Why?" I asked out of nervousness. Ge'ez, why am I always nervous now? This is just Z for Pete's sake!

"Well, you kind of looked like a different person lately. Like, you're trying to be a little distant and suppressing yourself," he scratched the back of his head, 'Hearing you cursing makes me remember the Marigold that I know,"

My lips parted at his words. So he noticed?

He turned his attention to me. "Mari, just because I finally confessed and you already knew that I love you doesn't mean I'm not the same person anymore. This is still me. I told you I will still be your best friend, that won't change. But I will also be your boyfriend from now on, and I don't want you to think that you can no longer act the same with me. You can be you, baby..."

"Yahhh," I tried stopping him as I feel my cheeks blushing. All these people around us keep giving us side glances even though we were simply standing on a corner.

"People will hear you," I told him and he just smiled.

"Fuck them, Mari. My eyes can see only you. You can tease me like how you used to. You can say anything you want in front of me, I won't mind. So please, be the same Mari, my sweet, yet fierce Marigold that I know,"

He then pulled me closer giving me a kiss on my forehead.

"Oh God," I muttered. He wants me to act the same as before but he's just here speaking all mushy and doing their sweet shits that just melts my heart.

How do I act the same?

"By the way, we're technically not yet together. I thought you're gonna be courting me but you keep on kissing me like that. Isn't that too much?" I snickered.

He pulled away from me a little and I felt one of his arms wrapping around my waist. "Do you want me to stop then?" he asked.

My lips immediately puckered and I had to groan internally for a second.

God, why is this so hard?

"No, don't stop or I'll kill you," I rolled my eyes and he chuckled. "And you're my boyfriend now because I won't ever let you go. But I guess you still have to court me every day because I'm adorable just like that,"

An amused smile escaped his lips and before I knew what he's about to do, he already tilted his head and gave me a quick peck on the lips.

"Of course, baby. I will court you for the rest of our lives and not even you can make me stop,"

My pulse quickened at the mention of our future together. I didn't know he's prepared that advance.

We ended up buying two burgers and a large fries. He also bought a pasta which they thankfully have and I had orange juice.

We were just there, minding our own business, staring at each other for the whole world to see.

And I guess I understood what he was talking about and what was wrong.

I get so anxious about us because we were best friends so that made me act differently. But then again, he's still the same Z that I know and this is still me. What changed is that we just love each other now more than just being friends.

I was still a little scared that something may go wrong but heck, I'd rather take that risk than lose him now.

Chapter 35

Marigold's POV

"You're grounded,"

"Dad!" I exclaimed, the scowl showing in my father's face was more than enough for me to know how serious he is right now. Even my Mom was just standing in the corner and not saying anything.

I know she wasn't blaming me for anything but I feel like this is just so unfair.

"No, Gold. You will follow everything I tell you until we sort this thing out. This is not something to laugh about," he demanded. I bit my lower lip and stared down on my lap as I play the hem of my white shirt.

Why am I being reprimanded for something I don't have any control with?

"A marriage scandal at this time? You two aren't even together yet!"

"We are together," I whispered and my father's eyes widened. "We got together that very same day," I added.

"Wah," I watch as my father washes his face with his hands as if he was really stressed out.

"But that was just a gift for Elle! Who buys engagement rings together, that's just so absurd," I utter. And my father raised an eyebrow.

"So you want him to surprise you?"

"Didn't you surprise Mom when you proposed? How am I any different? I'm a Simons too, Dad," I told him as if simply stating the obvious.

His lips formed an o-shape upon the realization.

The escapade that Z and I had last time resulted in one huge marriage scandal that our parents got shocked about. It was a week after that incident when my dad suddenly came banging at my door earlier this morning because of it.

Apparently, some paparazzi took a photo of me trying some ring inside that jewelry shop the same day we picked up Aunt Zanaya's present. It was the same day Z and I decided to buy something for Elle since it's almost her birthday.

And again, if that ring was for me, it shouldn't be an engagement ring because I'm going to kill Z if he doesn't surprise me for that.

My cheeks blushed red at that thought.

"Yah! What are you thinking? Your cheeks are getting red!" my father exclaimed and I laugh even more.

I can't believe I'm really thinking about it. I mean, Z and I are too young for that. And we're too young to be engaged.

"Grey, I think it's us who should be fixing everything. It's our fault the kids had to be exposed to media like that. It's because we are their parents," my mom chimed in.

My lips puckered at her words.

"I am proud to be your daughter. Regardless of the restrictions in our life, I am happy that you two are my parents. It's just that the circumstances are not the same. So it's not your fault you are famous. We won't be here if you aren't," I answered.

A huge smile immediately crosses my mom's face and I saw Dad hiding his smile by faking a cough and covering his lips.

It's true though. I will never be ashamed of my parents. Some kids would die to be in my place. And regardless if my parents are famous or not, I should be happy I am brought to this world.

"Sorry," my father started. He sat down beside me and that's all I needed. I lunged into him and wrapped around my arms on his waist.

"I was just a little startled about the marriage news and I freaked out. Just thinking about my baby getting married stresses me out. But I know you'd eventually have your own family. I was just hoping it wouldn't be this early," he hugged me back and I felt him kissing the top of my head.

"So does that mean you're giving your blessing to the young Z?" my mom asked amused. She also sat beside me and joined the hugging party.

"Not yet. Though his father was trying to build up his son to me. Tss," my father hissed. "No one will be perfect enough for my baby,"

I lifted my gaze and grinned to my father, "Dad, you do realize aunt Max may actually feel the same right? To his parents, I may never be good enough too,"

Mom chuckled at my words. "Your aunt Max will accept anybody as long as Z and Y love her. I'm not sure in Elle's case though. If Latch ended up falling in love with his best friend too, that's when your Uncle Sky will go nuts,"

The two of us laughed at what my mom said, though my father ended up whining.

We were at that state when Latch came in the front door. He was panting, sweat running down his face. It seems like he just went out for a jog.

His brows furrowed at the sight in front of him and that made me grin. "Please tell me you guys are not being sentimental and all that shit because I will be so offended that I am not included. What am I to this family?" he dramatically exclaimed before running to us engulfing everyone with his manly hug.

"Yuck! You smell like shit, Latch!" I screamed and his laughter echoed the whole living room.

We all had our breakfast and the moment I came to my room; I saw a lot of missed calls from the others including Z. So to make everything easier, I logged in to our group chat and told me we just had a family talk.

"Bitch, you just gave me a heart attack. I thought you two are really getting married and my sorry ass is not informed,"

I laughed at Zamara's words. She really doesn't have a filter sometimes.

After responding, I sent Z a text and it wasn't long before I saw his name on my phone indicating that I am receiving a call.

I sat on my bed and rested my back on the headboard before answering.

"Hey..." I answered. I heard him releasing a long sigh out of relief.

Soft chuckles escaped my lips. "I'm fine. Dad freaked out but it wasn't anything serious, okay? "

"Mom freaked out too but she's more on angry. You know my mom is the protective one," he stated. That's understandable. I heard that's one reason why everyone had major struggles in pursuing our moms because Aunt Max is very protective of them.

"Dad was proud though. I think he was even disappointed the news isn't real,"

We both laugh at what he said, my cheeks blushing too.

I heard him coughing from the other line. I took a deep breath to calm my nerves. I can't believe I'm almost palpitating like this just because I'm hearing his voice. And as much as I hate to admit it, I miss him so much even though I just saw him last night.

He was here last night and we were just in the living room talking. Dad was serious when he said he don't like Z to be inside my room anytime soon.

"I miss you, baby," his words came out in a whisper and that sent shivers all throughout my body.

Damn. I can never get used to this. I'm not complaining though. ----

Chapter 36

Mari's POV

"I'm starting to hate this," Zammy snickered, her brows furrowing as the four of us walk on the hallway. Louise and Irish are with us and that made me feel even worse because out of every one of us, the two, including Dimitri are the once not used to so much attention. And now they have to experience this all because of the scandal that Z and I have been to.

My Mom and Dad's agency released a statement about it and requested that the media doesn't release reports about us, especially those unconfirmed. Part of the reason is that we are not celebrities like them and some of us are actually still underage.

"Sorry, I didn't know things will blow up like this," I whispered. I felt Irish's hand on my shoulder.

"It's not your fault. Dad said it's never our fault whenever news about us comes out," an understanding smile was showing on her face and made me feel at ease a little.

"Yeah, but these kids looking at us like we did something wrong makes me wanna punch someone in the face,"

The three of us laughed at what Zamara stated.

"I'm actually confused about why there aren't any articles about Zamara yet. You know, about her hitting people,"

Irish giggled at what Louise said and I did the same. Zamara just smirked and flipped her hair.

"They're probably scared of my Dad,"

We all internally agreed at what she said. And I know part of the reason was that Ashton fixes everything even before it reaches Zammy's Dad. Not that Uncle Storm can't do anything about it. If not, Uncle Storm might even just let those reporters because he can't be bothered by it. And Zamara was raised like that so I doubt it would be affecting her that much.

Soon enough, the four of us part our ways to go to each of our classes. But I haven't even reached my room when two girls stood in front of me, blocking me of my way.

My eyes darted towards them. The first girl was as tall as I am, her stomach was showing and she has that big proud smile showing on her face. The other one was a little shorter and she's wearing an elegant dress, something that I can picture Louise will be wearing.

I raised an eyebrow, not bothering to ask them a question.

I was half expecting them to go sassy on me but I was caught off-guard when one of the girls almost squealed especially after I gave them an awkward smile.

"Sorry," she tried fanning herself so she would calm down.

"We're sorry for coming at you like this. We don't want to bother you but we like you so much. We're a huge fan! I especially like your sense of fashion and you look so cool and pretty! Can we take a picture?" the shorter girl asked. Her eyes were shining and my lips parted a little in shock.

But I was able to release a sigh of relief. For a moment, I thought I'd actually have to deal with bullies and all. Not that I normally deal with them because people tend to shy away from us but of course, not everyone likes our presence.

It took me a few seconds to recover but I did. I smiled at them and agreed to take a photo. Though it's kind of awkward because again, I'm not a celebrity, to begin with.

Before they left, what the other girl said actually warm my heart.

"I always knew you and Z look good together. His eyes shine every time he looks at you and it's like he can't see anybody else except you, Marigold. We're rooting for you two!"

I was already walking to my next class, late at that but I felt better. At least now I know that not everyone hates us. And that there are people who wish us genuine happiness. That's all that matters.

"Big bad Marigold," I grimace at the sight of Y. Unlike last week, he's back to pester me. I'm not even sure what to feel about it but I'd rather let him annoy me to death than see the coldness in his eyes. I knew he was like that because I hurt his brother then. He may be playful but he cares for his twin a lot.

"Your breath stinks," I banter as I sat on a bench opposite his. "Are those chocolates?" I didn't ask verbally, instead, I extended my hand expecting him to give me some.

"Someone gave this to me. Go on, eat them all," he laughed and I hissed.

We don't really eat those things that other people give us. It's not safe yet you actually feel sorry if you reject them so we actually have to dispose of it at home. We've been trained to do that after Latch was food poisoned when he was young.

"Where's my twin?" he asked.

Atlantis arrived and I almost laughed at her state. Her brows were furrowed and she looked really pissed off.

"You look like you step on shit," Y was laughing and I laughed out loud when Atlantis gave him a good glare.

"Whoa, hold your horses, Lan, ge'ez," he looked taken aback too. Atlantis is a sweet little girl who doesn't get mad easily. So her acting like this is really serious.

"I have stupid classmates. They keep asking things about you and Z, and it's annoying because they were being disrespectful and all. Are they expecting me to ask you two if you already have sex?" she gritted her teeth in anger and my lips formed an o-shape.

My cheeks burned in embarrassment. That was so direct, I wasn't expecting it.

"Tell them to ask Z about it," Y teased and I scoffed.

"Shut up, idiot. Z and I cuddle but we never did that stuff, okay? And please, that's so personal, oh my God!"

"It is! And why do they have to know?"

She sounded so annoyed, somehow, I was touched to see how she actually cared and felt offended on our behalf.

I saw my phone beeping and saw a message from Z.

"Baby, where are you? Please tell me you're not with Zamara when it happened,"

"Huh?"

Before I can even respond, I saw Ashton running towards the Dean Office, again, in his corporate attire.

"Shit. What did Zamara do this time?" Y asked and we didn't have to ask because it's not even two seconds, all three of us received a call from our parents, asking us to go home immediately.

Jesus, what the hell happened?

Chapter 37

Mari's POV

"Dad, we need to do something about this," I heard Ashton reasoned. All of us were now gathered in Uncle Seth's house after our parents asked us to come here directly.

I came along with Atlantis and Y. The others as soon came after. Z kissed my cheeks and hugged me immediately when he saw me.

"I know, Ash. But we need to consider a lot of things. And we have to wait for your uncle and aunt Soo to arrive," uncle Seth messed up Ashton's hair, who looked very exhausted and stressed out.

My eyes caught aunt Max's and she urged me to come over and gave me a hug.

She cupped my cheeks and pouted.

"This is also not you, and Z's fault, okay?"

I bit my lower lip and is unable to respond. Apparently, Zamara got into another fight because of Z and I. We all knew Zamara ever let it slide whenever we or our families are involved. The thing now is, it was four versus Zamara and even though Zammy knows how to use her fist, she still took quite a toll n her body.

Uncle Storm is fuming. He's now at school at wanted to have an investigation about it. And this is how we found out Zammy had been dealing so much stress lately. The thing is, Zammy gets so affected about everything and because of my recent marriage scandal with Z, it seems that things had gotten worse especially for her.

I heard Zammy snapped when one kid asked if we actually have share casual sex with each of our uncle's kids.

"Baby, it's not a crime to fall in love. And I'd welcome you any day because my baby loves you,"

"Mom, stop calling me your baby," I heard Z groan. He was standing right next to his mom but I saw how worried he looked.

Atlantis was hugging aunt Zanaya, who also shared her experience earlier.

"I don't care. I'm filing a case. Their parents better find an attorney to back up their asses," I heard my Mom talking with my Dad on the balcony. They were there but I can hear my mom screaming since earlier. She had gotten so mad after she saw Zamara's marks and she also learned about the things those kids had said about me.

The girls that Zamara had encountered are repeat offenders. It appears that their parents came with them after being called at school and didn't even show any sign of remorse about what happened. Aunt Soo said one parent even said that maybe it's true because it's probably something my parents did during their younger years too.

And my Mom snapped at that. She can't believe we are being sexualized because we are their kids. It must have hurt her so badly.

"Cupcake, listen. Let us fix this first, okay?" I can hear my father cooing my Mom hugging her as she cries and my gaze fell down on the ground.

Aunt Max pulled me in for a hug. I can hear Louise already crying too.

"Do something about it, Raze," Aunt Joy's words ring into my ears. "This is getting serious. We can't let the kids suffer any more than this. I don't want them to hate the fact that they are our kids. Things shouldn't work like that,"

"Z, baby, bring Mari at the kitchen and give her water,"

It wasn't long when I felt Z's arm wrapped around mine as he leads me to the kitchen. My eyes were blurry because I can no longer stop crying.

I can't help but blame myself for starting this. It was because of us that this happened.

When we reached the kitchen, I felt his hands on my waist and my body got lifted on the ground. The next thing I knew; I was already sitting on the kitchen counter.

Z cupped my cheeks and wipe away my tears...

"Baby, please stop crying... It breaks my heart to see you like this," he whispered. With my blurry vision, I can recognize the worry in his expression.

"We'll fix this, okay? Our family will do. They always do,"

My heart clenched at his words.

"I know. But it just hurts to hear my Mom crying. Why do they have to experience hate at this point? They were hurt before. And now they keep getting hurt because of us. Now I feel like our relationship caused this mess,"

Z pulled me closer and kissed my forehead.

"Mari, even if we are together or not, people just hate our families because they are successful. This will eventually happen in the future too, maybe not because of us but because of someone else. No matter what happens, do not blame yourself for it okay?"

"But what if we're not together?"

The words got stuck on my throat, and I wasn't even sure I was able to say those words without my voice cracking.

I saw his brows furrowing.

"There can never be us not being together. I will always find a way. I love you, Mari. I love you so much that I'm willing to lose myself if it's you,"

I felt his hands on my own, pressing it together and somehow, I suddenly felt secured.

"Promise me, baby. Please promise me you won't give up on us ever. I love you, Mari. Not to be selfish but I was half glad that news about us getting married came out. That way, I won't have to deal with those guys hitting on you," he stated, trying to change the mood and I pouted.

"Dad was very upset about it. I guess he had gotten shocked about the possibility of me walking out of his house one day because I'm already getting married," I added.

Z smiled at me before leaning closer, giving me a sweet kiss on my lips.

"Don't give up on us, okay? There are so many things I wanted to do with you. I want to travel the world with you, and experience new things with you beside me. Baby, loving you was the greatest thing I told my Mom, you don't even know how loud she screamed because of that,"

He then pulled me in for a hug and I wrapped my arms around him too.

I want to believe that things will get better for us. I love Z. I love him so much I'm willing to risk everything for us, right now.

Chapter 38

Mari's POV

What happened then caused major turmoil at school. It's not every day you'd see members of SHADOW and WHISTLE walking freely on the school grounds, with lots of bodyguards of course.

It was a mess. When my mom said she'll sue them, she really did file a case. Even my father wasn't able to stop my Mom when she came marching in the school, in her designer clothes like she's about to go on a photo shoot.

I've never seen my Mom that angry. Uncle Storm supporting her is not helping either. Everything had gotten really messy, I kind of felt bad because it all started due to my relationship with Z.

Zammy had been quiet though and my heart aches to see her like that. She's a strong girl and seeing her being like that made me think how bad things had been for her lately that she ended up in that state.

Ashton was stressed out and so were the others.

"Hey, you okay?" I heard Z's sweet voice. He was leaning forward, half his body almost close to mine but I remain seated on the couch inside Ash's room where all of us decided to camp in.

Zammy was sleeping in Ashton's bed. She's running a fever and Ashton promised to take care of her. It's quite funny how Zammy, despite her being sick, had called Ashton to pick her up just because she's used to having Ashton taking care of her.

Sometimes I wonder what Uncle Storm thinks. Does he really think Ashton only cares for Zammy like he's his older brother?

"Mari," I was startled when I heard Z's voice. I turned to his direction and realized how his brows are furrowing. I wasn't paying him any attention and I kind of felt bad. From the corner of my eyes, I saw Z and Louise looking in our direction.

"Sorry," I bowed a little and I heard him sigh. It was then that I felt his arms wrapping around me as he was trying to make me feel better. We stayed like that for a moment and we didn't really talk.

The mood between all of us is a little heavy and even after Z drove me home, we barely even talk.

Not bothering to invite him in, I was about to come inside when I heard him calling my name. I turned around and looked at him.

"We're okay, right?" he asked. I can see how uneasy he looked and I felt really really bad.

Oh, God.

I released a long sigh before mustering my sweetest smile. "Of course. Sorry, I was just tired. Drive safely, okay?" I told him and I can see the reluctance written all over his face. My stomach suddenly felt churning and there's this weird feeling inside me that keeps making me feel uneasy.

He still gave me a warm smile though I can still see a bit of worry showing in his face. He left the house and all I did was lock myself inside my room.

I covered myself with a blanket as I lay on my bed, my eyes focused on the ceiling.

I'm not really sure what's going on but I don't like it. Seeing everyone, how they all struggle, how they had to put down, and disregard their schedules because of this mess, I don't like it.

Everything that has happened makes my heart feel so heavy. My conscience kept bugging me and I can't sleep. Despite Z's efforts to telling me that it wasn't my fault, our fault, I feel like it is. And at some point, there's this idea in me that wants me to take responsibility.

But how?

Suddenly, I just wanted to leave and be alone for a while.

Everyone, all those people around me keep telling me that it's fine but I know it isn't. How can it be fine when everything is a mess? How can things be fine when my mom is so stressed out? Just how long do I have to pretend that this isn't affecting our family?

For a moment, I just want to leave. I want to be somewhere else, somewhere far away, with someone who wouldn't tell me it's fine when it really isn't... Someone who'll tell me it was indeed my fault because it is.

As much as I love Z, which I wholeheartedly accept now, I know he will never say anything that would upset me.

He never does.

So when my phone started ringing and I saw a familiar name flashing on my screen, somehow, I felt a little relieved.

Remembering all those times we've been together, I knew he will at least be honest with me. Unlike Z, he won't sugarcoat his words because that's just how he is. Or maybe not. But at least he never does something just to please me.

"Can you pick me up?" I asked him, not even bothering to let him speak. He seemed taken aback but agreed nonetheless.

Whatever he wants to say, he can tell me in person.

The moment the call ended, I just stayed lying on my bed, staring at the ceiling.

Should I tell him?

I bit my lower lip as I carefully think about the things I need to do, even the smallest details of everything I need to say.

I didn't even bother changing clothes because I haven't changed, to be honest. I was just too exhausted and my thoughts were full of worries.

In no time, I received a message from him telling me he's five minutes away from our house. I naturally stood up from my bed and just grab my pouch.

I was startled when I saw Latch walking out of his room and he seemed startled too.

He kept his hand on his right pocket and stared at the pouch on my hand

"Going somewhere?" he asked. I knew our parents are not yet home.

"Yeah," I lightly answered and just casually walked downstairs. I haven't even taken two steps when I received another message, this time, from Z.

"Take a rest. Hope you feel better baby. I love you,"

The moment I read his message, I felt like something inside my chest shattered into pieces.

Just why is he like this? Why does he always think of my feelings first?

Shaking off those thoughts in my head, I just shrugged my shoulder and found it hard to answer his message...Instead, I went straight outside when I heard the sound of his car's tire screeching, like always.

Z can wait, right?

Chapter 39

Mari's POV

"Here,"

After accepting what he's given me, I quickly chugged the light beer and fill my throat with it. I heard the sound of his laughter, probably amused with my ability to pretend I am okay while drinking in an open space like this.

"I'd bring you to a bar but we both know we're dead if either of our parents finds out," he stated. I put down the can on my right, the two of us staring at the open sky before us. Beneath us was a beautiful view I'd gladly wish to see every day when I wake up.

Too bad Mom and Dad didn't want to move near this place.

"That would probably earn us another scandal, don't you think? And then they'll say I'm the *Simons* playgirl, who seduced two *others*," I uttered and I heard him snicker.

"As if I'd let you seduce me. My eyes only see one girl,"

I smiled at what he said.

"Did Atlantis allowed you to court her now? I mean, it's been years since you first ask permission,"

Xander had been in love with Atlantis since I can't remember. He's such a hopeless dude. He's intimidating, much like Uncle Storm but he'd immediately waver once Lantis says a word. He's just like Ashton.

When I saw him calling me earlier, I knew I needed to be with someone I can trust. And even though I am the closest to Z, I can pretty much confess everything to Xander too. He calls me whenever he thinks I need him. That's how close we are. We are friends who see each other when one badly needed help.

"You know Z loves you, right?" he whispered. He chugged on his beer while I lifted my gaze and started appreciating the stars above.

"I know. How can I forget about that when all he does is make sure I know that he loves me,"

"So why are you acting cold to him then?"

I bit my lower lip at his question. I guess this was the reason why he went to see me. He cares for both of us and somehow, I feel a little bad for making even our friends worry.

With that in mind, tears started streaming down my cheeks. I didn't bother speaking. I know Xander understood.

I just sat there and cried. At one point, I felt him put a jacket on my shoulder because it's getting colder.

"You know, Z is that kind of person who doesn't share his things except to Elle and Y. You know, since he's the eldest. So when I saw him letting you borrow almost all of his wardrobe, I already knew that somehow, he must have had feelings for you. I'm not sure he's already aware at that point but I was so sure you two would end up together. I know how much he loves you. Fuck, I won't take my exams in a rush like that,"

I wipe the tears on my cheeks as I listen to him. Suddenly, I remember that day when Z showed up at the Villa I was in. Come to think of it, he really did a lot of things for me.

"Why are you so afraid?"

I turned to him and saw his worried eyes. I felt his arm on my shoulder and he pulled me closer. I lean on his shoulder and cried again.

Xander had always been a sweet friend. But I'm betting he'd run to Lantis in a flash of she calls for him.

"Because I don't want him to get hurt. It feels like being with me brings too many problems. I feel like all I bring to him, to his life are problems, everything is a mess,"

I cried in his shoulder and he let me. Maybe because Xander is a bit older than most of us that we can easily confide in him in times like this. And he lets us. He acts like the oldest especially when Ashton isn't available.

"So what, are you going to leave him? Can you do that? Can you let him go?"

That idea crossed my mind too but I can't. I can't do that to him. I love him.

"Mari, remember, being in a relationship comes with a responsibility. When you agreed to be together, you agreed to share the burden. Do you get me?"

"I know! It's just that, I feel like I'm hurting him more,"

"So, if you leave him, do you think that'll stop the pain? If Z calls you now and tells you he will break up with you so it won't be hard for you, what will you feel?"

The words he said hit like a damn truck.

I can't. I just can't let him go.

"Mari, love comes with a sacrifice. But sacrificing doesn't always mean letting go,"

"Xan..." I cried even more. What he actually said made me realize how I really can't let Z go. No matter how painful it is, I want to be selfish. I want to be with him even though it's so fucking hard.

Soft chuckles escaped his lips and when I lifted my gaze to see why, I saw his eyes focused on a car coming close to our direction.

"It's scary how Z knows you. He actually knows where to find you even without asking," Xander whispered and my heart started beating rapidly with just the sight of Z's car.

Just remembering how I acted towards him earlier makes me feel so bad.

Z had been nothing but an angel. He loves me and he never fails to make me feel how much he wants to be with me. Yet here I am, doing nothing but make him feel like I don't trust him.

So when he was finally able to reach the rooftop, I ran towards him and gave him a hug.

"I'm sorry baby. I'm sorry, I love you! I love you so much," I told him as I bury my face in his neck. His arms are wrapped around me and I never felt so safe in my entire life.

"I love you too baby, so damn much," he uttered and that's more than enough.

From now on, I will make sure to carry the burden with him.

Because that's how it should be in the first place.

Because we love each other.

Chapter 40

Mari's POV

"You should have called me," Z whispered. He was still hugging me and the two of us ended up staying at the rooftop while Xander went inside their house to check on his sister.

I felt Z's hands tightening on my waist. We were just standing there, facing each other as my arms were also wrapped around his body.

I smiled at him before resting my cheeks on his chest.

"I'm sorry. I got sidetracked for a moment. I promise I will call you first whenever I feel like something is wrong," I told him. Somehow, I felt a little bad for making him feel like I don't trust him, our relationship, but that little talk with Xander calmed me down a bit.

"It's funny how you always know where to find me. Did you go to our house?" I asked. I pulled away from me a little and realizes that he was still staring at me.

God, what beautiful eyes...

"No, I didn't but I went here because I knew something was bothering you. And at times when you can't confide to me, you always go to Xander or Ashton. But since Ash is probably busy with Zammy, I knew you'd be here instead,"

I bit my lower lip at his response. He just knows me too well.

"I just wanted to make sure you're okay and I would leave so you can talk to Xander but you started running towards me. You know I'm weak when it's you,"

I can sense the longing in his voice so I hugged him tighter.

All this time, I feel like it's always Z who's always been showing how he feels and I am always at the receiving end. From now on, I want him to feel how much I love him, and that he's not alone in this relationship.

With that in mind, I pulled away from him a little and reached for his nape. Maybe because he wasn't ready that I was able to pull him so easy until our lips were already touching.

And as if it was magic, I felt my heart started beating so fast, I feel like I was floating.

He must have been startled at my action so he stood there frozen at first until I felt him responding to my kisses.

He was kissing me so passionately, I felt my heart skipping so many times I wasn't sure if that was healthy.

I just miss him so much.

"I'd love to see you too getting all lovey-dovey and cozy but Dad might come here and I'm not really sure he'd be pleased to see you two eating each other's faces,"

Z and I pulled away from each other but I saw him staring at my lips. I saw him gulp and that made my cheeks blush even more.

"I love you, baby," he whispered and I starting to think that I was getting addicted to hearing him calling me baby.

"Come here," he pulled me in for a hug once again and I heard Xander laughing.

"You guys, you two go home before you make our house a hotel,"

In the end, both Z and I sat with Xander while drinking. Latch and Y ended up fetching us because we're all drunk and Dad will freak out if I sleep here with Z.

The following days had been better. I started caring less to those bullshits the media had been gushing about. Mom eventually dropped the case because that's just how she is. She's mad but she still has that soft heart.

Zammy had been better though. Ashton was all over her and that's when Uncle Storm called Ashton for a man to man talk.

To this day, we still don't know what they talked about. All we know is that Ashton looked so pale after. Even Aunt Zanaya and Uncle Seth were laughing and teasing their son for it.

"Hey, baby..."

My brows furrowed at what Y had said and before I can even stop myself, I started hitting him with my notebook. We were at Aunt Zanaya and Z fetched Elle. So here I am dealing with his stupid twin.

Y's laughter echoed across the backyard and Dimitri lifted his gaze from the book he was reading.

"Stop calling me that, you idiot!" I glared at him and he was still laughing so hard.

"Sorry," he uttered while still laughing. "I'm just not used to my brother calling you that. Jesus Christ, I can hear him calling you baby over the phone every fucking night, I'm starting to feel like the next time I hear him say that, I will be puking,"

I hit him with my notebook once again and he just giggled.

"I'm kidding!" he shouted. Dimitri was laughing at the scene before him.

"I like it when he calls me baby. It's just cringe-y to you because you don't have a girl to burn your phone lines at night," I clap back and he scowled.

"My single ass is happy, bitch," he grimaced and I just rolled my eyes. He's just envious because he doesn't have someone special to spend time with.

"He does have a girl though,"

My head snapped towards Irish's direction. Her eyes scream so much innocence I wanted to hug her so tight.

"Shut up, Irish. I told you, you saw wrong," Y was so fast to answer so that made me even more curious. Even Dimitri stopped reading altogether. This is the first time Y looked so flustered but Irish is too innocent to notice that. She's just that pure soul.

"What do you mean, Irish?" I smiled at her sweetly and she pouted.

From the corner of my eyes, I saw Y getting frantic. I also saw Lantis and Louise walking toward our direction.

"Stop," Y pleaded but the devil in me started working. *Payback's a bitch, huh.*

"Go on, Irish. We don't want our little Y getting into trouble in the future, right?"

Irish seemed to worry at what I said and bit her lower lip.

"I saw a girl kissing him last time. I thought she was his girlfriend," Irish uttered and Y almost fell on his seat.

"You have a girlfriend?"

All of us turned towards Louise who was looking at us so innocently. She sat on the empty space where Y was sitting earlier. She was smiling at him and I can see how Y's face turned so pale.

I know his dirty little secret. He looked at my direction and I can see the fire burning in his eyes.

Before I can even tease him further, I felt a pair of hands wrapping around me from behind, Z's familiar scent filling me in.

"Mom wants you inside Heron," he stated. Y hesitated for a moment. His eyes landed on Louise. It was as if he wanted to say something but he can't.

Soft giggles escaped my lips as I watch Y walked away. Our parents were in the kitchen, cooking, and discussing adult things.

Z pulled me closer to him. He leaned a little and kissed me on the cheeks.

"Y was fuming. What did you do to him?" he was laughing as his eyes were still following his brother's.

"He started it," I reasoned but I still can't help but laugh.

"You two have to stop fighting eventually. At least before the two of us get married," he casually stated and my heart almost jumped out of my chest.

Good Lord, Z. How can he just casually tell me those words?

I stared at him as he cheekily gave me a wink.

He knows what he's doing in my system. This fucking tease!

Though what he said, that isn't a bad idea too. In fact, I actually like it.

Chapter 41

Mari's POV

"No! One more lap, baby, please?"

I started laughing really loud when I heard Z groaning. That also means a few additional curses just because he can't say no. Well, he can. But Z has never said no to me. I am just that spoiled girlfriend everybody is envious of.

He went to our house a little too early to exercise with my Dad. So that means two hours of workout, I don't even understand why Dad take that long to do so when he's basically bulk up under his shirt. He's just hiding it with his bunny face that their fans still gushes about. Name a scam, Grey Simons.

Z and I been together for a year and it took Dad almost six months to finally get used to the fact that I am already in a serious relationship.

Yeah, it took him that fucking long. Z had been so patient and I was always the one whining. Mom had been the best diversion so Z and I can go out freely on a date.

Now him and Z often jog around the area every morning. Uncle Skylikes the bond though. He said at least that made my Dad stopped pestering Uncle Skyto exercise with him. Like a win-win thingy, as what Aunt Max always says,

"C'mon Z, endurance is important. Now run another two laps. I used to do thirty with Tokyo," he cheered from the balcony.

I laughed even more at what my father said. He's just so annoying sometimes whenever he gets so competitive in terms of things like this, or almost anything if I may add.

"Baby, you know I love you and all, but doing ten laps with you on my back is close to killing me," he whispered, low enough so my father won't hear.

Adorable.

At that, I jumped off his back and pulled him for a hug.

"Boomer!" my father shouted but I guess Mom did her job and made Dad shut up because I heard him whining from up there.

With a hand towel with me, I started wiping Z's beautiful face.

"You know, you don't have to accompany my father every day. Everyone knows he's just overly addicted to exercising," I told him. I had to stop myself for a moment after seeing him pout. Ever since we got together, I started seeing Z's habits adorable.

Like how he puckered his lips at times, that makes me wanna kiss him endlessly. But I can't just do that whenever I like it. Dad might kill me if he sees me kissing Z publicly.

We promised our parents we'd be lowkey. Since media also follows our every move, they want us to still have our privacy. And we're okay with that. I honestly don't like to suffer any more scandals than we already had in the last. Remembering that makes me so upset.

Z and I sat on the bench in the backyard. There are two glasses of orange juice already set on the table, a few slices of bread, strips of bacon, eggs, and two bottles of jams.

I took Z's soiled shirt and gave him a new one.

It was when he was settled that we started having our breakfast.

"You know, Y needs to toughen up if he wants to pursue Lou. Xander will surely tear him into pieces. Not to mention Uncle Raze who's overly protective of his princess. Though in all honesty, I don't really mind watching Y suffer. He had it coming for being so annoying as shit"

Z laughed at my words. I took my glass of orange juice and drank from it.

"You know Y teases you for the fun of it. Mom had scolded him so many times so please count that as your revenge," he leaned closer and wiped the corner of my lips with a tissue.

I lifted my gaze and was greeted by his beautiful smile.

Oh God, how thankful I am that Z knocked the sense out of me. I just can't imagine my life living without him.

"Do you have classes tomorrow? I heard Prof. Richards was out of the country for a seminar," he asked.

By this time, we were already finished eating.

"I do have one in the afternoon. Prof. Richards left us things to do I might have to stay at the library then,"

We brought the plates inside and Z helped me clean them.

"It's okay, Z. You can take a rest, I can do this myself," I chuckled. He was standing beside me in front of the sink and I wanted to laugh at how awkward he looked while he tries to get the sponge from me.

"No. Just because you're the woman doesn't mean you're the only one allowed to do the chores,"

We were cutely bickering with each other when I heard the devil talking.

"Might as well get married tomorrow and get our Dad hospitalized if you two don't stop being cringe-y as fuck," Latch chimed in. He went straight to the fridge and grab a bottle of water.

I lifted my eyebrows, my annoyance reaching the roof in an instance.

"Talk to me after Dad finds out you're so close to flunking you major," I threatened. I told him that while he was in the middle of chugging his drink so that made him spill a little.

His eyes widened as he stared at me in pure disbelief.

"You're kidding me, right?" he whispered. I saw him gulp and that made me smirk.

"Nope, try me, bitch,"

Latch scowled and talked straight to Z. "You still have a chance to break up with her. You know, I won't hold it against you. I'm sure even Dad will totally understand," he muttered before he took a quick dash out of the kitchen.

I heard Z laughing beside me so I turned into him and grimace.

A soft smile escaped his lips and before I knew it, he had already bent down a little, his lips claiming mine.

It was just a peck but as always, my stomach felt butterflies and giraffes going crazy inside it.

Jesus, he's going to make my heart go weak at this rate.

Chapter 42

Mari's POV

"It's impossible. Z will forget his own birthday but not anything related to you or your relationship," Atlantis stated. She was collecting her things as we were about to go to our next class.

I didn't bother answering her. The truth is, I don't even know what to feel. Lately, Z had been so out of it. It was as if he was always in deep thought and was fumbling.

It's been a week actually. I tried to ask if there's anything wrong but he just said it was nothing. He told me he was just preparing for his finals which I know is a load of bullshit. Z is the smartest out of all of us. He can nail his exams without even studying. It was something all of us knew ever since we were a kid. Uncle Sky always says it was from his genes but Aunt Max would always oppose it.

But this, Z's sudden coldness is stressing me out. Truth be told, I wasn't even half fazed about the fact that he forgot about yesterday. It wasn't as much as important as having him with me.

Yesterday was our 500th day as a couple. The whole day, I was anticipating for his greeting but all I received was a good morning and good night message. Yeah, a few have you eaten questions but that's just about it.

"Do you want us to contact Y? Or Elle might actually be a better choice. If things doesn't end well, Xander would probably have an idea what's happening,"

She walked with me along the hallway. I'm still not in the mood but I don't really want a fight with Z.

Ever since we got together, all he did was show me how much he loves me, how much he will sacrifice and do for us to stay together. The amount of stress he probably had to endure because of my Dad was more than enough. So I want to hold into him and think that this was something that will eventually pass.

"I don't want to bother them with this. Besides, I know Z will come to me eventually,"

"Why not ask him about it if you're that bothered?"

I thought about that. Honestly, the moment I woke up this morning, I was two seconds away from calling him. But something in me can't seem to do it.

"Oh, Miss Devon, Miss Simons,"

Atlantis and I stopped in our tracks when one of the college deans greeted us. We both bow and greeted her back.

"Great, it's good I actually bumped into you guys especially you Miss Simons,"

I wanted to raise my eyebrow at her words.

Please don't ask for any favors regarding our parents. I silently wished.

Because it wasn't the first time to be honest. Sometimes, my parents were okay with it but I'm not. I fucking hate it. I hate it so much I had to use all the self-control that I have not to snap at those people.

A signature from my parents or something was okay but sometimes, the favors gets too overbearing and ridiculous.

"Yes, Miss Choi?"

"Well, I was kind of hoping you could remind Mr. Devon Kim to drop by the faculty. It's been a week and he hasn't submitted his papers. The deadline was nearing and I was sure he wouldn't let this opportunity into waste,"

My brows furrowed at what she said but before I can ask any more questions.

"You guys must be so proud of your friend especially you Miss Simons. Aren't you two dating?"

I smiled in acknowledgment but I really wanted to ask her what she was talking about.

For some reason, my stomach started churning and the beating of my heart started accelerating.

I was nervous, dead nervous. And I knew Atlantis was curious about what's happening too.

"Anyway, please tell Mr. Kim to bring in his registration from his student exchange application. It is such a great opportunity for him. Out of the ten students, only his credentials met the requirements so it was automatically offered to him,"

At that, I was frozen still in my place, unable to move. The college dean left both of us in the hallway, my breath hitches and I feel like I was suffocating.

"Mari..." Atlantis called for my attention.

I bit my lower lip, unable to speak. Is this the reason why Z had been out these days?

What was he thinking?

Atlantis must have realized how the incident affected me so the two of us ended up skipping our classes and we both went to our usual spot.

The moment I locked eyes with Xander, he stood up and guided me to sit down. Lennox was with him but I was too out of it to even be bothered.

"Hey, what's wrong?" he asked the moment I was seated. Atlantis was standing behind me and I saw them locking eyes as if they were silently conversing.

My heart was beating rapidly.

Suddenly, it all dawned into me, the reason why Z was unfocused. He must be thinking about the exchange program. He must be having a hard time deciding.

Was it because of me?

"Where is Z?" I heard Xander asking, prying for his phone in his pocket but I held him to stop him from calling Z.

I don't want Z to see me like this.

I was already crying. Suddenly, I felt so stupid. Ten minutes ago, I was just upset with him because he forgot our day only to find out that he must be struggling. I knew Z will have a hard time deciding.

Devon will always think about me. I know he'll think about staying because I will be left there.

Z won't leave me. He will never do that - that I am sure of.

But how about his dreams? How about his future? As the dean said, it was a great opportunity. I don't want to take that away from him.

"Mari, why the hell are you crying? Did you and Z fight?" he asked. I shake my head in response. I can't talk. I feel so bad about what's happening.

I can't believe I'm dragging Z down when all he had been was an inspiration to me. Ever since we started dating, my grades had been better because he helps me study, one reason why Mom loves him even more.

I am nothing but a burden to him.

"Mari?"

My body stiffened when I heard Z's voice. I lifted my gaze and stared at Xander who immediately shook his head.

"Oops," I tilted my head and saw Lennox on his phone. "Sorry," he mouthed. *Shit.*

I was quick to wipe away the tears in my cheeks before turning into Z.

And there he is, face full of worry. He was panting as if he runs to get here. That made my heart clenched.

Why? Just why is he like this? Why does he live his life with me in its center?

Why can't he live for himself too?

"Why?" I whispered, my voice cracking. Xander stood up to give Z space.

At that, my tears started streaming down my cheeks once again.

I feel so bad for Z. Everything he does, every decision he makes, he always has to consider me, my emotion, my reaction. But when it comes to me, I mostly decide for myself. I seldom think of his reaction.

I had been so selfish and knowing how Z had been out of focus the past few days, it only means he was considering it. He wants to go but he can't because of me.

I felt his arms wrapped around me, caressing my back to calm me down.

Fuck Marigold. Why are you dragging him down? Why are you taking his beautiful future away from him?

I lifted my gaze and our eyes met. And I recognized the expression he was wearing. He knew I was already aware of it.

"It's nothing, really," he started explaining but I stopped him midway.

"Can I decide for you?" I asked. At that, I saw fear clouding his expression and that breaks my heart even more.

Fuck you, Mari. What have you been doing all this time? ---

Chapter 43 - END

Z's POV(Untold)

"Are we going to the Simons?" I heard my twin asking. Elle was there, bouncing excitedly. I'm betting that she's excited to see Latch because they always play.

My mom leans forward and kissed Yon the cheeks. "Yes, baby. The whole family will be there. You guys can play all you want,"

"GUCCI, the car's ready," that's all Dad said and mom's attention was all on him. I shake my head a little, no longer surprised how fast Mom's attention can easily be diverted towards Dad. They're just that, so in love with each other. All of our aunts and uncles actually. Us, kids had grown accustomed to these affections they are so proud with.

Who would have thought that the two most powerful Kpop groups in the whole world would end up together?

They were legends, still are. Y and I are already thirteen but we can still feel their presence and immense social status. There's not a single soul that doesn't freak out when they see either mom or dad. People go even crazier when they are together, sometimes it amazes me.

In no time, we were all gathered in the Simons' house. Our parents were all in the kitchen, talking about something while we all gathered in the living room so we can watch movies.

"Zammy, do you want some pizza?" I heard Ash ask.

"I want some too!"

"Me too!"

"Okay, okay!" Ashton laughed in response. That's just how he is. He'd always ask Zammy first.

I watch as my twin sprawled on the floor. He was watching Louise and Irish while they play. Latch and Elle were in the bean bag, sleeping. They kept playing earlier and got so tired.

"Where is Atlantis?" Xander suddenly asked. I tilted my head and realized that she was not around.

"Maybe she's with Aunt Zanaya. You know Lan loves being with her Mom,"

Xander shrugged his shoulders and continued watching. To be honest, my attention wasn't really in the movie. I really just wanted to sleep.

"Where's Mari?" I heard Aunt Tokyo asked. She was walking around with a tray in her hands. My eyes locked with hers and I saw her smile. "Z, honey, can you be a dear and call Mari? She's probably in her room sleeping. That kid binge watch something last night,"

I nodded and stood up almost immediately. I'm bored anyway. If I don't get up on the couch, I'd probably end up sleeping too.

Marching my way into Mari's room, I knocked three times before opening the door. And there I saw her, sleeping peacefully on her bed. Her hair was disheveled, blanket all over the place. The television is actually still open.

I shake my head and laughed at her state.

As always, Mari is always a free soul.

I reached to the television and turned it off.

Should I wake her up?

Scratching the back of my head, I headed to the side of her bed and tried calling out her name.

"Mari..."

She didn't even budge. "Mari," I called her name out loud this time but still no response. So I reached for her shoulder and started shaking her gently.

If aunt Tokyo didn't ask me to wake her up, I'd probably just let her sleep.

That's when I heard her grunting, stretching her hands while she squirms on her bed. I tried to stop myself from laughing.

"Mari, your mom wants you to go down," I told her. Her eyes squinted and saw her looking at my direction. Her brows furrowed.

"Z..." she whispered, her voice still hoarse.

Soft chuckles escaped my lips. "You look like a mess," I teased. We are all close to each other. Technically, we all grew up together, and seeing each other looking like a mess is nothing new to us actually.

"Shut up, Z,"

Slowly, she tried sitting on her bed, eyes still closed.

"I like your shirt, by the way," she added and I looked at my shirt. It was a GUCCI print shirt my mom bought for us. My parents love the brand.

"You already took two of my shirts. Mom will kill you,"

I heard Mari snicker. "Aunt Max loves my mom. Besides, Mom doesn't buy me those shirts,"

I just shrugged my shoulder. Mari is hard-headed. She always does what she wants but I have nothing against her.

It is true that she loves taking my shirt. I don't really mind though. It's just a shirt. Mom buys a lot.

"Whatever," I whispered.

We spend most of our time in school, having our vacation together, or having family gatherings from each of our houses. And we simply just got used to it.

"Just when will they stop?" I heard Mari grunting as we watch out parents running around the backyard. This time, it's Lan's birthday and we were at aunt Zanaya's house.

"Not anytime soon, I guess," I whispered. We were all sitting watching our parents have fun. We had gotten used to it. And our parents, despite their age now, are very much healthy. They don't seem like they've aged at all.

"Why do we have to study at the same school by the way?" Mari grunted. I looked at her and raised an eyebrow.

"Maybe because uncle Grey was afraid you'd get into a fight every week," I teased. Mari had always been the one to question our parents' decisions about us. And she does that because she just wants something to talk about.

"And control your anger, please. You're going to kill Latch at this rate,"

Mari rolled her eyes at what I said. Latch, being such a ladies man always ends up having a girl looking for him, and that puts Mari into lots of trouble. And that puts me in trouble too.

I can't even remember when that is but Mari had declared that I am her best friend. Again, who am I to protest? Mari would kill me.

And I don't really mind. I grew up with her. She can do whatever she wants as long as I can study and sleep in peace.

Besides, I am comfortable being with her.

Even when got into the university, we still all hang out.

"Z!"

I turned around and saw Mari running. She was wearing a short dress that fits her body. I raised an eyebrow when I saw a guy following her movements.

I stared at the guy and he must have felt my gaze because his eyes turned into my direction, eyes widening when he saw my gaze.

People say I am intimidating. The fuck I even care. I don't like it when my friends are being ogled like that. I mean, the guy was staring at her ass, probably fantasizing her or something.

He was quick to turn around and my jaw clenched a little.

My hands automatically wrapped around her waist as I pull her closer. She was grinning from ear to ear, not even aware of what just happened.

"I didn't flunk my numbers," she exclaimed. I shake my head as I laugh at her reaction. Taking her books from her hand, we walked towards our usual spot where the others are probably waiting.

And there I saw my twin reading something beside Louise. I almost raised an eyebrow when I saw him occasionally staring at her face instead of focusing on what they were studying.

I didn't want to pry but I am not clueless about Y's feelings. But he's my twin and I can let him get away with anything.

"Oh, by the way, there was a new cafe just two blocks away from here. Can we go there later?" Mari turned her attention towards me so I ended up staring at her face.

My brows furrowed a little. Why are her cheeks a little red than usual? And her lips, was it naturally red like this?

She was saying something but my suddenly, I can't seem to take away my eyes from her face.

What is it? What has changed?

"Hey!" she was laughing when she suddenly pinches my cheeks. That took me off from my trance.

Holy fuck, what was that?

He smiled at me giddily. "You're out of focus Z. I know I'm beautiful,"

A grin almost flashed my face at what she said. She's overly confident but she's not wrong either.

"Your makeup is a mess," I told her before I started walking. I felt her poke my side and that made me laugh a little.

"Shut up. Guys fall all over for me,"

Well, that's actually true too.

Marigold had always been open and voices out her thoughts freely. We had gotten so comfortable with each other that I had gotten used to her jokes too.

"Baby, are you still sleeping?"

I heard my Mom's voice, the sound of something rustling filling my ears for a moment. I heard the knocking on my door and a groan escaped my lips as I try to remove the blanket covering my body.

But before I can even pull it down, I felt a hand tightening its wrap around my waist, a slow movement on my side shaking my entire system.

Shit. I totally forgot about waking Marigold last night so I can drive her home!

She was very adamant about drinking last night to calm her nerves. And since we can't go to a bar, we ended up drinking on my room's balcony.

My eyes widened as I saw my mom opened the door. She walked gracefully and her nose crunches as she saw the bottles of beer on the side.

"You drank too much baby," she mouthed but headed straight to check my cabinet, a habit she had ever since.

Her frustrations on buying clothes had become an obsession but Dad always says it's just an outlet Mom had for having to deal with all of us every day.

If I didn't know very well, it's just Mom's stress over Dad and Elle. That little girl is a pain in the ass too.

But my ass is about to get beaten if Mom sees a girl on my bed.

"Mom," I whispered, afraid whoever is under my blanket would move or create any noise.

Mom was busy checking the clothes that made sure everything on me was covered.

"Baby, I can't find one of the jumpers I bought you last week. Did you give it to Marigold again?" It was a question but I can sense that she's upset.

She always whines about us not loving the clothes she gives us but thanks God Y knows how to work his magic on Mom.

I remember the jumper she was talking about and if my memory does not betray me, it was the same jumper Mari took yesterday when she barged in my room.

I bit my lower lip at the memory of it. That brat was so pissed off because someone threw a glass of water on her because of Latch.

Her prodigal brother just broke another girl's heart and Marigold had to take the downfall of it

If I didn't arrive on time, Marigold had probably ripped all of the girl's hair. I can clearly remember what she did with that one girl who tried to slap my sister for being so close with Latch.

She went berserk and had a full catfight with her.

It took Ashton and Xander to stop her as Mari told me she'll kill me if I take another step to stop her. As much as I don't want people to get hurt, I also know how many times Mari will kill me if I don't listen to her.

My breath hitches when I felt her pull me tighter, her warm breath hitting my skin sending shivers all over me. I felt the movement of her other hand and my eyes widened when I felt it go lower, I had to move a little and grab her hand of my own.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

I looked at Mom's direction and took a deep breath when I was sure she wasn't looking.

I pulled the blanket even more, but enough to ensure there was air coming in for her. I intertwined my hand over hers and I felt her stopped moving.

Holy shit. How did we end up on one bed anyway?

Marigold, she was like fire, a breath of fresh yet wild air.

Even though we were sons and daughters of the most famous K-pop superstars ever known, we were not exempted from the bullying and everything a teenager experiences. As much as possible, our parents wanted us to experience a normal life.

Now yesterday, I had to bribe Marigold for another of my toy car collection so she won't snap.

And of course, she had to barge inside my room and take another one of my clothes. It's not new to me anyway. She's been doing it half our lives and had forced herself as my best friend.

I gave up telling her otherwise. Amongst us second generation as what Dimitri calls our group, Marigold and Latch may be the most carefree. I'm not sure if it's because they are the sons of the known most powerful maknae couple, as what our parent's fans call them, but those siblings can do whatever they want and Aunt Tokyo will be out there cheering.

My father isn't even an exception. I can clearly imagine him cheering with Uncle Grey too.

"Baby, if this keeps up, I swear I'm going to have to ask her mother to pay me. That little bitch always gets my things too. Thank God I love Mari more than her mom that's why I'm letting her," she chuckled before closing my cabinet. A smile emerged on my lips.

Mom would always call aunt Tokyo names but she's the first to go crazy like a mad dog whenever there is an article about Aunt Tokyo.

"You always call her names when she's like your baby," I teased my mother and she just rolled her eyes.

My mother, despite her age, is still as glamorous and beautiful the world remembers. Actually, all of them including our uncles.

It's like they don't age at all.

Apart from uncle Storms, all of my uncles can still do chicken fights in the backyard. One time, my father, uncle Grey, and uncle Seth almost ruined aunt Zanaya's garden after they run wild and played some games.

To be honest, they all act more like a child than any of us.

"Stop teasing me and take a bath. You reek of alcohol," she pouted before she gracefully headed straight to my door.

And just when she's about to pull the door close, she peeked on me again and smiled cheekily her gummy smile showing.

I gulped. Sometimes, I find Mom's gummy smile creepy. She always gave me that look whenever she wants me to admit something.

It's like an invisible yet moving force.

"By the way, your uncle Grey met with your father today. You're a dead kid my baby. Tell Mari to call her Dad the moment she woke up," she stated and my jaw dropped on the floor.

"Stop keeping your girlfriend under your covers. Get up and go outside," she muttered before pulling the door close, the sound of her laughter echoing through the hallway.

It was then that her words slowly sank in.

"She isn't my girlfriend!" I tried reasoning as if my mother can still hear me.

Girlfriend, what is she even saying?

I have never seen Marigold as someone except as my best friend.

I felt Mari moved below me and I groaned when she started kicking the covers until her face was available for me to see.

And the moment I did, my mouth went agape when I saw how surreal she looked. She turned a little and my eyes caught sight of her ethereal face, a few strands of her hair scattered beautifully.

Suddenly, she started moving and even scratched her neck, my jumper sliding a little so I can see a clear view of her collar bone.

I gulped, my eyes avoided her, and I moved slightly away from her. But before I can even move a bit further, I felt her hand stopping me once again, this time, she even swang her feet over mine.

"Oh God," I groaned and I felt her make a sound.

"Z..."

Fuck.

It was just my name but why does it suddenly sound different? Her voice sounding hoarse not even helping.

And I felt it, something in me awakening.

Fuck Z, what the hell is happening?

That's Gold, Mari. Sweet, fiery Marigold, your best friend. Right?

"Mom, we were just sleeping," I tried explaining my mom who had been laughing the entire time while we were in the kitchen. Mari had gone home. Dad drove him home mainly because he and uncle Simons will go somewhere.

"That's what you said," she smiled cheekily and I just knew I can't win with her.

Fuck.

Mari, my girlfriend? No way.

I just disregarded that thought and let it be. Mom will not let it go so I just went back to my room.

I need to take a bath. I reek alcohol. Mari drank too much too.

I was already in the shower when thoughts of Mari kept clouding my thoughts...her smile, the sound of her laughter, even those moments when she pouts because she's annoyed with her brother...

I bit my lower lip as I try to shake my thoughts away from my mind.

"Fucking hell..." I whispered. My mom was just messing up with me.

I wish it was actually the case.

But days go by and all I do is think about her. If she's already asleep, if she already ate...if she's having fun.

I won't admit but I found myself realizing how much I care for her. I mean, I do care for her even before but I care for her in a different context now. And it scares me.

Mari is a childhood friend. Our families are close. I don't want things to get really awkward between us.

"Z!" I groan internally when I felt someone jumping on my back, my hands automatically reaching for her legs to make sure she doesn't fall.

"Nice catch," she giggled. I released a long sigh. She doesn't even know how she's affecting me.

"Why were you outside?" I asked her as I open the gate. I was just about to go inside uncle Demo's home when Mari jumped behind me.

"I was waiting for you, silly..."

Damn.

I don't even know how I was able to do it but I kept my feelings checked. I don't want to confuse her.

"Stop," I told her. She was pinching my cheeks too much. We were outside and Y kept on pestering her. I'm not even sure why but Mari gets easily annoyed with my brother. But being close to her made me get used to her antics.

And Mari normally listens to what I say.

"Awww, Mari!" I wrapped my arms around her waist and pulled her away from me. This little girl just bites me in my chest and she was laughing like it wasn't a big deal.

Elle wanted to come here because of Latch. Y was about to drive her but I volunteered so mom and dad just teased me for it. Such supportive parents.

I asked her to put some decent clothes on because we're going to watch some movies. She's such a tease.

That day when I saw her reaction upon seeing Lennox, I can't help but be scared. I knew one day, Mari will find someone she likes.

I knew that but I never said I was prepared for it. I don't think I am ever prepared for it.

"Marigold," I almost lost it when I saw Lennox's hands wrapped around her waist.

Mari sent me a message to fetch her because she was out for a drink. I had long been used to tracking her phone so she doesn't really need to tell me where but I didn't know I'd see her in someone else's arms.

Without even thinking, I pulled her closer to me, my hand resting on her tummy.

She's too drunk.

A long sigh escaped my lips. I just took a bath when I saw her message.

I am not dense. I knew Lennox is attracted to Mari. Who wouldn't though?

So every day, I had to pay even more attention to her. She was never concerned about getting into any relationship but then I was fucking scared.

"Are you sure, Mr. Kim?"

I nodded in response. I asked my professors if I can take all of my exams now so I can follow Mari. She badly wanted to have that vacation and seeing how she was so upset, I wanted to be there for her. She wanted to go home but I knew she was looking forward to that trip.

"What?" I snicker when I saw Y shaking his head. He just heard that I already finished my exams. And I also asked for dad's permission to follow Mari.

"Nothing. Just go home in one piece, please," he added and I just messed up his hair.

I had to drive for so many hours and to be honest, I was having a bad headache because of the things I just did.

The sight I saw when I arrived didn't help either. I saw Lennox trying to help her with her drink which I should be thankful for but I don't like it. I don't like the fact that he was touching her. Before I can even stop myself, I already reached for Mari and pulled her closer with me.

And just seeing how happy she looked when she saw me makes me even happier.

God knows I really had to stop myself while we share one room. Especially when she was drunk like that. Sometimes, it hurts to see Mari thinking negatively.

All of us are very thankful to our parents but sometimes, the burden was just too much so I kind of understood why she gets affected sometimes.

"Dev..." she called for my name. I didn't bother answering. I was fuming. I was mad not of her but I was mad at myself.

I knew I love her. But knowing that she can easily say those words, learning the truth straight from her lips upsets me. But what right do I have to get mad?

I will never force Mari to like me.

But I still have the right to get hurt, isn't it?

To calm myself, I just went out and had a drink with her friends.

"Sorry, Z. I know you heard us but please know that I was simply teasing her," I smiled at what Shiela said. She was that girl who Mari wants to set me up with.

"It's fine,"

And it's really her fault.

"Dev..." Maybe because I missed her that much and I wanted to punch myself for leaving her in the room but I was hearing her voice. I turned my attention elsewhere and my heart almost dropped on the floor when I saw her standing from afar.

Fuck Z, you made her cry.

"Sorry, Z. I won't do it again,"

I was startled when I felt her wrapped her arms around me.

"I won't share you. You're mine," I didn't even get half of what she said because I was just too focus on what she said first.

I took her in the room and all the patience that I had in me snapped.

I kissed her. And she fucking kissed back.

So when she outed us to our parents, I wasn't sure if I should be glad that they found out, or confused because Mari seemed to not understand what's happening.

Mom and Dad were very supportive that it embarrasses me too.

But my sweet firey Gold, she's just too innocent. I can still remember her reaction when I told her I'd court her.

"Hyung," I lifted my gaze when I heard Y's voice. I raised an eyebrow at him before drifting my gaze back to what I was reading.

"I said I'm fine Heron. Stop coming here," I told him. I heard him sigh and I just shrugged my shoulders. Y rarely calls me hyung. And he does that only to those occasions when he feels like, I was not in the mood to joke around.

Seeing Mari holding hands with Lennox just hit me in the face. Mari never lies to me. But she did because of him. That means he's that important. She wouldn't do that if he isn't.

To be honest, I wanted to talk to her about it but then I don't want to pressure her. If she wants him, I'd be willing to let her go. Her happiness always comes first.

So I promised to give her space though, to be honest, I am freaking out internally. I didn't know loving someone is this painful.

But when I heard that she cried and she wasn't feeling well, I wasn't able to stop myself.

I knew I had to see her. So finding out that she missed me made me feel so happy.

Fuck Lennox. I can't let my baby go.

Eventually, we got together. Though we had to overcome a lot of difficulties, I was fine with it as long as I have her.

"Just because you're my exercise buddy doesn't mean you've gained my full trust, Devon. I will hit your father if you make my little girl cry,"

I smiled at what uncle Grey said.

I will never hurt Mari.

"This is such a great opportunity, Mr. Kim. With all of your credentials, we decided to give you the slot. Your grades are more than qualified to be accepted, to be honest,"

I wasn't really sure how to react to what the professor told me. He was smiling but I can't even do the same.

He gave me the folder with all the requirements needed for the transfer and I was just too out of focus.

Six months?

That long?

I gulped. The first thing that came across my mind was my relationship with Mari. There's no way I can last six months away from her.

"Baby, are you okay?" I heard her ask one time while I was with her in their living room. She looked so worried, I can't help but cup her cheeks and kiss her forehead.

"Of course baby...I love you..." I whispered. I saw her smile and that was more than enough.

I was just too out of focus and somehow, I feel so bad for worrying her.

The student exchange program, it was a chance in a lifetime for a student like me. Being given a chance to study in an almost exclusive or invitation-only school is something. It's either your grades are more than qualified or you just got the best luck out there

My eyes landed on the envelope resting on the top of my table.

I haven't really told my parents about it too, or Mari.

A long sigh escaped my lips. Getting my things, I headed back to school for my last class. As I hop out of my car, my brows furrowed when I received a message from Lennox.

"Same spot. Mari, crying,"

Four words.

That was just four fucking words and I made a dash towards our usual spot.

Why is she crying?

I didn't care if I had to run. I was panting but that doesn't stop me from hugging her.

My heart clenched at the sight of her. My heart almost dropped on the floor.

She knew.

"It's nothing, really," I whispered.

I wanted to hug her, make her feel that everything will be alright.

I want her to know that it's okay. That it didn't matter. I know she will be sad if I'm gone.

"Can I decide for you?" she asked and that's when I knew. That's when I realized that both of us had eventually grown.

Gone was the selfish Mari...that girl who would only think of herself... That girl who would choose what's easier than what will make her happy...

She's just my Mari...

"I know you want it, Z. I know you're considering it. Will you listen to me and think about what you want? That's the decision I want to make for you. I want you to think about yourself this time. Choose what will make you happy. But before you make your decision, do know that if you choose to take it, we will be so proud of you. And I will make sure to wait for you so you don't have to be afraid,"

She cupped my cheeks and before I knew it, silent tears were already flowing down my cheeks.

"What the hell is happening?"

"These two are making a scene,"

"That's it, I'm calling Dad!"

"Is she fucking pregnant?"

I don't even care if the others are panicking as long as Mari and I understand each other.

"If you go, I promise to wait for you. We can video call, or see each other whenever we are free. I have tons of unused gifts with Dad. I guess this is my chance to use them,"

I pulled her closer and hugged her even tighter.

This is why I love her.

"Your happiness is important too, Z. And whatever your decision is, I will be happy. We will be happy, okay? I love you..."

A small smile automatically emerged on my lips. "I love you a thousand times more, Marigold Royal," I whispered.

- the end