

My Bad Boy's Ego

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STORYPDF

Complete English text · US Letter reading edition

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About this edition

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Chapter 1

Aubrey's POV

I woke up to the sound of my alarm clock.

"Aubrey, wake up honey!" my father's voice echoed into my room shortly after.

I released a groan as I turned over to my phone, hitting the "stop" button before tossing it carelessly onto the bed.

Moments later I dragged myself off of my not so comfy twin sized bed, and made my way to the new bathroom.

This new house wasn't as big compared to our old home; not that our old home was ever really big in the first place. My father, brother and I only moved in for about two days, and we were all still getting use to this old routine at this new place.

After finishing my morning routine, I threw my dark, wavy hair in a high ponytail. I dressed myself in a casual white blouse and blue jeans with matching white tennis shoes. I headed towards the kitchen.

"Good morning, little sis," my brother mumbled underneath his breath as he dragged his feet towards the dining area. He was wearing his baggy red muscle tank, with black basketball shorts. His red hair was pointing in all sorts of directions, as his eyes were barely even open.

"Good morning, Austin," I responded, laughing as I stacked two cardboard boxes full of furniture items and sat on it as a chair to the dining table, "You're going to school looking like that?"

"It's college Aubrey," he started, "No one cares about how you look."

I nodded and shrugged in agreement. We moved to California with my brother for him to be able to attend to college. We didn't have enough money to pay for his dorm, so instead we moved as a family. And as a coincidence, my father has found a little over minimum paying job for a business factory near here. Everything felt like it was falling into place.

Father came in with three dishes of eggs, bacon and toast. It felt good eating a decent breakfast after a while. Austin and I smiled at the smell of home cooked breakfast, and quickly devoured the plate.

"Are you excited Austin?" my father asked.

"Yeah," he answered simply.

"How about you, Aubrey?"

"Kind of," I managed to mumble with my mouth filled with food.

"I heard Jones High is a good school," he said and smiled at me, "Just remember to keep a good education and you'll be out of this school in no time. It's your Senior year anyways."

"I know, I know," I waved off his quick lectures about education.

"It's already 7:45," my dad stated as he looked at the clock, "You two should be out of this house already."

My father laughed as he pulled away both plates from Austin and I, "Have fun you two!"

Austin went back into his room to grab his backpack as I did the same.

"Bye dad!" we both said as we left the house.

Austin is two years older than me, we act as if we were twins sometimes. We think the same, we have the same opinion; he's basically me in a boy's body (aside from a few different interests).

We pulled up to my new high school. The red bricks and the cleanliness of the school caught my attention. All the schools of back home were not taken care of. There was always trash around at the old school, and no one even bothered to paint over the graffiti paintings on the wall.

Students were standing out in the front entrance of the school. It seemed like this school has cliques. The nerds, the jocks, the popular kids. It was like a movie.

"Well, I can't wait here all day," Austin says as he broke my chain of thought, "Get out of my car."

I released a smile as Austin held his arm out for a half hug. I hugged him and quickly got out of the car. "Have fun!" he called out as he raced out of parking lot.

I held the strap of my bag and walked towards the front entrance of the school. I couldn't help but smile at how cliché this school looked. Better yet, it felt like I was welcomed into a new life. No graffiti, no boring plain white walls, no broken lockers.

After a few minutes of day dreaming, I found myself walking straight into another person. My body lightly tapped against his arm. I looked up.

"Sorry," I said as I flashed a soft smile.

That's when I noticed everyone in the hallway suddenly got quiet. As I looked around me, I saw people whispering, glancing over my way. What's happening?

"The hell?" a deep voice echoed as I felt a sudden push on the shoulder from the boy I just ran into. I honestly forgot I even ran into him in the first place. A look of confusion was plastered all over

my face as I finally look at him. He looked back at me with a blank expression. He had messy brown hair, light blue eyes, clear beautiful skin as if it was glistening under the sun. He was wearing a burgundy V-neck, a short gold necklace, with a black bomber jacket. Then after a moment of silence, he spoke out. "Don't want to move?" he slightly questioned loudly, making sure to catch everyone's attention.

Shocked, I froze in place as he stares deeply into my eyes. A smirk swept past his face as he grabbed my arm and shoved me against the lockers. I winced as the handles of the locker stabbed me on my shoulder blade and back. He took a step closer towards me, and put his hands up against the lockers, blocking both sides to escape.

"New girl?" he asked me, its as if he knew every single girl in this school. I slowly nodded as he put an arm down and reached into his pocket, "Don't even think about moving," he commented.

Oh gosh, Im in trouble.

Chapter 2

I watched his hand as he pulled out a cigarette from his pocket, and put it between his pink lips. Is smoking even allowed in this school? I questionably looked at him as he leaned closer to me, poking the cigarette at my upper lip. "What? New girl doesn't want to smoke with me?" he taunted under his breath as the cigarette was still between his lips, "That's a first."

Everyone started mumbling, giggling, whispering and I knew it was about me and this guy. I bit my lower lip and turned my head slightly to the side, as the cigarette brushed against my cheek. "You're lucky you're new," he commented for a last time before he pushed himself away from me.

I stood frozen for a few second before fixing the strap of the bag on my shoulder. I swallowed as everyone's attention was on me. The guy was still standing there, watching my every move. I breathed deeply as I forced myself between the waves of people in the hallway. Okay, just find the main office, and get to class. Then I can forget about this moment.

I looked back, even though I knew I shouldn't have. The guy with the bomber jacket was still looking at me, straight in the eye. Quickly, I broke eye contact and continued walking.

Great, Aubrey. First day here and you've made a "friend".

- - -

"Alright Aubrey, your schedule is all set. If you have any questions, I want you to come to me, okay?" my counselor, Ms. Harper informed me.

I nodded.

Ms. Harper looked a little younger than most counselors in this office. She has wavy brown, red hair and beautiful face structures with her wide framed glasses. I could mistake her as a fellow student if she didn't wear the proper teaching attire.

I walked out of the office and looked at my schedule.

PRE-CALCULUS

I chuckled and shook my head. First class of the day, a stupid math class. I somehow found my ways around the school and arrived to the class fifteen minutes late.

I softly opened the door and entered, hoping that I won't gather too many attention, or happen to disrupt a teacher during their lecture. Instead, all eyes were immediately on me.

"You must be the new student!" the teacher proudly exclaimed. I flinched at his sudden excitement as he motioned me to come towards the front of the class. I walked towards the front of the class as I try to avoid all the eye contacts in the room. "I'm Mr. Winston," he introduced.

"Everybody, this will be our new student, Aubrey," he announced as if anyone cared, "Aubrey you can sit next to Landon. Landon can you please raise your hand?"

Slowly a hand crept up from the crowd. Almost immediately, I recognized who that black bomber jacket belonged to. It was the cigarette guy that I ran into earlier. What are the chances?

I made my way towards the seat, acting as if nothing had happened earlier this morning. As I arrive at my seat, I set my side bag onto the table and was about to sit. Then a sudden sound of something clashing behind me caught my attention; I stood back up. The guy in the bomber jacket, Landon, kicked my chair the opposite direction of his seat.

I could sense everyone around me whispering, and glancing over at this situation. For some reason, the teacher did not acknowledge this at all.

I stared at him as I furrowed my eyebrows. He looked at me with a careless smirk, biting at the end of his pen. He winked at me with his light blue eyes then quickly changed his expression into a hard, angered face.

Calmly, I turned around to face my chair that was a few feet away. Even when my back was facing him, I felt an uneasy tension. It felt like he was eyeing me from afar, watching my every little move. I swallowed my saliva nervously as I pulled my chair back to its original spot and sat down.

This is going to be a long, long day.

After what felt like years, the school bell had rung. Quickly, I grabbed all my items and shoved them into my side bag. This class was filled with so much awkward tension. I felt Landon staring at me in the corner of my eyes, that crazy smirk of his never leaving his lips. I stood up and tried to leave the class as quickly as possible. I was not trying to see this so-called Landon guy ever again; even though I knew that was impossible.

"Hey!" a voice called out from behind me. I tried my best to ignore the voice behind me, assuming that it was Landon's.

"Aubrey!" I sighed in defeat. There's no turning back when someone calls your name and knows you heard it. I turned around slowly. To my surprise, the brown haired, black bomber jacket boy was out of sight. Instead, a fit boy with blonde hair approached me instead. He held his hand out and introduced himself, "I'm Colton."

I smiled and shook his hand as he continued, "This may be kind of weird, but I'm the class president. And my duty is kind of, uh, to make new kids feel welcomed. I was just wondering if you'd want a tour of the school or something? Uh, maybe during lunch?" he questionably finished his introduction while rubbing the back of his neck.

I couldn't help but laugh at how awkward his introduction was. I let go of his hand and replied, "Sure."

- - -

The rest of my classes before lunch came across fine. I didn't talk to anyone, but I didn't run into anyone rude either. Chills went down my spine as the thought of the incident from morning came across my mind.

As lunch time approached, I found my way towards the cafeteria. People were standing in line with trays, accepting their desired food in an assembly line.

Chapter 3

It looked like a prison. The lunch ladies looked mean; they looked like they hated their lives. They stood there lifelessly as they throw a bunch of half cooked food onto the silver trays.

Although I wasn't very hungry, I grabbed a tray anyways. I followed everyone else and followed the assembly line of serving food. In the end, I had lumpy mashed potatoes, under cooked chicken wings, and a side of fruits. I cringed as I looked at my tray of food. Coming from a really nice looking school, their food looked like trash.

I peered across the cafeteria. There was only one empty table, in the corner next to the trash bins. I shrugged. Considering that I had nothing to lose, I went and sat on the empty table. I laid my tray of horror down as I pulled out my sketchbook from my bag. I grabbed a pencil from the pockets and started sketching.

Art has been a big part of my life ever since I was a baby. Baby pictures of me always had me showing my artwork proudly to the camera. Art has always put me at ease.

"Is this seat taken?" a voice asked me.

I looked up towards the voice and it was the class president boy, Colton. I smiled at him and shook my head as he took a seat across from me. "What are you drawing there?" he asked me as he nibbled on the mash potatoes, quickly making a disgusted face afterwards.

I laughed at his reaction and glance back down at my sketchbook. "Well, right now it looks like a potato," I stated, "but it'll look like a beautiful girl in no time."

"I mean it doesn't totally look like a potato," He chuckled as he picked up the chicken wings from his tray.

"I wouldn't eat that if I were you!" I exclaimed quietly as I looked at the red meat sticking out of the chicken wings.

He took a second glance at the chicken wings and quickly dropped it back on his tray, "Jesus, why do they even bother?" he groaned.

I smiled at his reaction.

He was funny. Geeky, but funny.

"Anyways how do you like it here so far?" he asked me as he put both of his elbows on the table, full attention drawn to me.

"It's alright," I started. However, I felt uneasy by the fact that I was already being picked on, on the first day of school. "You know that guy in our math class?" I asked him.

"The one that kicked your chair?" he asked casually as he bit into the apple.

"Yeah! Who is he? And why was he being so rude?" I furrowed my eyebrows as I laid my pencil back down onto my sketch book.

"His name is Landon. Landon Carthy," Colton started, "He messes with a lot of people, especially girls. Word on the street is that his dad is extremely rich and can afford to pay for every discipline that he gets during school. His dad also donated half of this school's funding, so he rarely gets in trouble for anything he causes. He's just a really mean, privileged guy." Colton says as he shakes his head back and forth, "A mean, mean, privileged guy."

I scoffed sarcastically as I heard how Colton described him.

"I heard about what happened to you this morning," Colton began again, "If I were you, I wouldn't worry too much about it. People will forget about it sooner or later. He hops around girls and mess around with them like that . . . Although, girls usually give in and follow his commands. Everyone was quite surprised when he let you go simply like that."

"What do you mean?"

He shrugged. "He just let you walk away. Usually he'll harass the girl until they give in."

"But he kicked my chair during class today?" I questionably mentioned.

Colton hummed and leaned back against his chair, crossing his arms. "Maybe that was your punishment?"

I shrugged as I glanced at my uneaten food.

"Are you still down to show me around?" I asked Colton.

He nodded and quickly stood up, "Sure."

We both picked up our tray and tossed it into the trash bins.

Colton showed me around campus and it was entertaining to know about all the different cliques in the school. There were the student body group, the skaters, the cheerleaders, jocks, popular kids, the list went on and on.

The bell rung shortly after as me and Colton parted ways.

"It was nice hanging with you!" he said as he waved goodbye. I waved back at him and nodded 'same' before heading to my next class. Possibly my favorite class. Art class.

I smiled to myself as I entered the art class. There were two rows canvases, perfectly aligned with wooden stools. My heart fluttered as I sat down in one of the seats and brushed my fingers along the paint brushes that were resting on the shelf.

Class started shortly as everyone started to paint freely on their canvases. The teacher was willing to let the class paint freely, as long as it follows the rubric assigned to the assignment. My canvas had strokes of blue and purple. The colors were well blended. As time flew by, more definition my artwork had gained. I was painting the galaxy, with stars, beautiful colors of black, blue and purple, hints of pinks. Suddenly the door busted open as I slightly jumped from my seat, surprised.

"Landon," the teacher greeted unhappily, "half an hour late to class, eh?"

I looked up towards the door once I heard his name. He ruthlessly ignored the teacher and walked towards an empty seat. Suddenly, his eyes caught a glance of mine and he stopped his track.

Oh my gosh.

I quickly looked back down on my canvas, and hid my face behind it. I cant believe it, luckily it was set up high enough to cover my face.

Chapter 4

I tried my best to focus back on the painting, however I couldn't help but to glance back in his direction. My bully was in the same room as me, again.

"Looking for me, Princess?" a voice came from behind me. My breathing quickly stopped as I turned my head towards my right. His face was over my shoulder, almost close enough for him to rest his chin on it.

I cleared my throat and proceeded to paint, trying to ignore his haunting presence. I grabbed the paint brush and softly stroked it against the canvas. I felt a sudden push beneath my elbow, and before I knew it, the brush created a long streak across my painting. I bit my lower lip and dropped the brush. I looked up at him as he maintained the hideous smirk on his face.

My heart was beating quickly, and as expected, the teacher didn't do anything. Instead, she acted as if she was ignoring the situation on purpose.

My whole body tensed as I feel the heat rushing through my body. I clenched my teeth as I stared at my piece of artwork. My beautiful piece of artwork, with a random white streak in the middle of it.

"Damn," I can hear one of the students from behind me whispered quietly.

I breathed heavily as I continued to stare at my painting.

"Oops, sorry love," he whispered in my ear.

I pressed my lips together as I did what first came to my mind. I clenched my fist and swiftly elbowed him in the stomach. "Jerk," I mumbled.

As I picked up my bag and stomped towards the door, I heard a couple of kids laughing behind my back. I turned my head back around to look at the jerk, as he was hovering over with his hand on top of his stomach. I felt a sudden guilt rushing down my body, as I stood at the door. He straightened up and looked up at me, pouting slightly.

His looks of attractiveness didn't deny the fact that he was an absolute dick.

"Aubrey?" I heard the teacher question before I left the classroom.

- - -

"How was class?" Austin asked as we were heading back home from school.

"It was okay, just class," I laughed a little, not wanting to get into detail about what happened in school. Austin is extremely protective, telling him about Landon would just make him angry, and Angry Austin never looks back.

"Yeah? Well my classes were just class too." He dumbly responded to his own question.

I made a face at his comment and shook my head.

"You don't think my outfit looks a little too much?" Colton asked me as he ran his hand across his dress shirt.

He was wearing a black dress shirt, black dress pants and a red tie.

"I mean, what are you so dressed up for?" I asked, eyeing him from top to bottom.

I must admit, even though Colton may come off as a nerd, his body was very fit. His muscles appeared through his dress shirt, but not too much to make the shirt rip apart.

"It's for this speech I'm giving today, to the Student Body," he responded.

"Then no, you're not too dressed up," I reassured as I took a second glance at his outfit.

"Alright, stop checking me out," he chuckled as he pressed his finger against my forehead.

I smiled, pushing his fingertip away from my face, "You wish, hot shot."

It's been a few days since I've attended this school, and the only friend I bothered to make is Colton. At least I had a friend around here, I always tend to keep my circle small so having just one friend didn't really bother me. I really liked my alone time anyways.

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"Alright," Colton started, "I got to go now. I'll catch up with you later."

I nodded and waved him goodbye as I walked towards a random hallway.

Im alone again.

Even though this school was quite big, I was able to trace out where the main parts of the campus: the gym, cafeteria, my classes, and most important, the art class.

That reminds me.

I turned back around and started walking towards one of the private art classes, where students can come in and spend their free time painting, drawing, making art, basically.

The art class is where I felt the most comfiest. This school is nice and all, but I never felt myself fitting into any of the cliques here. Even though there are other artistic kids in this school, majority of them are competitive. They want to be the best of the best, or part of the popular kids; so there was no real passion for art.

I opened the door to the empty classroom and set my bag down. Breathing deeply, I stared at the blank canvases set in front of me. It reminded me of one of my artwork that was ruined by the jerk, so called Landon. I huffed in annoyance from the memory, and sat down on the stool.

I pulled out my phone and went in my playlist, playing "Alaya (Outro)" by xxxtentacion for inspiration. Even though x was known for his crazy music and hyped up beats, the new album was very close to heart. His music was even more powerful than they were before.

I cleared by throat as I lost track of reality. My brush stroked against the canvas softly, and before I knew it, the painting was finished.

My breath stopped as I stared at the painting in front of me. Sometimes, I don't even know what I'm capable of.

Chapter 5

I smiled proudly as I slightly bit my lower lip. If anyone was watching me right now, I'd probably look like a crazy girl fantasizing over her own artwork. I blew against the canvas in effort of making the paint dry faster before my next class start. However, paint doesn't dry that quickly.

Instead, I grabbed a sticky note from my back and wrote "Wet painting! Don't touch please." And stuck it to the wooden pencil holder right below the canvas. I stepped back and admired the color of the painting really quick before packing up for my next class. Smiling as I exited the room, I found myself running to a pile of kids in the middle of the hallway. Everyone was rushing towards one side of the hallway. Confused, I followed the crowd.

A little later, I figured out that all the students squeezing their way through the tight hallway was to watch two students fighting. All cell phones were held up, in attempt to record the fight. Just like any other student, I was curious as to what was happening.

With my small body, I managed to squeeze myself through the crowd of people.

There were two bodies: one on top of another. The male on top was constantly throwing punches at the boy who was helplessly straddled on the bottom. I furrowed my eyebrows trying to get a sense of what was happening. Even though I thought watching a school fight might be entertaining, the blood gushing from both of their faces were gruesome. I swallowed my saliva nervously and suddenly caught a glimpse of the male's face. The guy on the bottom was a soccer player, Isaiah Chaser. A lot of students have talked about the all-star soccer player, Isaiah Chaser around school. Apparently, he was getting a scholarship to a big university with a Division 1 soccer team.

The guy on top. . .

The guy on top was Landon!

My eyes widen at the look of Landon beating the life out of the soccer player. It wasn't shocking to find out that Landon was causing trouble around school. What was shocking, was that Landon had no mercy for the other student and kept punching.

"Is no one going to do something?" I screamed as I looked at the people around me. No one heard me, everyone was too excited about the fighting scene.

With a rush of second hand guilt, I took a step towards the fight as I felt a sudden pull on my arm. "No!" the voice from behind me yelped. It belonged to a girl with orange, red hair. She had high

cheekbones, and a thin yet fit figure. She shook her head as she held onto my arm, "Don't get in the way of Landon." She told me.

I ignored her comment and disrespectfully twisted my arm out of her grasp. I was scared, but I was more worried about the soccer player living after this point of the fight. Without a doubt, I ran towards the fight. Using all of my strength, I tried my best to push Landon off the soccer player who looked barely even conscious.

"The fuck are you doing?" I heard Landon snap. Then I felt a sudden push against my stomach as my body stumbled back slightly. I watched as Landon got himself back on the soccer player, continuously firing punches at the guy's face.

"Stop it! You're going to kill him!" I cried as I ran back towards Landon and managed to push him off again.

I ignored everyone's presence. All that occurred in my mind was that this guy is barely stable to even fight back. I grabbed Isaiah's head as I shoved my side bag under his neck, attempting to stop all the blood from leaking back into his throat or head.

Gosh!

I turned my head to see Landon standing up and brushing off his hands. With one hand holding up Isaiah's head, and one hand balancing myself, all I could do was stare at Landon in disgust.

"What?" he asked me, "Never knew he had a prince charming." Landon smirked as he shoved his bloody hands back into his pocket.

"Does it ever occur to you that no one here likes you?" I slightly screamed at him. The crowd suddenly got quiet. No one dared to say a word.

Landon let out a laugh before taking a step closer to me. He knelt down in front of my face and stared at me in the eye. His blue eyes glistened under the hallway lights, although his eyes were filled with pure hatred.

"Does it ever occur to YOU, that no one here likes YOU?" he repeated my question, leading the question back up to me.

I didn't say anything back, instead I attempted to pull Isaiah up. Isaiah was barely conscious enough to sit up, with me supporting him with my arms wrapped around his back. Isaiah groaned in pain as I practically forced him up.

"Listen," I heard Landon speak up again. I attempted to ignore him until Landon grabbed my chin and forcefully tilted my head towards him. His face was only a few centimeters away from mine, "Come across my path again, and you're dead. You hear me?" he taunted.

I didn't say anything back.

"You hear me?" he asked louder this time.

And again, I didn't say anything.

Amused, Landon smiled at me as he began caressing my cheek with his thumb. "You're beautiful. And I don't want this pretty face of yours getting messed up." He paused, "Although, you're lucky I don't hit girls."

My heartbeat starting racing fast against my chest.

"You don't talk much," Landon frowned, "I would've probably like to get to know you." He eyed me up and down.

I uncomfortably looked away and tried to put my full attention back on Isaiah. I stood up and wrapped Isaiah's arm around my shoulder as I attempted to drag him down the hallway.

Chapter 6

By this time, the crowd was starting to vanish. They were upset that they didn't get to see the fight finishing fully. But at this point, it's obvious who won.

I took a last glance back at Landon as he kept his eyes on me. Something softened in him as he saw me dragging Isaiah's body down the hallway. "Jerk," I mumbled as turned back around towards the door.

Suddenly, Isaiah's weight has been lifted off of me by a little.

"I'll help you," the familiar voice called out.

It was the girl that was attempting to stop me from breaking up the fight earlier. "You're brave," she started, "and with you being a girl, being able to break up a fight that's impressive."

I smiled at her compliment and shook my head.

"It's sad to see everyone not doing anything to help." I commented.

"You're a bad-ass," I heard Isaiah mumbled beneath his breath as all three of us headed towards the nurse's office, "Thanks for helping."

"It's nothing really," I responded, downplaying the situation.

After we brought Isaiah to the nurse's office, I sat in the waiting room with the girl.

"Your name is Aubrey, right?" the girl asked me, "My name is Bella."

I nodded as I shook her hand.

"How do you know?"

"Well a lot of people were talking about how Landon picked on this new girl during school. And seeing what you did back there, I supposed you were the new girl."

"Rumors do fly around fast in this school," I laughed a little.

"Yeah, this school is broken in so many ways," she added.

- - -

"Jesus, did you rescue a dying dog?"

"Well yes, but an Isaiah Chaser."

Colton laughed as he handed me an extra hoodie he had kept inside of his locker. I unbuttoned the bloody flannel I had on and threw the flannel in the trash. Because the flannel was slightly unbuttoned with my outfit, there were a few blood stains on the inside tank I was wearing. However, I carelessly tossed on the hoodie ignoring the rest of the red stains.

"Well, hero of the day: Aubrey Watson. Want to go get food with me?" he asked me as he held out his arm.

I smiled and grabbed his arm, "I would be delighted too."

"The hell are you doing?" Austin raised an eyebrow.

I groaned and planted my face on the piles of papers on my desk. I released a loud, screeching half yawn half sigh.

I heard Austin laugh from behind me as I lifted my head back up.

"You've only been in school for a week." He commented.

Before I got to answer a soft cushion landed on the back of my head, jerking me forward. Even though Austin had thrown a really soft pillow, his strength was out of this world.

"Austin!" I exclaimed at the top of my lungs as all I hear was his laughter. I got up and grabbed the pillow angrily, throwing it back at him. With his quick reflexes he managed to dodge my shot and childishly points at me, teasing.

"Weak!"

"Austin stop!" I groaned.

"Aubrey's weak!"

"Stop!"

"You're weak." He simply commented.

I bit the inside of my cheek and got out of my chair.

"It's impossible to study in this house," I said in defeat as I dragged myself out of the bedroom.

"Alright, have fun!" I heard Austin's voice from the room.

It was already 10pm, and my dad was still back at the factory working. He works hard. Although he had me and my brother at a young age, all of this working will have him die at a young age. Kidding.

I sighed as I opened the door. The breeze gently hit my face as I stretched my arms, yawning before stepping a foot outside. I didn't bother to put on a jacket, or real shoes. The weather was warm enough for me to walk out in a T-Shirt and shorts, and my rabbit sleeping shoes were already torn apart to even begin with.

I closed the door behind me and decided to take a stroll in the new neighborhood. Back at home, I never had the guts to walk outside by myself. The old neighborhood was filled with crimes, Austin would never dare to let me step a foot outside without his company.

Although Austin can be annoying, practically all the time; his company never fails to make me feel protected.

I yawned as I continued walking alone the clean sidewalk of the area. The houses here weren't mediocre big. They weren't two story houses. They were single story; however, the houses didn't look torn apart, they didn't call out "IM RICH" either.

From a distance, I heard footsteps. Not from behind me though, from in front of me. I rubbed my eyes, confused as to why there was shadow or person up close enough for me to see.

Believing that I was hallucinating, I continued to walk. Looking at the sidewalk below me as I played a game of 'don't step on a crack'. The sound of the footstep grew faster, and louder. I looked up and rose an eyebrow as a sudden shadow from afar started appearing, running towards me.

I kept quiet.

Is this when I run?

I was more confused as to why this person was running by themselves, especially in this safe looking neighborhood.

"Move!" the person called.

The person got closer to me as I stepped to the side. However, I thought I moved fast enough but I didn't. The person tackled me to the side as both of our body fell on the hard concrete. "Ow!" I exclaimed as I pushed myself off the concrete.

The figure hushed me before he dragged me behind the bush of one of the houses. I rose my eyebrows in surprised and attempted to scream.

Before I did so, the stranger had already put his hand on my mouth, blocking the sound of my muffled scream.

"Please! Don't scream," he begged me.

I stopped screaming as I got a look at his facial features. His cologne smelt familiar, definitely a scent I noticed not too long ago. Then I looked at his neck. The gold necklace! It's Landon!

My eyes widened and I shoved him off of me.

Out of all the people!

Landon stumbled back and caught himself with his palms before he fully recognizes me.

"The hell!" I screamed at the top of my lungs.

His eyes widened as he tackled me onto the grass for the second time.

"I said be quiet!" he whispered harshly as he put his hand over my mouth.

Our bodies were touching. I was laying underneath him as his body was innocently laying on top of mine. He was too focused on spying on the surroundings before he even noticed the weird position we were laying in.

I trusted my instinct and followed his order.

The freak is wrong with this guy?

Landon then looked down at me, finally recognizing me through the darkness. His expression of nervousness was suddenly wiped away with a smirk on his face.

"Hey, love." He whispered.

I furrowed my eyebrows and attempted to push him off of me. He didn't budge. Instead, he put his attention back on the look out for whatever or whoever he was looking for.

I felt my body heating up from anger. This guy attacked me not too long ago, ruined my painting, and now he's here holding me hostage and calling me love! My body tensed up as I used all my might and bite his hand that was covering my mouth.

A painful hiss escaped his lips as he loss control over me. I sat up and rolled his body off of me.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" I whispered at him, pushing him against the bush.

He released a soft chuckle before putting his index finger against his lips, indicating me to be quiet.

I shook my head and stood up. Not for long, I felt a pair of arms around my waist, pulling me back behind the bush again.

"I'm only going to tell you this once," Landon whispered to me, "Don't move or you'll die."

The last few words struck me. Cluelessly, I sat in front of him. He had one arm around my waste, and the other hand covering my mouth.

I pushed his body away from me and finally gave in.

"Fine." I whispered as I hid behind the bush with him.

A couple minutes later I heard a few footsteps coming our way. I looked at Landon and the color from his face has drained. He grabbed my arm and pulled us both closer into the bush. Without a doubt, I followed him. We both were crouched in between two large bushes. Branches were scratching all over my legs and arms.

"Where'd he go?" a voice echoed from the neighborhood. It was a deep, taunting voice.

"The hell Braden!" the voice hollered again, "You're useless!"

"He was too fast!" a second voice responded.

"Then shoot him!" the first guy screamed at the top of his lungs.

My jaws dropped at the word "shoot". Were they planning to kill Landon? What did Landon get himself into?

I looked at Landon as he looked back at me. He had a playful smile on his face. It seemed like the word "shoot" didn't bother him at all. Landon started fidgeting in his spot and reached into his jacket's pocket.

He pulled out a black object that soon appeared to be a gun.

I gasped loudly, and I quickly covered my mouth. My heartbeat starting racing. All of my hatred towards Landon quickly turned into fear. I was just planning to take a nice break from my homeworking from walking in this so-called safe neighborhood. But I ran into a life and death situation; with my OWN BULLY.

Landon put the gun back into his pocket and held up both of his hands, mouthing the words 'Don't Worry' towards me. Chills were coming down my spine, all of the sounds started to tune out as all I hear was sharp pains coming through my ears. I started to hug my knees against my chest. How ironic that I left the most crime filled neighborhood, just to run into a crime connected scene.

A little while later there were no voices, or footsteps. It was just the sound of the leaves clapping on each other from the soft breeze. Landon stood up first, as I stood up second.

"That was fun," he commented.

I stared at him as I took a step back from him, remembering that he was armed.

He noticed my funny expression and scoffed, "I'm not going to hurt you." He reassured me.

With this crazy guy, you'll never know what's going to happen. First he says he wouldn't hurt you, then he beats up a guy until he can't move. I shook my head and took another step back as he took two steps towards me.

He softly smiled at me. He put his hands into his pockets. My heart skipped a beat as I took another step back. He noticed my fear and took his hands back out of his pockets.

"Sorry," he mumbled as he kept his eyes on me.

The soft wind was making his soft brown hair flow in a certain direction. The edge of his lips curved into another soft smile as he lifted his hand up. I flinched from his sudden movement.

I noticed that he was about to reach for one of the curly strands that was in my face. Voluntarily, I reach up and pushed the strand behind my ear and took another step back, eyes still locked in his.

"Don't talk to me," I stated before breaking eye contact. I turned around and quickly ran home.

Whatever happened earlier was beyond my control. I was utterly confused as to what had happened earlier, and can't piece it together. Even though I was there for the whole part, half of me wanted to think that the situation wasn't real. In a safe neighborhood, crimes are still lingering, guns are still being used daily.

I frowned as I cuddled against my soft blanket. I didn't know if I should cry because I was afraid, or angry that I even left this house in the first place.

Soon enough, I drifted off to sleep.

"Goodnight Aubrey," my brother whispered as he tucked me into bed.

"So, tell about Landon again?" Bella questioned as she munched on her baby carrots.

I shrugged and shook my head. "That was it."

"So you're telling me that he could've got shot? And you hid with him?"

I nodded.

"And he didn't beat you up?"

I shook my head.

"And you trusted him?"

I slowly nodded, then questioned myself afterwards.

"Did you guys kiss?" Bella teased and pointed a finger at me.

I jerked up and shook my head rapidly. "No! Jesus, never!" I denied.

"Come on, with those attractive blue eyes and messy brown hair, every girl falls for him. You have to admit he's hot."

"Not at all."

"Not even a little bit?"

"Nope."

"What are you guys talking about?" Colton laughed as he sat down next to me. He set his tray down in front of him and took a bite of the fake lasagna.

"Nothing!" "Aubrey kissed Landon last night!" Bella and I said at the same time.

"Did not!" I screeched and threw a baby carrot at her. Bella laughed and attempted to dodge the carrot as it hit perfectly at the center of her forehead. We both busted out laughing as Bella wiped the carrot juice off of her forehead.

Colton sat there laughing along, yet clueless to the story.

"You two are weird," he commented.

"Thanks!" we both said in unison.

"Even more weird," Colton said as he looked at both of us.

Bella and I smiled at each other before we both huddled around Colton.

"Isaiah is getting benched for two weeks," Bella started.

"Well yeah, he was beaten his life out of his body," Colton scoffed.

"But is Landon going to get in trouble at all?" I asked.

"Well, nothing Isaiah can do about it. Landon's dad can pay off any discipline remember? That includes police reports."

"That's unfair," I frowned at Colton's conclusion.

"Life's unfair," he commented.

"Colton, don't you think Landon is hot?" Bella asked.

Colton furrowed his eyebrows in a confused expression and looked at Bella. "I don't think he's hot. But he is handsome."

"Would you date him?" she asked him.

"No. . . ?" he answered slowly, "Why do you guys forget that I'm straight?" he asked as he grabbed one of the nuts and popped it in his mouth.

I laughed at their comments and shook my head.

"He's not hot, Bella. Quit dreaming."

- - -

I sighed as I leaned back on my seat. Then it occurred to me that I was in art class, aka stools. I shrieked as I fell back, off of the stool. Many eyes were quickly drawn towards me as well as a couple of giggles and laughs.

I laughed at myself and stood up, dusting myself off.

"Uh, Aubrey," one of the student next to me called out.

"Hm?" I looked at her.

"Your clothes," she slowly commented as she pointed to the front of my jeans and shirt, at the spots I just dusted off. I looked down and there were streaks of different colored paints all over my white shirt and blue jeans. My eyes widened as I did the stupidest thing on earth.

I rubbed my hands against the paint marks as the leftover paint of my hand smeared even more paint onto my clothes. I groaned as I dropped my arms in defeat.

"You can go to the bathroom," my teacher stated, amused.

"Thanks." I mumbled as I walked myself through the door.

Annoyed, I rubbed my two palms together in effort to dry the paint and have it smear dryly across my hands. I released a deep sigh as I used my breath to blow the few strands of hair out of my face.

"Someone's having a little trouble," a voice called out from behind me.

I turned around swiftly and caught eyes with the guy I planned to never see, ever again in my life.

"What do you want?" I mumbled underneath my breath as I continued to rub the paint off of my hands, "I have somewhere I be," I told him.

Landon chuckled as he eyed me up and down, "Looking like that?"

"Seriously, what do you want?" I asked him.

Landon pulled out a plastic bag with an item in it. I raised an eyebrow and looked at him, confused. He lifted up the bag towards my face and opened it, "Your rabbit shoes, dummy," he started, "How'd you even run home barefoot yesterday?"

I blinked several times and stared at the shoes. I blushed in embarrassment and tried my best to avoid the situation. "Those aren't mine."

Landon reached into the bag and flipped one of the slippers around. On the soles of the slippers said "Aubrey" in small red letters.

I bit my lip as my face heated in embarrassment. Standing in front of Landon Carthy; Jones High's most popular 'badass' drenched in paint smears with my rabbit shoes. God is just teasing me now.

A strand of hair fell back in front of my face. I pushed the strand away from my face, irritated as Landon was standing in front of me with his jaw dropped.

"What are you looking at?" I barked at him.

He cleared his throat and smirked, "Nothing, nothing."

I yanked the plastic bag from him and continued my way towards the bathroom. I breathed deeply as I tossed the plastic bag on one of the shelves in the bathroom. I washed off the paint of my hands and quickly dried them.

I walked over towards the mirror and threw my hair in a high ponytail until I noticed a paint mark. A paint mark that was right in the center of my cheek. It was a mix color of blue and purple. Then I realized Landon's reaction when I pushed my hair out of my face earlier. I groaned as I stomped back over to the sink.

Why did I even care about how I look in front of Landon?

He obviously doesn't treat anyone out here like human beings.

Chapter 7

"I swear, you're just taking all of my clothes now," Colton said, laughing as he pulled out long sleeve tee.

"I swear, you're just taking all of my clothes now," I mocked him.

Colton gave me the death stare as he threw the shirt at my face. I laughed and willingly caught the shirt with my face. I threw on the long sleeve and got on my tippy toes as I swung my arm around his neck from the side.

"You're my bestest friend!" I exclaimed as I nuzzled my nose against the side of his head.

Colton laughed and shrugged me off, "Go away, you creep."

I smiled as I took a step back.

Colton and I's friendship has gotten closer ever since the first day I came to this school. He was attractive, never the less he was also caring.

"Let's go get ice cream," Colton suggested as he threw an arm around me.

I smiled and nodded up at him.

"So what about that Landon thing you and Bella were talking about during lunch?" he asked.

"It was nothing important really," I trailed off.

"It was nothing important really," he mocked as he nudged my head with his knuckles.

"Colton Adams!" I screamed as I pushed him away, rubbing the side of my head. Although the nudge was barely forceful, it still hurt.

Colton laughed as he grabbed me by the shoulders and pulled me back towards him, "Aw you're gonna go cry to papa now?" he talked with a baby voice.

I pouted and kept my hand covering the painful spot, "Yeah," I said back to him in a baby voice.

We got into Colton's car as he started driving us to the famous ice cream parlor. The ice cream parlor, Scoop was set up like a restaurant diner. Almost every high school students around in this city came here to get ice cream and hang out with their friends. Luckily, our high school is one of the closest to Scoop.

We entered Scoop and welcomed ourselves to one of the booths. The waitress handed us a menu filled with choices of ice cream and milk shakes. I licked my lips, nearly drooling over the pictures on the menu.

After ordering our desired treats, I received a text message from an unknown number.

hey beautiful

It said.

I raised my eyebrow in confusion as I looked up at Colton. He was busy folding the napkins into random origami shapes.

I stared at my screen for a while, before remembering that I handed my phone number to Bella not too long ago.

Haha, funny Bella

I smiled as I sent the next.

Almost immediately, I got a text again.

bella?

I scoffed to myself and blinked at the phone screen.

Not Bella?

no...

Who's this?

guess, princess.

"You sure are deep into your phone," Colton commented.

"I'm getting texts from this weird number," I told him.

"What do you mean?"

"Look!" I showed him my phone screen, "I literally don't even know anyone else besides you and Bella."

Colton blinked at me and pointed at the screen, "they called you princess, it's Landon!" he concluded.

"Stop, it's not him," I shook my head, denying that fact.

don't ignore me.

Sorry

did you figure out who I am yet, love?

My heart skipped a beat as I dropped my phone to the side, "It's not Landon, is it?" I looked up at Colton and Colton has the weirdest expression ever. He was holding back his laugh

"Just text Landon, and see what he says."

Landon?

A few minutes of anxiety went by as my phone vibrated again.

no.

No?

no.

What?

what.

Who's this?

lol, ur so stupid

Excuse me?

stupid

Who are you?

stupid, look up

I looked up, hearing Colton cracked up. He laughed so hard that his face turned entirely red, as he covered his face with his phone.

"I was on my phone the whole time, how are you not suspicious?" Colton managed to choke up between his laughter.

"Ha ha ha, very funny Mr. Adams," I said as I toss my phone to the side.

"Come on, that was good," he cleared his throat trying his best to stop laughing, "You thought it was Landon! I'm crrrrrying!"

I leaned back against the booth and crossed my arms, "Okay, I get it Colton."

"You should've seen your face! You were like 'oh my god he called me beautiful!'" Colton shrieked as he put his hands against his cheek, imitating a feminine girl.

"Okay, Colton. Stop," I mumbled underneath my breath.

"Come on, don't be mad at me beautiful," he begged and poked my arm from across the booth.

Beautiful.

I closed my eyes and savored the sweet flavor against my taste buds. I hummed as I looked back down at my strawberry ice cream. I took another big scoop and shoved the large bite into my mouth as I repeated my little savoring act.

"You're gross," Colton commented as he made a disgusted face.

I smiled with my mouth full of ice cream and puckered my lips towards him, initiating a playful kiss.

Colton rose his eyebrow and took a napkin. He put the napkin against my lip. The napkin stuck on the leftover ice cream that were on my lips. I swallowed the ice cream and laughed in amusement as I used the napkin to wipe my mouth.

Colton chuckled as he started eating his ice cream slowly.

The door bell rung as someone entered Scoop. Me and Colton looked at the door curiously. At the door, there stood Isaiah Chaser. Isaiah was companied by the rest of his soccer team. Apparently, the soccer team stops by here often after practice, just to eat away their gains from practice.

Isaiah still had a couple scratches and bruises on his face. However, his condition now looks ten times better than it was when he first got them. I turned back around towards Colton as I duck my head.

Colton copied me.

"Why are we hiding?" he whispered.

"I don't want him to see me."

"But you saved him."

I shook my head and sneakily took a big scoop of ice cream before shoving it into my mouth. "I still don't want him to notice me," I mumbled between the ice cream, "popular kids are crazy in the head."

"You're hanging out with one of the popular kids right now." Colton whispered to me.

It was true. Colton was well known as one of the smartest people in school. He was respected for his good looks and incredibly smart brain. There was no way he was able to win class president if no one in the school knew him.

"You're nothing!" I teased.

Colton shrugged and sat back up.

"Hey," I heard Isaiah's voice from behind me.

Isaiah welcomed himself to sit next to me. I scooted over and blinked at him.

"Hey," I responded.

"Thanks for doing what you did back there," he said.

Isaiah was still dressed up in his dirty soccer uniform. Even though he did smell like grass and dirt, there was no uncomfortable smell of body odor.

"Aren't you benched for the next two weeks?" I heard Colton ask from the other side of the table.

"Yeah, smarty," Isaiah scoffed and suddenly shot a glare at Colton.

Colton rose his eyebrows and leaned back against his seat. It was clear that there was past tension between these two.

I cleared my throat and turned my body towards Isaiah, "Well, what are you going to do?"

"I still practice," he shrugged, "I'm benched because I got in trouble, not because I'm hurt." Isaiah smiled reassuringly to me. Then he shot up from his seat, "I still don't know your name."

"It's Aubrey," Colton interrupted.

Isaiah furrowed his eyebrows at Colton and then casually looked back at me.

"Yeah, it's Aubrey," I casually greeted and pressed my lips together awkwardly.

"Well, Aubrey," Isaiah started and glanced at Colton, hoping for him not to interrupt our conversation again, "It's nice seeing you again. Hope to see you around school and thanks again."

I nodded and waved at him, "No worries."

"I owe you," he said as he pointed at me. He then got up and wandered back to his soccer team.

"What's his problem?" Colton asked with an attitude.

I laughed at his childish behavior and tilted my head, "He just came to say thanks, Colton."

"Yeah but he didn't have to be rude about it."

I shook my head at Colton and continued eating the ice cream.

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"Thanks Colton," I hummed before closing the door to his BMW. I stretched my arms out and Colton raced off in his car. I sighed as I take a look at my cute, little house. I can get use to this little place. I smiled upon the thought.

"Rawr!" a loud scream from behind me hollered.

I released a terrified scream as I first turned around and shoved the person with all my strength. So much strength that I also lost balance and fell flat on the grass.

Austin stood there doubling over laughing.

"How are you going to push me, and you end up falling?" he questioned, laughing as if it was the funniest thing that ever happened.

I rolled my eyes, yet sighed in relief.

"You're a jerk." I mumbled underneath my breath.

"Who was that?" Austin calmed down as he questioned, "He has a nicer car than mine and dad's. Is that your boyfriend?"

Austin handed me his hand before I grabbed onto it, pulling myself up.

"No, it's Colton. Just a friend," I said slightly blushing.

"Just a friend?" he questioned as he squeezed my cheeks, "Or is that my little sister's crush?" He stuck a tongue out and wrapped his arm around my shoulders. We both walked towards the front entrance of the house.

"Just a friend." I said.

Austin grabbed the keys and unlocked the door.

"Oh! I almost forgot," Austin said before he reached into his backpack. He pulled out a grey side bag, similar to my old one.

"For some reason, your old bad had blood all over it?" Austin rose his eyebrows questionably and held the new bag out towards me, "I don't want to know if you killed someone, just take it." He stated bluntly.

I smiled widely and hopped in his arms.

"Austin!" I exclaimed.

"This is so cute!" I cried and hugged him tightly around the neck, "Aw my sweet, sweet brother!"

Austin chuckled as he hugged me back tightly, before pushing me off of him. "Okay, I need to study. I have a midterm tomorrow and it would be nice to have you not groan every single time you see your homework."

Putting my hands on my waist, I looked at Austin, "Is this your way of kicking me out of the house?"

Austin grabbed my shoulders and turned back around to face the door, "Yes, little sister," he commented before forcing my small body towards the door. "I love you, but I need absolutely no distraction in this house."

I turned back around to Austin and batted my eyelashes, "I mean, I guess I can leave you alone. But what can an eighteen-year-old girl do without a little bit of money in her pocket?" I tilted my head to the side and leaned towards Austin.

He sighed and reached for his wallet, pulling out a five-dollar bill. "Here you go." He smiled wildly before opening the door and leading me out the door.

"What am I going to guy with this?" I called out, clutching the five-dollar bill in my hand. I still had my old bloody side bag with me. "Should've at least let me switch my bag," I mumbled underneath my breath.

I looked up at the sun setting directly in front of me. The sunset was absolutely beautiful. The color of purple, pink, red and orange blended so well together in the sky. I walked towards the edge of my lawn and set my stuff down on the concrete. I reached into my bag and pulled out my sketchbook, along with a bunch of color pencils.

I lost track of time as I started doodling the colors of the sunset. The sun set was quickly replaced by the moon as I finished the rest of my artwork with just my memory. I breathed in deeply as I continued to blend the colors smoothly onto my paper.

"What are you drawing?" a voice above me spoke out.

I tuned out the voice and continued drawing. I heard the voice, however I was too busy finishing up my artwork and assumed it was Austin's voice.

"Leave me alone Austin," I mumbled underneath my breath as I used my fingers to blend the colors together on the paper.

"Austin?" the voice questioned.

I furrowed my eyebrows and looked up towards the voice.

Isaiah stood there, munching on his chips.

"Who's Austin?" he innocently asked me as he continued to shove his face with chips. He set his duffel bag down and casually invited himself to sit next to me.

"My brother," I responded blankly, before putting my attention back onto my drawing. "Why are you, here?"

"I'm just walking home. Why are you sitting out here?" Isaiah asked as he peered over my shoulder.

"No reason."

A moment of silence passed by. "Are you always this," he paused, "boring?"

I released a soft chuckle and looked at him. I didn't take any offense in what he said. Instead, I agreed with him. "I guess so. Better than putting on a show for people, right?"

"Is that supposed to be targeted towards me?" he asked me, offended. He sat up straight and turned his whole body towards me.

"Of course not." I shrugged.

"Wanna see a cool trick?" Isaiah got up out of nowhere, catching my full attention.

I looked up at him.

He crumbled up the empty bag of chips and tossed it at his foot and kicked it softly. The empty bag of chips immediately leaped towards my face. As soon as I felt the impact from the bag, I laughed and put my hands over my face.

"What the heck!" I called out and laughed at the situation. Isaiah looked at me nervously, before laughing along.

"Sorry! Not that," Isaiah picked up the empty bag of chips again. This time, I inched a little bit further from Isaiah and pulled my knee towards my chest in case I needed to take cover from the chip bag.

Isaiah dropped the bag of chips on his foot and bounced it repetitively multiple times before kicking it above his head. I watched in amusement before he caught the bag of chips with his mouth.

I laughed and clapped my hands together like an amused child. Isaiah took the bag of chips away from his mouth and sat back down next to me.

"Ta da!" he childishly screeched.

I smiled at him. My front door opened as my brother called out, "Aubrey!"

"So, who was that this time?" Austin asked. He held the green apple by the stem and spun it around in his palm. His bright red hair swept to one side, big brown eyes staring at me.

"I don't really know him," I answered carelessly. I opened the dishwasher and pulled the top drawer out. Grabbing the dishes and carefully stacking them on top of each other before setting them in the cabinet.

"You don't know him? It looked like you knew him," Austin commented.

"Well, I guess," I shrugged, "I guess he's just a friend also."

"How come I don't see you having any girl friends?"

I had a feeling that Austin's brotherly protective side was seeking through.

"I do, her name is Bella. I've only made like two friends during school."

"Those two guys?"

"No," I paused, "Well, one of them and Bella."

Austin nodded slowly, watching me as I moved towards the dining table. I sat on the same two cardboard boxes of furniture I've stacked a few weeks ago and looked at Austin.

"Well..." Austin trailed off, attempting to figure out his positioning as a brother.

I laughed a little and looked up at Austin, "I'm fine, Austin."

"Okay then," Austin tossed the green apple in the air and swiftly catches it, "I was just making sure."

I nodded reassuringly and stretched my arms out, releasing a loud groan.

"Gross."

- - -

Colton released a deep sigh, slamming the door of his locker closed and looked at me. I rose my eyebrow in amusement.

"What's happening with you?" I asked him.

Colton was dressed in Adidas sweatpants and a high-neck athletic jacket. His dirty blonde hair was not combed to the side this time, instead it was as if he just came out of bed. His light blue eyes appeared a lot darker than it was before, along with the dark eyebags beneath his eyes.

"I stayed up all night," Colton lazily responded, rubbing his palms against both of his eyes, "was helping my dad out with stuff."

I nodded understandingly and rubbed my hand on his back, up and down attempting to make him feel more relaxed and less tired somehow.

Colton flashed me a small smile before he leaned his head against the lockers, looking down at me before slowly closing his eyes.

His look of tiredness somehow looked attractive to me. I felt my cheek heating up, as well as my back. A person cannot possibly look cuter on days that he doesn't try compared to days that he does; but Colton made it possible.

I bit the insides of my cheek and didn't notice how long I was staring at his face for.

"Stop checking me out," Colton casually stated as he opened his eyes.

As a reaction, I stood up straight and peered behind his shoulder, casually shaking my head. I crossed my arms and legs and rose an eyebrow at him, "Why would I check you out?" I asked.

Colton gave me a stink eye before he straightened up and stretches. "Why not?"

In the distance, a loud noise echoed through the hallway. The noise had only occurred once, but the sound was loud enough for everyone to stop their tracks. Almost everyone's attention was quickly drawn towards where the sound was possibly coming from.

A few seconds later, students that were hovered around the entrance of the hallway quickly cleared the doorway. From the crowd, a student was being dragged towards the center of the hallway by another student. A girl, with dirty blonde hair and dark brown eyes was dressed in a long summer dress, covered by a khaki thick knit sweater. Her hair was in a single French braid that ended towards the middle of her back and above her nose laid a pair of thin framed black reading glasses. In her left arm, she was hugging a few sets of notebooks in effort of not dropping any of them on the floor. Her other arm was clutched by another male student as he had viciously tugged her down the hallway. The girl soon started to lose control over her notebooks as the boy yanks her harder and harder. Notebooks started to scatter all over the floor. The boy shoved her against the locker as her lifeless body flopped against it.

Students were watching, Colton was watching, I was watching; but no one moved. No one dared to take a step towards the abuse. She was crying for help, but everyone pretended not to hear her. Even when our full attention was on her, we all pretended that we lost our ability to hear and that we were helpless.

We watched as the guy forces the girl against the lockers. He hands clutching both of her wrist, as he attempted to maintain his anger by whispering harshly into her ears. She struggles, but he holds her down. Many times, he releases her wrist from his grips only to be replaced by gripping her shoulders, slamming her against the lockers.

"Stop!" a deep voice hollered through the hallway. Within seconds, a dark-skinned teacher ran up towards the couple. He grabbed the boy by his arms and forces him off her as he held the girl in his arms. Papers and notebooks were scattered everywhere, yet everyone remained still. School staffs started to run towards the situation. Two older males in their late-thirties held the boy with his arms, forcing him against the lockers. The dark-skinned teacher escorted the girl out of the hallway with both of their heads down.

Adrenaline rushed through my body as well as the feeling of guilt hovered over me. I turned over to Colton, speechless. His face seemed unamused, as if this situation occurs often. I heard him sigh as he walks towards the notebooks and papers scattered all over the floor. With his silent actions, I sensed that Colton was annoyed. I followed him and helped him pick up the loose papers, and ripped notebooks.

I hugged the pile of school supplies in my arms and stood up.

"Just go without me," Colton spoke up. I nodded as Colton started to walk in the opposite direction.

The students in the hallways started whispering, giggling, and going back to their original tasks. My heart was still beating fast from adrenaline. I kept my head down and hugged the books closely to me as I reach towards the exit of the hallway.

There was a sudden push on my shoulder, however not hard enough for me stumble or anything. I turned my body and looked at the person I've just collided shoulders with. Landon glared at me, something about his expression shows that he'd bump shoulders with me on purpose. His light blue eyes were locked in mine. It felt like this moment was played in slow motion the moment our eyes connected. He released a silent scoff as he turns his attention back in front of him.

- - -

"Thankyou, for bringing this to us," my counselor thanked me as I set the books on top of her desk. I nodded and flashed a small smile at Ms. Harper.

I was about to turn around and leave until a question of curiosity popped in my head.

"Does this happen often?" I asked.

Ms. Harper looked at me and forced a half smile, "Yes, it does." She fiddled around with a pen between her fingers.

"And no one does anything about it?"

"It happens so often that no one wants to do anything about it," she answered. I felt the sympathy in her voice.

Ms. Harper was a kind woman who looks like she appreciates the kindness of everyone. Even though I've only met her once, I've felt a positive vibe from her. Something tells me she truly is very dedicated to her career as a counselor, and wants the best for everyone.

I nodded understandingly and left her office.

The school bell rung, and I made my way towards my math class. As I entered my math class, I noticed that class was already piling up. Everyone was in their assigned seats, joking and laughing.

Aside from one girl in particular. I rose an eyebrow as I walked towards my seat. There sitting, was a girl with wavy blonde hair. She was extremely skinny, however the only meat that was on her body was her chest and bottom. She was sitting only on half of the chair, majority of her body leaning towards Landon. They were joking and flirting in some type of way. She glances back at me for a second before giving her full attention back to Landon. I sensed that she was ignoring me on purpose.

Quietly, I set my bag on top of my table, and stood patiently until she got out of my seat. Class was already starting, and Mr. Winston was horrible in getting the class to follow his guidelines.

A few minutes passes by and the girl uneasily took a few glances back at me. She finally cleared her throat and turned her body towards me, "Do you mind?"

I lifted my eye brows looked at her in disbelief, "Yes, I do." I bluntly responded.

Other classmates who were sitting around us looked over. Some holding back their laughter, some looking at me disgusted.

The girl continues to ignore my presence as I shook my head. Tired of the situation, I grabbed her books and swiftly pushed it over Landon's table.

I maintained a blank expression as I also pushed my bag onto Landon's table. Landon rose an eyebrow and kicked the leg of my table. One of the broken bars from the table stuck out, happened to hit against my knee cap. My knee heated up in pain as I bit the inside of my cheeks to keep myself from making a sound. Calmly, I pushed the table back into it's original position and sat on it.

"Excuse me!" the girl behind me scoffed, "You're in my way."

I didn't respond. Instead, I reached into my bag and pulled out my notebook and pen, jotting down the notes that Mr. Winston had wrote on the board. I ignored the burning sensation in my knee that was throbbing from the impact earlier and continued to focus on Mr. Winston's lecture.

"Bitch," I heard Landon mumble beneath his breath from behind me.

Chapter 8

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"Bitch," I heard Landon mumble beneath his breath from behind me.

Hearing those words escape from Landon's lips stopped my breath. Sounds started to tune out, replaced by a piercing noise banging against my ear drums. I clenched my teeth as my eye sight starts to tune out of focus. The word 'bitch' came across my mind on a constant replay.

It only felt like a quick second before I felt something hit the table roughly. I blinked out of my trance and turned my body slightly, looking behind me. A thick Pre-Calculus textbook laid closely behind me, and the girl who was previously sitting in my seat already left. Landon laid his eyes on me, biting the end of his pen.

I slid off the desk and walk behind it. As soon as I set my notebook on the table, Landon lifted his leg and places his feet on my chair. His big leathered combat boot laid heavily on my seat and he carelessly pretend to pay attention to the lecture ahead of him.

Finally irritated by his actions, I grabbed my chair and yanked it away from his foot, and shoved it back underneath the table. Almost instantly, Landon shot up and hovers over me. His body was only a foot away from mine.

It's odd how Landon was acting fine a couple of days ago, and now looks like he has the urge to kill someone.

He leaned his face towards me and stares at me deep in the eyes. His right hand gripping my left shoulder as he shakes me viciously. My eyes widen in shock as I try to remove his grip from my shoulder.

"Who. Do. You. Think. You. Are." He speaks underneath his breath, nudging me forward after each word. He finishes his sentence with a scoff, along with small a laughter, sarcastically spitting in my face.

After being put up with his constant harassment, I felt my throat tighten as I blink multiple times, desperately holding back my tears. My heart was beating fast, my face was heating up, and my fists were clenched tightly until my knuckles turned white.

"Let me go," I simply requested in a soft voice.

By then I felt an uncontrollable tear drip down my cheek. His grip loosens as soon as the tear has escaped my eyes. His smirk was wept off of his face as he slowly drops his hand from my shoulder. I watched him as he swallowed his saliva, his adam's apple moving in the center of his neck. Some of Landon's friends even bothered to pat Landon on the back, encouraging him for his ruthless behavior towards me.

"What's going on back there?" Mr. Winston speaks out from the front of the classroom. He caught the drift of the mood in the room and looked at Landon and I.

"You two, step outside."

Landon clicked his tongue as he stomps towards the exit, swinging the door as hard as possible for it to reflect and bang on the other side of the wall. I cleared my throat as I quietly followed behind him.

By then, I barely managed to hold back my emotions and wiped the previous tear that had dripped down on my face.

"Aubrey?" a soft voice from down the hallway called. The voice belonged to dearest friend, Bella.

Both Landon and I looked at her as I breathed deeply. I was clutching my emotions by its last thread.

"What's wrong?" Bella asked as she hurried towards me.

The moment I felt the nurture from Bella, tears uncontrollably escaped my eyes as I started sobbing softly. I didn't care about Landon's presence, and he definitely does not care about mine. I felt Bella's arm wrapping around my waist as I wrapped my arms around her neck, burying my face in between my arm and her neck. I cried as quietly as possible.

Without thinking, I glanced back up and unmeaningly landed my eyes back on Landon. He was avoiding my eyes this time, looking down at his palms. Just looking at him makes my body shake and heat up in anger and hatred. Shortly afterwards, he stuck his hands into the pockets of his jacket and turned towards me. We made eye contact. I furrowed my eyebrows and hugged Bella tighter as she rubbed my back with comfort.

Landon opened his mouth for a second, before closing it again. His expression of fault quickly changed back to a careless smirk. He licked his bottom lip and tilted his head backwards as he started to walk in our direction.

Bella released me from our hug as she looked at me with sad eyes, fixing my hair, pushing some strands away from my face. My gaze was focused on Landon, as his was on me. The feeling of slow motion occurred again before Landon passes us, and continues walking towards the exit of the hallway.

Chapter 9

Ever since the incident, I haven't seen Landon in any of our classes the past few days. Even though I was thankful that he hasn't been around, I was still curious as to where he ended up.

Some students said he got expelled, or suspended. Some even said he was in prison. But from what I've heard, his dad would've had enough money to bail him out of any of these situations.

I opened the door leading to the private art room and sat in the same seat as I have since my first day of school. Plugging in my earbuds, I walked towards one end of the classroom where all the different size of canvases was stacked up against the wall. My eyes caught attention of the largest canvas, twenty-four by thirty-six inches. An idea popped into my mind as a small light bulb lit above my head. I dragged out the preferred canvas and tossed it on the floor. Lightly jogging towards the other side of the room, I grabbed a few loose sheets of newspaper. I pushed the rest of the stools and tables towards the side of the classroom and laid the large canvas in the middle of the room.

I smiled widely as I turned towards my bag, pulling out my personal art supplies. First, gluing all the new paper flat on the canvas, I grabbed the large paintbrush and dipped it in navy colored acrylic paint. I dabbed the paint onto the canvas, and rocked my head side to side from the beats of the chill music.

After what only felt like a few minutes, I dropped my brush with white paint on top of extra loose-leaf newspapers and stretched my arms. I released a loud groan, and yawned quickly afterwards feeling all the muscles in my body quickly tense and release itself in satisfaction. I sat up straight and observed my painting of an astronaut reaching for the moon. I bit my lip and smiled before removing the earbuds.

"Wow."

I jerked up in shock as I swiftly turned around on my feet. I was still squatting, however I had my legs crossed in an awkward way. I lost balance and fell back on my cushion. I looked up at the guy and there was Isaiah Chaser. Isaiah had his eyes locked on the painting behind me, his mouth wide open as he eyes glistened in amazement.

I awkwardly cleared my throat as his attention was quickly drawn back to me.

"Hi," I greeted, sending a single wave towards his way.

He chuckled and looked back at the painting, "Hi."

I pressed my lips together awkwardly, tapping my fingers against the hard-wooden floor.

"How long have you been standing there?" I asked.

"For about ten minutes," he responded, checking his watch. He had a chip bag in his hand, and was carelessly tossing potato chips into his mouth, as he observed the painting.

"You're a really good artist," he complimented.

I nodded and looked back at my painting, "Thanks."

The awkward silence still lingered as the only sounds that we can hear in the room are my fingers tapping against the floor and Isaiah's teeth crunching on the potato chips.

"How'd you know I was in here?"

"I saw you through the window," he casually answered. He pointed his chip bag towards the big glass window located right next to the door. It amuses me that he always had a chip bag in his hand, and as ironic as it sounds, he's one of the most talented soccer player in the school. Shouldn't athletes watch their diet?

I nodded at his response and packed up my art supplies before tossing them back in my bag. I took the dirty paintbrushes and tossed them in one of the bins with the sanitizers for the art teacher to clean them later on.

I picked up the canvas by the sides, attempting not to touch any part that it still wet.

"I just wanted to stop by, and say hi," Isaiah said as he licked his fingers and tossed the empty bag of chip into the trash can.

"Well," I trailed off, "Hi." I laughed as I greeted him again.

"This might be a weird question," Isaiah started, "But have you seen Landon around lately?"

I rose an eyebrow at him. "Shouldn't I be the one asking you that?"

"Why so?"

"I suppose you guys hate each other," I paused, "since, you know." I pointed at his face where the scars underneath his eye was almost fully healed.

He shrugged, "We're still friends."

I propped the canvas up on a standing position and rested my elbow on top of it. Confusion was plastered on my face as I rose an eyebrow at him. Last time I checked, friends don't beat each other up until they die.

"I mean we only fought because he had issues with his alliances," he continued, "I just didn't want to hit him back because he's still my friend."

I nodded slowly, still trying to understand the drama between these boys.

"Alliances?" I asked.

Isaiah nodded confidentially before he stopped his track. He froze in the middle of his nod and his eye sight was locked in the middle of nowhere. He said something he wasn't allowed to say.

"Alliances as in..." I asked again.

"As in..." he trailed off.

"His group of friends?" I suspiciously asked, attempting to make the awkward tension go away.

"Yeah!" he looked back up at me and nodded, pointing at me with his index finger. "His group of friends," he nervously chuckled before pressing his lips together and rocking back and forth.

I laughed slowly as I nodded.

"Want to just, leave?" he suggested.

"Yeah," I smiled reassuringly as I swung my bag over my shoulders, and clutching the canvas from the wooden backbone.

Before I reached the door, Isaiah quickly called my name.

"Aubrey, wait!"

I turned around accidentally hitting my canvas against one of the stools. I gasp and looked at the painting; nothing messed up. I sighed in relief.

Isaiah suddenly approached me with a paper towel, that looked like it has been damped with water. Without permission, he put a hand on my shoulder and with his other hand, he started to wipe the towel against my chin and nose.

Caught off guard, I shivered from the cold napkin pressing against my skin and Isaiah released a soft chuckle, "Sorry." He removed the paper towel and we made eye contact. He kept his dark brown eyes locked in mine as I looked away. I cleared my throat and turned back around towards the door.

"Let's go," I said quietly before I rush out of the classroom.

Isaiah released a small laugh before he quickly caught up with my pace.

"Want to walk home together?" he asked.

"Sure, why not," I agreed, ironically trying to avoid him at all cost. The vibe in the art room was incredibly awkward, and that fact that it was with me, made it one of the most awkward encounters ever.

"I just need to grab something from my locker really quick," I said as I stopped in front of my locker.

I dialed in my combination before pulling on the door. It didn't open. Confused, I reset the lock and redialed in the combination. It didn't open again. Assuming that the third time is a lucky charm, I reset, redialed, and pulled. No luck.

"Let me try," Isaiah volunteered, "do your combination."

I dialed in my combination for the last time, and with all his strength, Isaiah yanked open the door of the locker. It bounced open as it was shaking from the strong force between the jammed door and Isaiah's strength.

Suddenly a thick white board slid out of the locker.

"What?" I mumbled underneath my breath as I caught the canvas.

"I never put my paintings in the locker, I'm always afraid of it getting messed up." I commented.

I flipped the canvas over and looked at the painting. It was the galaxy painting. The painting that Landon messed up a few weeks ago. The painting that I've worked so hard that day, only to be ruined by a jerk, purposely pushing my arm. But this time, the white streak was gone. Instead, someone had painted over the white streak, and fixed the picture.

"Are you sure you didn't put it in there?" Isaiah asked me, hovering over my shoulder.

"Yes, I'm sure."

I closed my locker as I held the canvas in my hand. I flipped it towards the back, hoping to find a clue somewhere but the canvas was clean and empty.

Chapter 10

With my fingers tapping against my chin, and my rabbit slippers slapping the hard wood floor as I take each step; I paced around the center of my bedroom. I was wearing one of Colton's oversized olive-green hoodie, along with my loose pajama pants dragging on the floor, and my messy wavy hair was sitting in a loose bun on top of my head.

"You look like you're about to go to war," Isaiah commented, laughing at my uncontrollable pacing.

I quickly hushed him as I brought my fingers back up to my chin.

"I left the classroom right after the incident," I mumbled to myself, "there's no way I put that in my locker!" I screamed as I pointed to the galaxy painting laying innocently on the edge of my bed.

In the corner of my eyes, I can see Isaiah looking at me as if I was possessed. I put my hands on my hips and quickly turned my body towards him, examining him from head to toe. Isaiah suddenly jerked up, holding his hands up as if he was just being stopped by the police. I slowly took my gaze away from Isaiah and squinted my eyes at the painting.

"But only I know the combination to my locker," I scoffed and crossed my arms.

"Are you a hundred percent sure, you didn't put it in there?" he asked me.

Isaiah was sitting on the bean bag that was in the corner of my bedroom, next to the window. He had his backpack sitting on his thighs as his legs laid straight out on the floor with his feet crossed.

"A hundred and ten," I waved him off.

After years of walking in a circle, I decided to give up on the mystery. I took the canvas and toss it into the corner of my bedroom, where all my finished art projects end up. It's unbelievable how much paintings a girl can create in her lifetime. There were a handful in the corner of my room, and an infinite amount of paintings in the garage. There were even a few hung up around the house as wall décor. Austin even has three paintings on his wall, although he is never in his room.

Suddenly my bedroom door busted open as Austin called my name at the top of his lungs. I lifted my eyebrows and turned towards the door, oblivious to that fact that I had a boy in my room. Austin froze as his gaze slowly went from me to Isaiah. As soon as I got the gist of what Austin was thinking, I jumped up and waved my hands at him.

"It's not what it looks like!" I panicked, covering my face in surprise.

Austin stood there silently as he continued to stare back and forth between me and Isaiah. Slowly, Austin finally took a step into my bedroom and held his hand out towards Isaiah, "Austin." He blankly greeted.

Isaiah smiled and grabbed his hand, shaking it firmly before introducing himself to Austin.

"No offense," Austin started, "but why are you in my little sister's room?" Austin crosses his arms, leaning his weight towards his left leg while tapping his right foot against the floor. Austin was wearing panda slippers that slapped the floor every time his foot met it.

By the look of Isaiah's face, I can sense the awkward aura in the room. Isaiah looked Austin up and down, rotating between Austin's eyes and his panda slippers.

"She invited—"

"School project!" I voluntarily interrupted him. I flashed a huge grin towards Austin and grabbed his arm, "Okay my dear loving brother, we need to focus on our assignment now!"

I dragged Austin back towards the door and tried to push him with all of my strength. Austin didn't budge; however he took a step back from me slamming the door in his face.

"Okay, don't do anything stupid!" Austin called from the other side of the door, "I will kill you, soccer boy!"

I pressed my lips together in embarrassment and stopped myself from laughing at the situation. Isaiah seemed dumbfounded as he was sinking in the bean bag chair. He moved his backpack so his side and rested his feet on the floor, spreading his legs out like how guys normally do when they feel relaxed.

"Your brother is cute," he said as he leaned his head back in comfort, "you guys are both cute." He clarified.

I stayed quiet.

Isaiah lifted his head back up and looked at me. He then pulled away from his relaxed position and leaned towards me. He rested both of his elbows on top of his knees, fingers intertwined as he rests his chin on it, "I didn't mean it like that," he finally corrected himself.

I laughed lightly and shook my head as I made my way towards my bed. I sat on the edge, with my body still facing Isaiah.

"I heard about what Landon did to you," Isaiah said out of the blue.

I didn't respond; however I was still giving him my full attention. My heart started beating fast as my mind tries its best to block out the horrible flashback. Landon calling me a bitch, grabbing me, shaking me until I feared him.

"I want to apologize for him," he trailed off and paused. He got up from the bean bag chair and walked towards me. He sat next to me on the bed, one leg propped up on the bed as he turns his body to face me. I pulled both of my legs up, criss crossed and turning my body towards him. I remained quiet as I waited for him to finish his confession.

"Sometimes Landon is just extremely," he paused, "bipolar."

"One day, he can feel like he's on top of the world. The nicest guy on earth."

I shook my head and denied that observation.

Isaiah looked at me and shook his head, "Listen to me. One day he feels at his best, and one day he feels at his worst. I feel like you've only seen him in his worst days."

I furrowed my eyebrows in disbelief, feeling betrayed. I helped Isaiah the day no one wanted to stop the fight between them, and here he is asking me to forgive Landon for all the harassment since my first day of school.

"That's not a good excuse, Isaiah," I finally spoke up.

Isaiah stared at me with sorrowful eyes, and lifted his hands up to convey his message, "It's not an excuse!" he defended.

"I helped you. He harassed me," I concluded.

"I understand," Isaiah quickly responded.

"No, you don't," I shook my head, "You only want me to forgive him because he's your friend, even when you know about the things that he did to me."

"I might be defending him because he's my friend," he paused, "but I'm also trying to help you."

"I'm not going to forgive him and be friends suddenly. I'm not going to walk into a possible abusive friendship!"

"You're not."

I didn't respond to him, instead I started to look at my bed sheets, acting as if I had no interest in what he had to say.

"I don't need your help." I finished off the argument.

There was a moment of silence before Isaiah started to shuffle around uneasily.

"Aubrey," he said, breaking the silence. I looked at him unintentionally, as my eyes met his. He took a deep breath before putting both hands on my shoulder, gripping them softly.

"How can you stand up for me, but you can't stand up for yourself?" He held onto my shoulders for a few more seconds before dropping his hands. He got up from the bed and walked over to his backpack. He swiftly swung it over his shoulder as he made his way towards the door. He turns around and flashes me a sad smile, before exiting the door, closing it behind him.

My breathing started to stabilize. However, being the selfish girl I am, I ignored Isaiah's apology for Landon and pushed it in the back of my mind. Apologies should come from the person that caused the problem, not his friend. I collapse on my bed as Isaiah's question wandered in my mind.

How can you stand up for me, but you can't stand up for yourself?

Moments later the door softly opens and Austin walks in. I sat up as I recognized the look of guilt plastered across his face.

"Did you hear?" I asked.

He nodded and frowned at me, opening his arms before embracing me in a tight hug.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked, rubbing my back.

"I can handle it on my own." I reassured.

Chapter 11

My eyes fluttered open as the color of his dirty blonde hair caught my attention. His soft hair was swept to the side, the strands of his hair volumized simply by leaning on top of each other. The face structure of this man was beautiful, thin and masculine. His perfect tan skin complimented the color of his hair, as well as his soft pink lips. Accompanied by a left dimple each time he smiles showing his straight, white teeth. His eyes. His beautiful blue-green eyes that always changes colors depending on the light shining against them.

He was wearing a light blue button up shirt, I had my head laying on his black slim-fit jeans. He had his thick framed glasses hooked into the left pocket of his shirt, along with a red pen cuffed onto his left ear. His hand softly laid above my head, touching my wavy brown hair as he twirls it around his index finger. His gaze was set straight ahead, peering into the soccer field as he watches a practice in session.

"You're awake," Colton says softly as he looks down at me. I looked up at him and flashed him a tired smile.

He brought his hand up to my forehead, and pushed all the strands of my hair behind my head, combing his hand through my hair.

"Good morning sunshine," he chuckles.

I turned my head away from his body as I observed the soccer field. We were on the bench on the opposite side of the bleachers. We were far enough for the soccer players not to see us, but close enough for us to watch them.

After what felt like hours, I gathered all of my strength and sat up. I released a loud grunt as if I was carrying the heaviest weight on earth. An amused laugh escaped Colton's lips as he leaned back against the bench.

"You drooled on me," Colton squinted his eyes at me before pointing at the tiny puddle of dried saliva on his pants.

My face heated up in embarrassment. I played it off and smacked his arm.

"It's okay," I answered for him.

I deeply inhaled in the fresh air and loudly exhaled, "I feel great!"

I tilted my head to both sides, loosening up the tension behind my neck. Looking down at the soccer field, I traveled my eyes towards the boys on the soccer team. I kept my eyes on a familiar figure that happened to belong to Isaiah.

I huffed at the appearance of him. Isaiah was standing in line behind his teammates as they each took turn kicking the balls towards the net. They all were dressed in practice gear: muscle tanks and tees, basketball shorts, long socks with bright neon colored cleats.

"What's wrong?" Colton asked as he noticed the look of annoyance on my face. He leaned towards me, trying to catch what I had my eyes on.

Colton then laughed a little as he figured out my eyes were clutched on Isaiah, "Yeah, I don't like him." He simply commented.

I made a face at Colton towards his random statement. He held up his hands and shrugged casually, flashing a bright smile afterwards, "I'm just saying."

"You're so immature," I smiled, pushing his body towards the opposite direction.

He didn't budge, in fact he leaned closer towards me. His grin slowly turned into a genuine smile, as he stares at me in the eyes. His eyes trailed down to my lips as our face was only about an inch apart. I kept my eyes from looking at his lips, trying to avoid the necessary urge to kiss him as much as possible.

Colton crept his warm hand behind my neck, slowly caressing my cheek with his thumb. We both hesitated to continue. Although our lips were brushing against each other at this point, we pulled apart. Disappointment showered down my back as we both awkwardly turned our attention back on the field.

My heart was still beating rapidly against my chest, my cheeks were still flushed.

"Sorry," Colton apologized quietly throughout the awkward silence.

"It's okay."

"My brother can just come pick me up," I smiled reassuringly at Colton before waving him off. He flashes me the 'Are you sure?' look before I rushed him towards his car.

"Yes!" I screeched and spun him around. With both of my hands against his back, I lead him towards his vehicle, "Go, I have to go somewhere with my brother anyways."

He releases a chuckle before turning back around, facing me.

"Hug?" he asks simply.

I smiled and wrapped my arm around his waist as he embraces me. After a few seconds, I released him as he opened the car door.

I turned back around and walked towards one of the benches on the sidewalk of the student parking lot.

The sun has already set as the sky barely has enough light from the full moon and street lights. I pulled out my sketchbook and turned on the flash on my phone. Clutching the phone in one hand, I took a pencil and started sketching random figures.

It didn't take long until a pair of white tennis shoes appeared in my peripheral vision. I lifted an eyebrow as I slowly tilted my head up. There standing was a person who has been missing from school for over a week. I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

He was dressed in a white short sleeve polo, with the Lacoste symbol on the left chest area. Khaki pants that fit him well, and the same gold chain that dangles from his neck. I turned off the flash from my phone and put it back in my bag. I looked down at my sketchbook and pressed my lips together, speechless.

"Can I sit?" he finally says.

I kept my eyes on my sketchbook and slowly shook my head, "No."

Silence fills the air again as all we can hear is the soft breeze.

Landon remains standing there, as I feel his eyes on me. I shifted uneasily in my seat before slamming my sketchbook shut. Without having anything to say, I picked up my bag and stood up.

Finally owning up the courage to look at him in the eyes, I walked towards his direction. I passed him in attempt to find another bench to sit at. As I crossed his path I felt his hand wrap around my wrist. My heart stopped.

It felt like lightening had struck me the moment he held me. My body started to tense as I stopped my tracks, staring at the concrete floor ahead of me. We stayed like that for about a minute, before my feelings of hatred quickly shifted into fear. When I start to feel my body shake, I tried to maintain my stability.

"I'm sorry," he mumbles underneath his breath.

The two words that came out of his mouth. The two words that I've been waiting for since the first day of school. But I still couldn't find a way to have myself forgive him, he was a horrible person.

I breathed in deeply before twisting my arm out of his grip and continued walking. I pulled my long sleeves and covered my hands with it, in substitute to having something to clutch on. My fist wraps around the end of my sleeves tightly until I could feel my hands getting numb. The light

breeze hits my face as I start to take a step away from Landon, feeling his presence being peeled away further from me with each step I take.

Chapter 12

How can you stand up for me, but you can't stand up for yourself?

I pushed my hair back and carelessly pinned it half up half down as I wandered into the hallway. Taking a tissue, I rubbed it against my nose before tossing it into the nearby trashcan. I attempted to sniffle, but my nose felt clogged and irritated. I growled underneath my breath as all I could do was breathe through my mouth.

I had a piercing headache, throbbing only on one side of my head, while the opposite ear felt swollen. I couldn't hear through one side, couldn't think through the other.

From afar, I could see Bella in her blue floral print blouse and dark washed jeans. She had her orange-brown hair curled and nicely laid down. She waved to me from afar before rushing towards me.

"You look," Bella trailed out while she fixes the collar of my blouse, "terrible."

I nodded while frowning. Bella always had the nurturing side of hers ready. She sent me a sad smile as she comforted me by rubbing my back.

"Class is starting really soon, you should head on," she tells me in the most sorrowful tone. I couldn't help but laugh and how much we both hated school. Although we still maintain good grades and perfect attendance, our motivation for school is no where near and average student's.

I gave Bella a quick side hug before turning around as we separated ways. After taking a few strides, I stopped in front of my Pre-Calculus class. In the back of my head I was begging for Landon not to come to class today. However, in fear of jinxing it, I tried to distract myself from that statement as much as possible.

Taking a deep breath, I opened the door and the classroom was nearly filled. Everyone was sitting in their assigned seats. I peered towards the end of the classroom and the seat next to mine was empty. I quietly cheered before welcoming myself towards my assigned seat.

Sniffing, I pulled out my notebook and grabbed a classroom textbook from underneath the desk. I laid all of my supplies on the table and rested my chin on my palm. I cleared my throat as the irritating scratchy feeling heated up my neck.

I closed my eyes until I heard Mr. Winston speak up.

After about fifteen minutes into the lecture, the classroom door had opened. At that moment it never occurred to me that Landon was ever going to show up for the rest of class. So without a care, I had my eyes set on my notes, studying the examples that Mr. Winston has provided for me.

"Landon," the teacher says.

Hearing his name made me freeze. I blinked twice before I looked up at the door. Landon in his black bomber jacket, approaches towards his assigned seat. I bit my tongue and eyed him as he walks in my direction.

For some reason, I didn't feel to angry as I did before. I was too tired from this cold to even make a deal about his presence.

His eyes never made contact with mine.

Although he knew I was here, he didn't bother to acknowledge my existence. I shook it off as I turned my head back towards the board, jotting notes down onto my notebook.

Having the need to cough, I brought my elbow up to my lips and made the nastiest sound. Some students ignored my horrible sickness, some looked over and cringed at the sight. But without a care, I did it again. I clenched my teeth together as I felt my throat heating up.

Suddenly I felt a tap against my arm. Something cold has pressed against me. I looked over to my side and it was a water bottle, handed to me by Landon.

I looked up at him and took the water bottle, only to set it back on his desk.

"You need it," he whispers to me as he leans towards me with his elbows resting on his knees.

I ignored him and pretended to pay attention to the lecture.

I heard him click his tongue, and in a gist, the water bottle started to roll itself towards the end of my desk. Annoyed, I picked up the bottle and put it back on his desk.

"Aubrey," he says softly.

I bit my upper lip as I finally grab the bottle off of his table. Instead of opening it, I stood up and threw it at him.

"Stop!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, my voice cracking. All eyes quickly averted towards us.

Ignoring everyone's attendance, I continued, "Just stop it! You're not nice Landon, stop pretending that you are. You think coming back and acting nice is easily going to grant someone's trust?"

Landon stood up. My gaze quickly shifted up as his eyes hovered over me.

Mr. Winston sighs loudly as he points his finger as both of us, "Outside."

Without a doubt, I grabbed my bag and stomped outside. The moment I stepped outside, I uncontrollably coughed for a minute straight.

Landon came out a second later, quietly. He softly closed the door as he leaned against the wall on the other side of the door. I rolled my eyes and crossed my arms as I did the same. The few minutes were quiet, aside from my coughs and sniffles.

Soon I regretted not accepting the water bottle from Landon. I didn't bring any water of my own, and my throat was starting to throb. I felt so swollen that I could feel the pulse hit against the skin on my neck.

"The painting," Landon mumbled.

I looked at him.

"I fixed it," he explains. The painting that magically appeared in my locker, renovated was from him. I questioned the possibility, however I still had my eyes on him, finally opening up to his apology.

"Did you get it?" he asks. I hesitated to answer for a minute, before nodding slowly.

He didn't say anything after that. Instead I saw a genuine smile swept across his lips as he broke eye contact, looking at the floor.

After that, we didn't bother to look at each other. Although the incident was intense, there was no awkward tension in the air. I looked down the hallway and saw Colton's figure walking towards me. I quickly smiled and pushed myself off the wall.

"Colton!" my rough, scratchy voice called out.

A smile was quickly brought to his face as he held his arms out, walking towards me. I skipped towards him as he wrapped his arm around me, picking me up off the floor. He set me down carefully right after and handed me a Gatorade.

"Bella told me you were sick," he said.

"Yeah, it sucks," I mumbled underneath my breath. Without hesitation, I opened up the bottle and started chugging. With just half of the drink empty, I closed and tossed it into my bag.

"What are you doing out here?" I asked him, remembering that me and Landon got kicked out during a class period.

Colton chuckled and held out with Student Body President badge, "Perks."

Pointing a finger at him, I made a funny 'ah' sound before he did the same.

"Oh!" Colton's face lit up as he reaches into his pocket, "Look at this." He pulls out his phone and positions his body next to mine. Wrapping an arm around my shoulder, I can smell his cologne as he shows me a video on his phone.

Chapter 13

Another day, another class.

Going to school on a Monday is something no one ever wants to participate in. But society differs.

I still felt the soreness in my throat, and my voice still sounded like an old man's. On a good note, my symptoms has healed over the weekend. My father is a huge educate supporter. Education is key, you don't leave school unless you're literally dying. If you don't have the proper education, you won't get a proper life, and a stable foundation for your children.

My father has always been like a mother to Austin and I. He always tries his best to educate Austin and I about real life situations. Things such as finding the right person to be with, standing up for yourself, and keeping your group of friends small; my dad has always had these cultural legacies that stands in the center of his heart.

Even though my dad does open up to Austin and I's opinions, winning over his personal values is very difficult. My dad has set goals for us, planned for us in the future. Although he doesn't limit us on our decisions, he pressures and pushes us to strive for a better life. A better life for us, and a good life for our children.

Upon my dad's belief, he works extremely hard for Austin and I to gain happiness. He attempts to give us an appreciative life. Many time, Austin and I attempted to sneak applying and getting jobs. But my dad never wanted us to work as hard as him at a young age. He always talks us out of getting a job, and to focus on education. Even though our past was pretty rough, we were extremely proud of where our dad brought us to now. And I couldn't be any more appreciative of him.

Yawning as I approached my locker, I dialed in the combination before pulling on the handle. The door didn't even budge. I clenched my teeth as I stared at my locker, as if it could read my reaction.

If you don't open, I swear to god.

I bit the inside of my lip and dialed the number again, still didn't open. I growled as I stomped the floor in frustration.

IT'S MONDAY. Don't do this to me.

"Woah there, sunshine." Hearing the word sunshine, I instantly recognized Colton by his voice. I turned towards him and pointed at my locker.

"I hate this thing," I mumbled underneath my breath, each word coming out slowly. I pointed my finger at the locker before hitting it with my palms irritatingly. I breathed deeply before whining and leaning against the locker, "Why? Why?"

Colton's eyes slightly widened; not in shock but in reaction to weirdness. A soft chuckle escaped those lips as he took a step towards me.

With my back against the lockers, I stared up at him. He looked at me with his dreamy eyes, with a soft smile plastered among his lips. Colton leaned down to my height and adjusted his mouth near my eyes.

Soft words escaped his lips. My heart beat raced against my chest as my breathing stopped for a quick second.

"Move," he whispers.

I blinked multiple times in confusion before it occurred to me that he wanted to see my locker. Blushing in embarrassment, I took a step to the side before turning around and facing the stupid metal box. Standing next to Colton as he attempts to pull out my locker, I kept replaying the embarrassing moment in my head.

I mentally hit myself in the head so many times before noticing that my locker door was open. I rose an eyebrow as I fixed my attention back to my locker. Pulling out my notebooks, I slammed the door shut.

"You're cute," Colton says as he puts both hands against my cheeks, pushing them against each other.

I squealed feeling my cheeks and lips tightly and uncomfortably squeezed together. The image of me being squished must've looked disgusting, ugly.

"Okay, go to class," Colton demanded as soon as he released my face from suffocation.

Still feel the tingles in my cheeks, I swiftly spun around on my heels and walked away. As I took the few first steps, I was almost hesitated to leave him. Within a second, footsteps were following me in a rush. Before I could realize what was happening, arms crept over my shoulders, folding around my neck in a warm embrace.

I blinked and looked down at arms that belonged to Colton.

"I didn't get a proper goodbye," he mumbles underneath his breath next to my ear. I could smell the sweet minty flavor from his gum.

My face flushed and my body warmed up. I like him, I really do. When you really like someone, it's hard to figure out if you'd want to ruin the friendship or take it to the next step.

But he hesitated to kiss me a few days ago.

"And," Colton says after a minute of silence, "I like you."

My smile suddenly disappeared as my hands dropped to my sides. My mind was suddenly surrounded by a foggy mist, I didn't know how to answer him. My breathing started to feel heavy, and my legs started to feel numb. I pressed my lips together and in a panic, I broke his grip.

Something in the back of my mind told me to run. To walk away, and to never look back.

Why am I feeling like this?

My throat started to tighten as I rushed myself to my Pre-Calculus class. I didn't bother to pay attention to who was in the class. I immediately got to my seat the moment I opened the door. Lifelessly staring at the bored, Mr. Winston started on his lesson but questions clogged up my mind.

Is it possible to like someone, but when they confess you feel like something is holding you back from accepting his confession? I like Colton, but will taking it to the next step be the right thing to do? I'm scared, please someone just give me a hint.

A note somehow slowly crept onto my desk. It was an index card, with messy writing filled from top to bottom of the paper.

I know you hate me after all I've done to you, but I want you to know I'm sorry. Fixing your painting is just the first on my list as apology. I'm sorry I ruined your first day of school. I'm sorry I ruined your painting.

Lastly, I'm sorry if I ever made you feel insecure and useless in any type of way. Every single time I've do you wrong, I couldn't help but to think what a beautiful life

I might've almost ruined. I know saying sorry wouldn't grant you all of my trust, but can you give me a chance to dinner? Landon.

My eyes adjusted to the notecard, attempting to figure out each word that was written. Quickly afterwards, I looked at Landon. His eyes didn't show any sign of anger, instead it showed sadness, regret, and a little sense of lost. I softened at the look of the hurtful boy, however I couldn't find the courage to accept his offer.

His hand slowly crept towards me as he softly lays his hands on mine.

"Please," he begged.

Chapter 14

His hand slowly crept towards me as he softly lays his hands on mine.

"Please," he begged.

I pulled my hand away from his, and put them underneath the desk. Accepting his apology would mean opening up a door for a possible abusive friendship; not accepting his apology can cause him to cause harm to other people, knowing that no one else would bother giving him a second chance.

Maybe I could change this guy. Maybe if I come into his life for just a second, I can lower any possibilities of him harming other people. I rubbed my sweat palms against my dark washed jeans before flipping the note card back around.

Grabbing my pen, I covered the note from any one else's vision and started writing.

You get one chance.

I swiftly slid the notecard back to his table. The edge of his lips curved upwards, looking at me with thankful eyes. His smile disappeared as he turned all of his attention back onto the notecard and started scribbling.

Tonight at 8, FORMAL ATTIRE.

I rose an eyebrow due to the emphasis on 'formal attire'. Personally, an apology is an apology; there's no need to fancy things up. But instead of having the effort to argue for a cheaper, casual dinner, I nodded at him before writing down Bella's address.

- - -

It quickly left my mind that Colton had confessed to me earlier today. My head was filled with so much attempts to change Landon, I almost forgot about the most important part of my friendship.

I walked down the hallway, noticing Colton's blonde hair from afar. Rubbing my palms together nervously, I approached him in the slowest, most uncomfortable way possible. With my index and middle finger, I softly tapped Colton's shoulder as he quickly reacted and turned around. A smile appeared on his lips, but in his eyes it didn't so any feelings so happiness.

"Um, about earlier," I stammered. I paused for a little before taking a deep breath, "I don-"

Before the successfully escaped my lips, Colton shook his head before slamming his locker closed, "Don't answer." He bluntly demands.

My heart skipped a beat before I grabbed his arm, "Colton," I softly said his name, almost in a whisper.

"I know you don't feel the same," Colton begins, "We're friends, we're really good friends. I'm happy for that."

I furrowed my eyebrow as I shook my head. In the moment, I knew I liked Colton. I was happy around him, I fell head over heels over his presence. And last Friday, that little moment we had on the bench was the first in years that I've felt this way towards someone. It was a feeling that couldn't further be explained; it was just a feeling. However, the feeling also had a negative side to it. Something was telling me that all could go wrong. I couldn't completely put my tongue on it, it was the feeling of love and impossibility.

"I just need time, Colton, to think," I stuttered before turning my attention towards the floor.

A moment of silence passes by as Colton still kept his eyes on me.

After a few minutes, he finally nodded understandingly as he passes me a sad smile. Although it was clear that he wasn't feeling his best, he still held out his arms motioning me for a soft hug. I walked towards him as I wrapped my arm around his waist, resting my face on his chest.

"I'm sorry," I apologized as guilt swept me off my feet.

"It's okay," he releases a small chuckle before playing with my hair, "I still love you."

I heard his heart beating against his ear, it was beating rapidly. Raising my hand, I placed it underneath my ear, feeling the pitter-patter against his skin. As I did, his heart beat started relaxing, as if it did out of comfort. I tilted my head up, staring into his sultry eyes as we exchanged soft smiles. Colton leans down and kisses the top of my forehead, sending chills all over my body. Shyly, I hid my face in his chest.

We released each other as I started swinging on my feet from heel to toe. Colton releases a chuckle as his palms reach for my head, ruffling my hair as if I was a little kid. I attempt to dodge his attack but failed miserably. I stood there accepting his will to mess up my hair, and just stared at him with a wide smile.

"Well," he finally says, "I have a meeting to go to." Colton fixes the collar on his button up shirt before walking past me. Swiftly, he spins around and points at me with finger guns as well as a laugh, "I'll catch up with you later."

I nodded as I waved him off.

I stopped in front of my locker before staring at it in despair. Opening up this locker has always been the most difficult task in my life. Suddenly, god sent my guardian angel from above.

"Do you need help?"

Isaiah stood next to me, already dressed in his soccer uniform. His two weeks of bench was up, and today was his first game after the break. He releases a small chuckle as he gaze switches from me to my locker.

"Aren't you mad at me?" I curiously looked at him.

He didn't seem to have held a grudge at all, especially after our heartfelt argument a few days back. Isaiah rose an eyebrow at the question and innocently shook his head.

"No, why would I?"

I shrugged in response.

"I suppose, since you stomped out of my room last time."

Isaiah flashed a wide smile as if I had given him the nicest compliment of his life.

"That was only in the heat of the moment," he replied, "we're still friends."

I released a small sigh of relief.

"Saw you and the blonde over there. Are you guys a thing now?" Isaiah casually asks. It's funny how we've only know a little bit of each other, but he acts as if we were friends since second grade.

I shook my head in response without giving him a verbal answer.

"I was just asking," he shrugged.

I nodded at his useless comment before the awkward silence fills the air.

We both were standing there, casually looking at each other, other students, and maybe glimpse of the walls and floor. After what felt like forever, a light bulb popped into my mind as I remembered to why he's approached me in the first place.

"Will you help me open my locker?" I smiled in embarrassment as I felt my cheeks turning pink.

Isaiah released a small laughter before swinging his duffel bag to cross his body. He pushed the bag as it hangs around his lower back, before motioning me to enter my combination. Without a trouble, I dialed in the combination for my locker before he grabs the handle and yanks it out.

The locker was jammed so hard, that Isaiah had to nearly pull three times before the door bounces open. I shook my head in disbelief before tossing my books inside. Ruffling my hands through my messy locker, I searched for a hairband somewhere in the pencil cabinets. For minutes, I looked for the small band before feeling my fingertips brush against it. With much success, I threw my hair up in a pony tail glancing behind the door of my locker.

Isaiah was still standing there, awkwardly.

I smiled and held the door after tying my hair.

"Don't you have a game to go to?" I smoothly asked as I flipped my ponytail to the back of my head.

Isaiah jumps from his spot and releases an embarrassing laugh. He checks the watch on his wrist before bouncing on his tippy toes.

"Yeah," he trails off, "okay, bye!"

He quickly sprints out of the hallway leaving me confused as to his actions. I found his awkwardness funny, and couldn't help but to laugh at the situation.

Chapter 15

"I can't believe you're giving him a second chance," Bella says as she walks towards the edge of her bed.

Bella always had a protective, motherly side to her. Her intentions are always for the best she sees for the people she cares most about. Sometimes I act as if she was the mother sent to me, in replacement of my birth mom.

"And I can't believe you gave him my address," she continues, laughing at the childish response I had given Landon earlier today. I couldn't help but to join in and smile at her. Bella looked the best when she is happy. Her hair glistens against the sun, her skin was alright bright and clear, and her preppy outfits always seemed to be on point.

Bella didn't belong into any "original cliques". She was always hopping around groups, hanging out with everyone individually; day by day. Many people love her presence. Some people hated her because of how popular she actually seems to be.

"Well," I rose my hands up to defend myself, "One, I needed a dress. And two, I couldn't just let Austin see me go out with a guy, he'd kill him."

"But, this is Landon we're talking about."

"Three, Landon can possibly kill my dear brother," I pouted towards her, "I can't let that happen."

She couldn't help but smile at my comeback. Bella shook her head and walks towards her closet; pulling the doors open, I never expected what would be in front of my eyes. It was a walk-in closet, but as a size of a bedroom.

Dresses, sweaters and shirt were all organized by color code. My eyes glistened at the sight of the dreamful closet.

All that could escape my lips were, "Woah."

Bella smiled at my impression as she puts her arm against the closet door, leaning on it.

"What is mine, is yours!" she brightly introduced before holding my hand. She leads me into the aisle with dresses, beautifully sorted from red to pink to white to silver.

I stood there dumbfounded as Bella started digging into her closet, moving dresses towards her left until she lands on the perfect dress. I started to walk towards the red side of the dress, before randomly pulling out a dress.

A beautiful red, velvet dress. It was short, and simple. I took it off the rack and turned it back and forth. The back of the dress was backless, the front was a short v-neck, that possibly stops before the chest area.

Bella froze as she lands her eyes on the dress next to me. Excited, she grabbed my hand with the dress and puts it in front of me.

"That's perfect!" she says, amazed, "You have to put it on!"

Bella squealed as she left the closet, giving me personal space to change.

I only have one or two dresses in my closet. Although my wardrobe may be girly, I almost never wear dresses unless it's on a special occasion. When I was a little girl, dresses were the only thing in my wardrobe; however I somehow grew out of it.

I struggled to put on the dress as there were thin straps along the backless side in support of holding the dress up. After about five minutes of irritation, I successfully slipped the dress on. The dress felt loose enough to comfortably sit and eat, but tight enough to hug my waist, emphasizing on my body figure.

"Okay, I'm done!" I called out to Bella. Within seconds, she sprint in and stops in front of me, staring at me up and down. She held up her fingers, twirling it in a circle position as I copied and spun my body.

Ending the spin with a fake royalty bow, Bella squealed and bounced on her feet.

"Aubrey! It's perfect. You look so beautiful!" she cooed.

I faked a blush and waved her off, "Oh, stop it." I laughed jokingly.

"No! Really!" she trails off as she walks behind me. Putting her hands on both of my shoulders, she leads me to the full body size mirror that was drilled up against the center of the closet's wall. I looked at my reflection slightly in shock.

The dress hugged the upper half of my body, as it flares out after the waist. I smiled at myself, before turning around towards Bella, "I love it." I simply stated.

She claps her hands together as she took a hold of mine, "We need to get you ready! It's half until eight!"

Bella drags me out of her closet, ignoring my previous clothes that are just carelessly laying on the floor of her walk-in. She sat me down in front of her vanity, handing me her makeup bags as she quickly ran back inside the closet.

"Do your makeup!" she calls out before disappearing.

I smiled at her excitement as I dug through her makeup bag. Keeping it simple and easy, I pulled out a lash curler, mascara, as well as a sheer tiny lip gloss. Carefully, I laid the lash curler against my eyes and pressed my lashes, following by putting just a few layers of mascara on both the top and bottom of my eyes. I swept the lip gloss across my lips as I pressed them together, blending them out thoroughly.

Bella ran out again with a pair of short heels, getting on her knees in front of me. I looked at her, amused as I took one of the heel out of her hands.

"I can do it myself," I smiled at her.

The shoes were a light pastel pink color, almost as close to a cream color. The heel was only an inch tall, it was chunky enough for me to stably walk without being too uncomfortable. It had long laces coming out from the sides, long enough to wrap around the ankle with a cute bow. Overall, the shoes were velvet.

I slipped my right foot into the heels, carefully wrapping the lace around my ankle and attempted to tie a perfect bow on the back of my leg. I repeated on the other foot.

I stood up, the heels were almost as if I was wearing sandals with just a little boost on height. Bella had her hands over her mouth, as if she was shocked from seeing a girl wearing a dress. I laughed at Bella before shaking my head at her, "Bella, I'm just wearing a dress." I downplayed the situation.

"Exactly!" she screeched, "You look so pretty, even I would date you!"

I laughed at her statement as I walked over and sat on her bed, "What would I do without a friend like you."

Bella joined me as she sat fully facing me.

"You're going on a date with a total hottie!" she squeals, "But he's a jerk so don't let him in too fast."

I nodded as she advised as if I didn't know that already, "It's not a date, Bella. There's no way I'm ever going to be dating a guy like that." I sighed and shook my head at the thought of Landon.

"Who would you date then?" Bella trailed off as she quickly nudged my arm, "Colton?"

With a surprise, I looked at her as she plastered a wide grin on her face, "Oh come on, Aubrey. You don't think I sense the chemistry when you two are together? Colton talks about you every single time I hang out with him. It's clear that you guys like each other." Bella cooed.

"No, it's nothing like that," I lied, "Colton and I are just friends."

Bella tilted her head and gave me a sarcastic look, shaking her head, "Yeah sure, friends."

Right after her statement, a door bell dinged down the hallway. Bella got up to her feet and gasps, "He's here!"

In a snap, I grabbed my phone and my card, sticking it in between my phone case and headed out. I hugged Bella at the doorway before exiting myself from her luxurious bedroom.

"Please be safe," she smiles at me, "Call me if anything happens!"

I swallowed nervously, rubbing my palms against my thighs before putting my hand on the handle. I'm going to open the door on someone who has been bullying me since the first day of school. Something in the back of my head told me to not open the door, and to not leave with him.

I brushed off the thought and opened the door, slowly.

Landon stood there, hands in his pocket as he was wearing a light blue dress shirt with black dress pants. The gold chain around his neck was hidden underneath his shirt, as his leather shoes sparkled under the door light. His eyes slightly widened at my appearance, quickly covered by the release of a small cough.

"I didn't know you lived here," Landon broke the silence, looking down the neighborhood. Bella lived in a neighborhood far from my home. All the houses were more than two stories high, and extremely clean and well-trimmed down.

I smiled and shook my head at his comment, "It's a friend's house."

Landon suddenly straightened up, uncomfortably tapping his shoes against the cement floor, "Oh."

It was quiet for a minute, before I took a step out of the house and closing the door behind me. "Should we go?" I innocently questioned.

Landon nodded as we both silently walked towards his car. He opened the passenger door for me, and I went in. I sat in the seat and looked up at him, before reassuring, "I can do it myself."

He pressed his lips together and nodded again, as I held the door by the handle and closing it. Landon walked around the front of his car before entering in the driver's seat. My heart started rushing as my stomach started to turn. The fear I had from Landon was slowly creeping back, hovering over my back as I tilted my head down to look at my palms.

What have I gotten myself into?

Chapter 16

The car ride was uncomfortably quiet, even with the radio softly playing in the background. I sat there playing with my fingers, looking out of the window pretending to forget that there's another person in the car. The neon lights from the buildings blended in with the navy-blue sky. All kinds of different people were walking along the sidewalks of the city: people in business suits, people with shopping bags, cameras, there were even people painting a beautiful mural on walls.

A smile appeared on my face as the view of the city suddenly turned into views of the ocean. The bright, full moon reflected off of the dark water, sending chill and relaxing vibes each time the waves moves against the sea.

"Do you like the ocean?" Landon spoke up from the silence.

I turned my attention towards him and nodded, answering with a soft yet cold "Yes."

He cleared his throat with his focus adjusting from the road and onto me, "I do too," he simply states. The silence starts to take over again, as I soon found myself guilty for staring at his face.

His soft brown hair was elegantly swept upwards, and a little to the side. Piercing blue eyes that kept his attention on the road in front of him; a defined jawline that effortlessly tenses each time he swallows; and a perfect side profile. His dress shirt was rolled up a little bit passed his elbow as he shows off his gold and silver Rolex watch.

He turns his head fully as he stops the car, catching me by surprise. I blinked multiple times before awkwardly turning my head back to the front, staring off into the night sky. My cheeks warmed up from embarrassment as I press my lips together.

I heard Landon release a soft chuckle before he unhooks his seatbelt, "We're here."

Almost immediately, I took off my seatbelt and opened the door; attempting to leave the awkward vibes in the car. I stood up and brushed down my dress, quickly closing the door behind me.

Landon's car clearly spoke out for his financial stableness. It was a black Dodge Charger, the newest 2017 edition. The car was kept squeaky clean, and the seats inside were replaced with red leather with a gold-plated license plate, front and back that reads out 'CARTHY' in bold black letters.

Feeling the cool air brush against my skin, I felt the goosebumps forming on my arms.

"Cold?" Landon asks me as he approaches towards my side of the car. I shook my head and played it cool.

"Have you been to La Folie before?" he asks as he rubs his right hand against the back of his neck. I sensed the uncomfortably small talk from him and couldn't help but to smile at his question.

"No," I responded. I looked towards the direction we were walking in. My eyes widened just by the look of the front entrance of the restaurant.

The building was modern build, with big bold letters drilled onto the side of the building stating 'La Folie'. The restaurant was four stories tall, windows from ceiling to floor. I can already see the fancy dining tables through the tinted windows, as well as lights hanging from the ceilings.

I hesitated to walk towards the building, turning towards Landon and grabbed his arm.

"Are you sure about this place?" I asked him, concerned about the over-the-top fanciness.

The edge of his lips curved upwards as he removes his arm from my grip, and softly putting his hand on my lower back, motioning me towards the building. A little spark flashed in my body when his warm hand brushes against my skin.

"I'm treating," he reassured as he opens the door for me.

I entered the restaurant feeling like I entered into another dimension. Couldn't help it, a smile crept upon my lips as Landon looked at me from the side. In the corner of my eyes I saw him smile along, as I was observing the beautiful laid out design of the place.

The tables had thick white cloths, with red drapes. Two roses in small white vases, individually centered each dining table.

"Right this way, Mr. Carthy," the waiter immediately guides us.

It didn't surprise me that the waiter knew who this guy was. He was rich for gods sakes, the cars, the discipline, his clothes already speaks so much about his financial stances.

We both followed the waiter silently, as he leads us into the elevator. I was slightly confused as to why we didn't just get the tables that were on the first floor, but I didn't bother asking Landon anything. Instead, I just appreciated the elegance of the elevator.

FLOOR 3.

FLOOR 4.

ROOFTOP.

The elevator door opened as to all was in my view was the ocean, and a few dining tables followed by various strings of lights, decorating zig zag across light posts. Candles were lit along with the roses in the center of the table.

This place has a rooftop? Who am I kidding, it's a five-star restaurant.

I laughed and rolled my eyes at my own thought before catching Landon's attention. He releases a small chuckle before looking at me with his light blue eyes.

"What?" he questions innocently as we exited the elevator with our designated waiter.

"Nothing," I answered quietly.

The waiter handed us menus, while two men dressed in burgundy suits pulled our chairs out for us. Landon smiled at the man in response and sat down as I did the same on the opposite side. We flipped through the menu quickly before ordering our meals. The waiter smiled at me as he took our menus, "You look beautiful," he speaks quietly. I smiled in response as he winks at me, quickly getting back to his job.

"You're not quite a talker, are you?" Landon asks, giving me his full attention.

It was different seeing him like this. His eyes were in contact with mine, he was actually pleading for an answer, actually interested. Although his outfit from school speaks out for his money; Landon's formal attire today made him look even more attractive. He looked a little bit more likable.

I shrugged in response.

A little afterwards, I realized I answered his question without even talking. A smile formed on our lips as we both laughed at the same time.

"I guess not," Landon smiles as he leans back against his chair.

I tapped my foot against the wooden floor and looked at the view of the ocean. This is my chance to get all the answers to my questions.

"Landon," I called his name softly. He lifts up his head from the utensils on the table and looks about me.

"About the painting," I slightly trailed off, figuring out words to piece together before leaning a little forward, "h-how?"

Landon released a shy smile as he puts his hands under the table.

"The day that I've hurt you physically, I really knew I was in the wrong; not like I was in the right in the first place," he paused, "I went back to our art teacher and begged her for the painting. She refused to give it to me until I begged her for hours. Afterwards, I asked her to help me figure out how to fix the painting and we both fixed it, together."

My body softened at his explanation, then I pressed my lips together.

"How'd you get it in my locker?"

"I paid the janitor," Landon answers easily.

I nodded in response as the waiter comes out with our fresh dishes: two plates of Pan-seared Foie Gras.

My mouth slightly watered at the dishes as he sets them properly on our table. I grabbed a fork and gently stabbed my food.

I looked up at Landon again, "After that day, where'd you go?" I asked curiously.

His hand stopped moving once I asked the question. He stares at his food and stays quiet for a few seconds before hesitating to answer, "I just have some things I had to deal with."

As he answered, I snuck a little piece of meat and bread into my mouth.

A moment of silence swept pass our table as we both eat corresponding to the sound of the waves hitting against the shore. I peered my eye out at the view, placing my chin on my hand as I rested my elbow on the table.

"Do you like the ocean?" he asks, breaking the silence as he also peered out at the ocean.

I nodded slightly, without knowing if he saw me answer or not. We both returned to finish our food before I wiped my lips with the napkin.

"That one night, when we were hiding behind the bush. Who were we hiding from?" All of a sudden, millions of questions came across my mind. I didn't know this guy; all I know is that he was possibly one of the biggest jerk at our school.

Landon pressed his lips together as he stares at the candle and roses in the center of the table.

"From my enemies."

I furrowed my brows together, as a gasp escaped my lips, "Like gang related?"

Landon's eyes widened as he straightened up from his seat, "Of course not!" he laughs for a second, before covering his mouth with the back of his hand, "Just because I have that reputation at school doesn't just mean I'm part of a gang."

I smiled in embarrassment as I soon joined him, laughing at my innocence.

Chapter 17

As we finished our plates, I stretched my arms out, arching my back as I feel my body tense and release. Landon released a chuckle as he reached out his hand towards me. I stared at it blankly, before softly placing mine on his.

"Let's dance?" he asks, wrapping his fingers around my hand.

In a panic, I pulled my hand back. I pressed my lips together as I hid my hands under the table. Landon rose an eyebrow in confusion, an embarrassed smile across his lips.

I avoided his eye contact before answering slowly, "I don't know how to dance."

Landon shook his head as he got up from his chair. He walks over to my side of the table before grabbing my hand softly, "I'll teach you," he smiled gently, guiding me towards the middle of the rooftop. Music suddenly starts playing from the speakers.

I swallowed nervously, following him hand in hand. As we reached towards the middle, Landon swiftly pulls me in front of him as I slightly stumbled. He laughs at my clumsiness as I blushed in embarrassment. He grabbed my left arm, putting it over his shoulders as he puts his right around my waist. We locked fingers in our other hand as our body slightly swayed from side to side.

I took a step to the left along with him, looking down at our feet as guides to copy him. I could feel Landon laughing silently, his body shaking softly each time he releases a chuckle. I felt his hand carefully placed under my chin, as he gently lifts it up, looking his eyes in mine. My heart started racing against my chest; it was almost like I could hear the beats pounding against my ears.

"Just follow the beat," Landon says as he hums along with the song. Who knew that a tough, masculine jerk, listens to music like this. A smile crept upon my lips as we started dancing in synchronization.

There were a few moments where I stepped on his shoe, as he winced; not in pain but in an expensive topic. I laughed each time he reacted when I stepped on his luxury shoes.

Half-way through the song, Landon pulls me a little closer as he keeps his eyes locked in mine. His blue eyes was nothing compared to Colton. Landon's eyes were bright blue, piercing through my soul as if he could read my mind. His smile slowly drops and he opens his mouth, attempting to say something.

After a few minutes of hesitation, he finally speaks up, "Aubrey."

I tilted my head, an answer of 'I'm listening'.

He nervously licks his lip as we remain swaying from side to side, "I'm sorry for what I've done."

I stayed quiet as I avoided his eyes; looking out into the view. Half of me wanted to hug him, accept his apology and hoping that we would be able to start on a new page. The other half of me hated him, I wanted to push him away and go home.

I bit the inside of my cheek as I slowly drift away in thought.

"Aubrey?" his voice distracted me from my thoughts. I answered him with a soft hum, as our bodies were still rocking with the music.

A chuckle escaped his lips as the song ended. Another song played as more customers started walking towards the dance floor. I motioned Landon to go back to our seats, I wasn't feeling the dancing and I definitely wasn't feeling the music with him. As we walked back, I noticed that more couples were on the dance floor after we left.

Very rich, fancy couples. A grown lady in her mid-thirties was dressed in a silky blue dress, with a fur cloth draped through her arms and resting behind her back. Her blonde hair was put into a fancy up do as her earrings glistened under the light. Her date was wearing a black velvet suit, matte leather shoes with a black top hat.

I smiled by the look at the couple, followed by a quick sigh. I was never the type to praise for money. In fact, we were very financially stabled at one point; however, we were still not considered as a high class, maybe just upper middle class. Things change overtime though.

"What are you thinking so hard about?" Landon asks as we both sat back down at our table.

I shrugged and left him wondering, not interested in answering his questions. Landon is a hard guy to put trust into, especially because how he's portrayed himself to me. I leaned back against the chair in effort to find something else to put my attention on.

Then, Landon spoke up.

"My dad owns a billing company, a medical billing company." He started. I questionably looked at him as to why he was telling me about his stories; but I let him continue, "Just because I'm saying he owns a medical billing company, doesn't mean we haven't broken hearts before."

I raised an eyebrow, "What do you mean by 'broken hearts'?"

"He takes patient's moneys, gives half to the doctors, keeps half to himself. This includes cancer patients, patients in surgery, children," he drifted off with a smirk plastered on his face, "hence, why we're so rich."

"So you're just going to rub in my face about how rich you are?" I scoffed, crossing my legs feeling the heat rise up in my body. The first time I've actually tried to give him a chance he talks about his

family's wealth. Skipping to conclusions, I've already assumed that Landon had given no care about his apology with me.

"My dad is my only parent, my mom only existed in my life for a little bit. I'm a lucky guy, as well as my half-brother. We were both born straight into a wealthy family and of course, we've never complained. My half-brother is my dad's favorite son, I'm my half-brother's favorite family," Landon looks at me, smiling at his statement before staring back down at the glass of water, "My older brother, being 21 and I am only 19, he's got the priority as the next owner for JONESMED. Can't lie and say that I'm not jealous."

"Why are you telling me this?" I interrupted him as he rudely sticks a finger up in the air; expecting me to keep quiet.

Being in this peaceful restaurant, I tried not to raise my voice. By keeping myself sane, I crossed my arms and started pinching myself in anger at where my hands landed.

"Just listen," he pauses, "Please."

I took a sigh before looking at him, slightly rolling my eyes at this ridiculous story.

"Since I'm the younger kid, I've always been neglected from my father's discipline. Money seems to bring our family happiness, so that's how it'll stay. My mother worked for my dad, to satisfy his sexual needs. Shortly after she got pregnant, he won the case for full custody over me and here I am. No one believed that I could be raised in the hands of a stripper. They fell in love after having me for the next few years until money tore them apart. My dad is so powerful, he was able to harass my mom without being caught. Snitches gets stitches; that's what he goes by."

My arms uncrossed as my body softened listening to the rest of his story.

Is this why he was so prone to harassing other girls?

"I fell in love once, two years ago. I know we were young, but I was heads over heels for this girl. She had the same personality as my father, results to how they got along so well. But money also got into her head. She was beautiful, sweet; and just like you, she had a passion for art. After a week trip to New York with just her and my family, she changed. She got closer to my father and brother; and soon was obsessed with the fact that money brings happiness. Her personality changed as well as her mindset. Money was always in her head, and she started becoming less patient, less caring, and started to get abusive. Punches after slaps, and slaps after punches I couldn't get enough of her bullshit and started to fight back. It was after months of harassment before I finally laid hands on her though. And even after that we were still together, abusive as fuck until I finally dropped her during our nine-month anniversary." He trailed off, tapping the toothpick against the white cotton table cloth.

Speechless, I couldn't bother to slip out a word. I put my hands under the table and started fidgeting with my finger uncomfortably.

I'm starting to feel bad for him.

"When I saw you painting in class that one day, you reminded me of her so much," he released a horrifying chuckle, "I hated your presence and I wanted to get rid of you. I wanted to make your life horrible," he pauses, "before I realized my hatred her was wrong to be used upon you."

A quick moment of silence passes by.

"When I realized that, I was a little too late. Earning your forgiveness will probably be harder knowing that I've almost ruined your life. I can't even forgive myself after that." He mumbles as he brings his hand up to his lip, brushing his knuckle against his upper lip.

I took a deep breath before staring at the fire in the candle.

I don't know what to say I thought, watching the light dance with the wind.

Chapter 18

"Come on, let's take you home to your boyfriend," Landon laughs a little at the end of his sentence.

We both got up as I raised an eyebrow in confusion, "Boyfriend?"

"Yeah, you and the class president. I heard that there's something between you guys," he says, sticking his hands in his pockets while walking towards the elevator.

"We're not dating," I scoffed a little, before avoiding his eye contact.

"Well, do you like him?" he asks casually, pressing the button on the elevator as he spins his car keys in his index finger.

I stayed quiet at his question, debating about my answer. After a second of silence, Landon tapped his foot against the white marble floor.

"So you do," he cooed, concluding the situation.

I rose my eyebrows and looked at him, rapidly shaking my head.

"Then why didn't you say that you don't like him?" I closed my eyes in defeat, feeling the elevator move as a distraction.

Landon releases a short laugh before covering his mouth with the back of his hands, "Exactly."

"I hope he won't get jealous that I just took you out for dinner," he teases, leaning down towards me before stepping out of the elevator; leading me back towards his car.

I rolled my eyes, feeling the soft breeze hitting against my back, "I'll just say you forced me against my own will to go with you," I smiled at my response.

"Ah, so you want to play that game," he trailed off as he turned around towards me, walking backwards as he shoots a playful wink.

Landon opens the door for me as I welcomed myself inside, smelling the scent of a new car. I pulled my dress down a little when it slid up from the tilted seat. I sensed Landon watching me. Before I was able to confirm the suspicion, he closed the door on my face.

I released a yawn, leaning back against the seat. When I first sat in this car, I didn't get the chance to observe it; I was too distracted by how awkward the drive was. My eyes trailed from the red leather seats to the customized gold cup holders with nothing in it but a fancy electric lighter. The driving wheel was covered with a leather case, while the driver and passenger windows were tinted past the legal limit.

"You like it?" Landon chuckles as he inserts the key in the ignition, reaching for his seatbelt.

I shrugged in response, "It's just very," I paused, "expensive looking." Curiously, I wiped my fingertip across the dashboard checking the dust on the car. I looked at my finger and nothing. Not even a spec of lint.

Landon watches me amused, smiling softly at me as I showed him my finger, "How?"

He grabs my finger and pretends to inspect it before quickly letting go and backing out of the parking lot, "I care about my car, that's how."

I scoffed at him, rudely insulted, "You probably just hire people to clean it."

Landon raised his eyebrows in amusement as he defensively shakes his head, "I could! But I like to take care of my baby myself."

"You're one of those people," I rolled my eyes and looked out of the window, losing interest in the conversation.

"I never knew you were like this," Landon mumbles underneath his breath, loud enough for me to hear.

"Like what?" I asked, eyes still kept on the scenery.

"Sarcastic, funny. It suits you," he continues, "I thought you were just a quiet, reserved girl who only enjoys art. You didn't talk much the car ride here either."

I furrowed my eyebrows, turning my head back towards him, "That's because I hate you."

"Then why are you talking to me," Landon smirks, sending a wink my way. Second time, he winks in a day.

I huffed in annoyance. I hated the smirk that appears on his lips. It sends vibes of hatred, confusion; it feels like I'm being lied to. Never trust a guy with a sarcastic smirk.

The car ride soon became quiet, although the silence wasn't awkward or uncomfortable. It was more peaceful, and relaxing. I closed my eyes as I tilted my head towards the window. The seat was tilted back enough for me to lean back in a relaxing position before drifting off to unconsciousness.

- - -

I opened my eyes after what only felt like five minutes. My head was still tilting towards the window. Taking a deep breathe, I blinked multiple times in order to get my vision back in focus. I release a slight yawn before sitting up.

Landon wasn't in the driver's seat anymore; in fact, I was there alone. Confused, I pushed my hair behind my ears before checking my phone.

11:45 pm

Austin

Where are you?

11:46 pm

Austin

Aubrey

11:47 pm

Austin

Hello? I'm worried, why are you not home yet?

10 missed calls from Austin

My eyes widened. It was already five minutes from midnight. Nervously, I bit my lip before opening his messages and texting back.

Sorry! I fell asleep at Bella's house. I'm going to come home a little later, she'll drive me.

I looked out the window, in attempt to find Landon. However, all I see is darkness. Irritated, I opened the door and quickly slammed it.

"Landon?" I called out.

My phone buzzed.

12:00 pm

Austin

Okay, call me if anything.

Clicking my tongue in pure annoyance, I locked my phone and started walking around to who knows where.

"Landon!" I called again, louder this time.

The breeze had gotten a lot colder than it was when we were at the restaurant. The frosty air hit my exposed back and arms, sending shivers down my spine. My teeth started chattering, my body curled up slightly as I kept walking.

Surrounding me was just a bunch of grass that were at least as high as my stomach. I started to feel afraid of the darkness, and loneliness. I couldn't help but to shake from not only coldness but from fear.

"Landon," I effortlessly called out once more before standing there in defeat.

Even though I gave Landon the benefit of the doubt, he still leaves me alone in the dirty. Literally. I sighed, as I started to walk back towards the direction of the car.

After about fifteen minutes of searching and walking, I finally saw the view of the car again. By then I felt abandoned, I couldn't help but to almost cry like a child being left by her mother. I swallowed back the tears as I convinced myself to keep my head up. Don't be a baby Aubrey. You're eighteen, you can deal with being alone in the dark.

I took a deep breath before hugging myself in effort to warm myself up from the cold breeze.

"So you're Aubrey," a voice from behind me spoke out.

Chapter 19

"So you're Aubrey," a voice from behind me spoke out.

I gasped as I turned towards the person in surprise. The horrid man had nice features, however seems a little older than my age. I swallowed nervously as I took a step back. He had a white button up shirt, with light grey dress pants. Although it was almost pitch dark outside, I saw his features clearly. A face with masculinity, sharp features with a neatly lined stubble.

"The little replica of Landon's ex," the mysterious man growled, as he takes a few step towards me.

"Where's Landon?" I managed to choke out, behind the fear.

The guy smiles at me before a second figure walks out from behind him. Landon appears with sorrowful eyes, staring at me as if he was secretly pleading for help. I raise an eyebrow in confusion and hissed, "What the hell?"

I clenched my fist as I felt my body tense up from anger, pure hatred.

"Hey, don't get mad at the pretty boy now," the odd man walks towards me, raising his hand towards my face. I froze, bravely staring up at the guy deep in the eyes. His right hand had two gold rings, on the middle and pinky finger. As the guy starts running his hands through my hair, I started to get afraid from his superiority.

This guy was clearly rich, he clearly had enough money; and if he was as rich as Landon's father, lord knows what he is willing to do with me. I sniffled a little bit, pressing my lips together as my bravery started to go downhill. My eye sight drifted from his eyes, to Landon's.

Landon stood there, staring at me blankly. After a moment of silence, he suddenly rose his hand, putting his index finger in front of his lips initiating me to be quiet.

I was standing in a position where I didn't know who to trust.

The mysterious guy leans down towards my ears, as I tried my best not to avoid his contact.

"I can't blame Landon for take you on a romantic date," the man trails off as he starts to take a couple steps around me, keeping his eyes on my body, "you're a beautiful one. Even more beautiful than the old." After completing his first circle, he stops in front of me with his hand under his chin.

Again, he steps closer and starts touching my head. My fists still clenched, I tapped my foot on the concrete floor impatiently before clearing my throat. I didn't know what I was feeling. Bravery and fear was all swept up upon my emotions.

The cold air blew wild, as my hair was blown away from my face. Without fully understanding the situation, I felt a hand cup underneath my cheeks. Before I knew it, a pair of lips crashed against mine, hands gripping on my waist as it starts feeling around my body. I attempted to push the man off, wincing in fear feeling him pressing his body against me.

Just a second afterwards, his body was peeled off me. Landon had the guy in a tight headlock, tossing him onto the floor as he straddled on top of the guy.

"Get in the car!" Landon growls, throwing punches at the man's face. I flinched from the violence, but my legs didn't want to run. I froze and stared in disgust.

"Aubrey!" Landon screams as he tosses his car keys at my feet, "Go, now!" he choked up as he was holding the man down. I hesitated to pick up the keys as the two men started rolling on the floor. "Aubrey!" Landon screams again as I bravely clutched onto the keys and rushed back towards the car. It's been a year since I've driven a car, let alone driving under pressure.

I threw my phone and wallet into the passenger seat before inserting the key into the ignition. Looking up at the back-view mirror, I adjusted before seeing the full view of the fight. With my hands still shaking, I held the drivers wheel tightly as I see Landon being pushed off of the man. The two continued fighting as I started the car. I breathed deeply, swallowing back the tears that was about to form in my eyes.

I looked back at Landon with hesitation as we made eye contact. When our eyes landed, he received a fist directly to the face. I winced before pressing on the gas, rushing down the unfamiliar street.

After driving for about ten minutes, the situation replayed again and again in my head. The unfamiliar road suddenly took me to the highway, soon figuring my way back home. Tears formed in my eyes slowly as I tried to blink it away, focusing on the road to go back home.

How is Landon going to get home?

Who was that guy?

Thinking about the mystery guy sent shivers down my spine. Every part of my body that he laid his hands on started to heat up. I felt disgusted, grossed, used. I breathed deeply, attempting to calm myself down from bursting out in tears.

All I was hoping to get out of dinner was a start of a possible new friendship, a change; but I started to regret giving Landon a chance.

I turned the corner of my street, heading towards my house. But something inside of me told me not to stop. When I reached the street of my house, I gripped the drivers wheel and pressed on the

gas, passing home. My throat tightened, my face felt swollen as my eyes tries to pry away the tears forming.

I sniffled as tears dripped down my face.

Then I parked my car.

I leaned back against my seat, letting out a soft sigh before tears uncontrollably streams down my face. Without a second thought, I took out the keys and opened the door, and walked towards the two-story house.

I stood at the steps, silent tears dripping down my face. Hesitating, I put my fingers against the door bell before pressing it.

After about a minute of waiting, the door swung open.

"Aubrey?" Colton softly asks, as he immediately takes a step outside swinging the door closed behind him. He looked at me with worried eyes, before wrapping his arm around my shoulder; pulling me into the warmest embrace.

I buried my face into his shoulder, releasing loud sobs muffled by his shirt.

He hums as he combs his hands through my hair, rocking us side to side attempting to calm me down.

After a short while, I started to settle down from crying. My sobs were being replaced with low, soft sniffles. Colton sensed me calming down before trying to pull away.

Instead, I buried my face further into his chest, wrapping my arms around his waist and pulled him closer towards me. Our bodies rested against each other as I felt the firm protection from Colton's arms.

Chapter 20

Previously on the last chapter:

Aubrey runs into a wealthy stranger with relations to Landon. He starts to harass Aubrey in front of Landon, resulting to a fist fight. Aubrey flees with Landon's car during the fight and ends up in front of Colton's steps. Colton and Aubrey shares a meaningful moment in front of his house with warm embraces.

- - -

We sat on his bed, leaning against his headboard. I lifelessly stared into blank space; dressed in Colton's baggy t-shirt and basketball shorts. Colton has his arm around my shoulder, cuddling me from the side.

I looked over at him, a soft smile crept upon his lips. He reached his hand out, combing his hand through my hair. From his touch, the flashback of the mystery guy caught me by surprised, I flinched. Colton immediately sits in front of me on his knees, trying to read my eyes.

"Who hurt you?" he asks, almost whispering.

I didn't respond, instead I tried to avoid his eye contact.

"Aubrey, who hurt you?" Colton growls, hitting the pillow beside me as I didn't try to answer him. By then tears couldn't form in my puffy red eyes anymore.

I shook my head at his previous question, and looked down at hand, playing with my fingers. Colton looks over to my pile of clothes resting on his chair; refraining himself from asking anymore questions and scaring me.

Colton sighs as he grabs me by the back of the neck, pulling me towards him. He tightly squeezed my body and looks at me with sympathy.

"I'm sorry," he says, cupping my face.

Although I thought my eyes couldn't produce anymore tears, I was wrong. With Colton's hands holding my face, his eyes staring deep into me; I couldn't help but tears of relief came down my face. I was glad I came to Colton for support, he makes me feel protected.

Our face slowly came closer to each other, forehead resting on mine. Tears that has dripped down my cheeks slowed down the moment we made contact. We hesitated. We stayed in that position, lips brushing on top of each other. If one of us accidentally tilts upwards, my lips would've fully made contact.

Colton made that accident.

His lips softly place on mine as we kissed in the silence. I felt his kiss healing my broken lips. I didn't feel as dirty as I did earlier. The last tear drop slid down my face, before we broke off the kiss.

My lips were left tingling as Colton moves back to my side.

- - -

6:30 AM

Austin

So you didn't come home.

6:31 AM

Austin

I covered up for you when dad asked. You owe me an explanation

6:32 AM

Austin

Just text me back so I know you're safe

7:00 AM

Aubrey

I'm safe

7:01 AM

Austin

Where were you? What happened?

READ 7:05

I looked up from my phone as Bella was sitting at the edge of Colton's bed. Colton called her earlier and explained about me crying in front of his house. She came over with my clothes from yesterday and comfort me along with him.

I rubbed my eyes after slipping on my old clothes. Taking a deep breath, I walked towards Colton and wrapped my arms around his waist. I can feel him releasing a pleasant sigh before holding me.

"I'll see you at school in a bit, okay?" Colton mumbles under his breath.

I nodded and looked up at him, flashing him a fake smile. After, I held Bella's hand as we both walked out of Colton's house. My eyes widened as I remembered about Landon's car that was parked in front of his lawn. It wasn't there.

Instead of telling Bella, I kept the problem to myself maybe confront Landon about it later. I took a deep breath and sat in Bella's car.

"What happened yesterday?" she asks me, looking at me with her big brown eyes before pulling out of Colton's garage.

"So much," I mumbled under my breath.

Bella smiles softly at me, sending me a reassuring smile. The rest of the ride was quiet, I had my head laid back on the headrest with my eyes closed.

- - -

"So I'm just going to sit here and pretend that my little sister was alright?" Austin growls as he leans against my bedroom door.

I've already changed clothes for school, getting ready to move on to the next day.

"I can tell you've been crying," Austin whispers as he closes my bedroom door, walking towards me, "Tell me, what happened Aubrey."

I hissed in annoyance, making my way towards my closet to grab a pair of sneakers.

I could feel Austin shaking his head behind my back.

"Just be glad I'm home," I slightly screamed. Feeling the rush of guilt down my back, I turned towards Austin and looked at him with a frown, "Please."

Austin sighs in defeat as he unravels his arms across his chest. He mutters 'fine' underneath his breath before giving me a slight hug, "I'll wait for you in the car." Then he left my bedroom.

Swinging my side bag on my shoulder, I clipped my hair to the side and looked in the mirror. I stared at the lifeless body that was reflected. Shaking my head at myself, I quickly left my bedroom, closing the door after me.

Austin was already in his car with the engine on. I welcomed myself into the passenger seat as he drives me to school in silence. Austin, obviously sensing that something was wrong didn't bother to ask me anymore questions.

Instead, he let me be. He played radio music in the background to keep himself distracted, as well as I.

It didn't take us long for us to arrive at school.

"Thanks," I blankly said as I opened the door.

Austin watches me with worried eyes, catching my attention before I closed the door, "Call me if you need anything, I'm worried," he says.

I nodded in response and sent him a small smile, before shutting the car door. He races out of the parking lot as I started walking to school, rubbing my palms against my thighs.

"You should really stop doing that," I heard Isaiah scolding me from behind.

I turned my attention towards him before quickly looking away, he reminded me too much of Landon. Even though Isaiah has showed me nothing but care, I couldn't look at him the same knowing he's part of Landon's circle.

"You always ignore me," Isaiah says, leaving a small laugh as he walks next to me with his hands in his jogger pockets.

I turned the corner, entering our 'oh-so-beautiful' school. I kept my head down, attempting to avoid any contact from other students; not like I was gaining any attention anyways.

Isaiah was still following, casually cracking jokes in effort of breaking my barriers. After a while, he started to realize that I wasn't enjoying his presence.

"Aubrey, what's wrong?" he whispers, tugging on my elbow before fully turning me around to face him.

"Nothing, leave me alone," I scoffed, twisting my arm away from him as I continued to walk towards the hallway.

"What did I do?" he slightly screams, grabbing my arm again with power.

Furrowing my eyebrows together, I looked at Isaiah; pointing directly at chest as if I was able to shove his body with the strength of my finger. My feelings clogged up to the point where I had no idea what I was doing; or who I was hurting. I was just angry, broken, and utterly sad.

"I gave him a chance," I hissed underneath my breath, "I knew I shouldn't have listened to you."

Isaiah stumbles back with surprise, staring at me in the eyes. His body softens at my defensiveness.

"What did he do to you?" he asks softly, holding me by my arms. His expression started to show some curiosity; but more anger.

"Why don't you ask him?" I growled, prying his hands off of my arms. I clenched my fist as I stomped off.

Chapter 21

To my luck, my locker opened swiftly after punching in the combination for the lock. I stared blankly at the books in front of me, seeing nothing but blur. My thoughts were at a constant stir; everything occurred in my mind was clouded up by my negative mindset.

I pushed my hair behind me ear and grabbed my Pre-Calculus book. I huffed knowing that I possibly have to sit next to Landon again. At this point, I wish I had never gave Landon the benefit of the doubt. I wish I could've turned back time; accept Colton's confession, and deny Landon's apology. A bad boy can never change.

"You can just skip class," Colton disrupts my thought as we both stare at my workbook. We both knew what class I have, and who was in that class. Colton managed to piece together that Landon and I had a miscommunication; however I don't believe he knows the whole story that have went down.

I shook my head in response, knowing how much my dad treasures me going to my classes.

Colton sends me a soft smile, as he takes a step towards me, "If you need anything, I'll always be here," he says, in almost a whisper. He brushes his hand against my cheek. As his eyes lands on mine, I felt comfort and protection. I couldn't help but release a gentle smile, his body softened.

"There's that beautiful smile," he lightly chuckles, switching his focus between my eyes and lips.

Colton lets go of my face as I closed the locker door that was behind me. I pressed my palms against the door and pushed it with a little force before the locker clicked closed. From my peripheral vision, I saw a glimpse of Landon; jumping to my feet. I bit my lower lip in nervousness before turning back, fully facing Colton.

He walked in with his hair gelled up, a large grey trench coat with a black polo tee underneath. He has khaki pants and designer shoes. Landon's uptight clothing never tend to bother anyone in this school.

I attempted to hide behind his big body structure. I glanced out over Colton's shoulder as I see Landon keeping his eyes right on me. As he walks slowly, his eyes never left mine. His eyes were filled with blankness, nothing but a cloudy vision. I furrowed my eyebrows, fist clenching in anxiousness and anger.

"What did I tell you about not getting her involved?" a familiar voice starts to echo down the hallways.

Students start to get quiet, as a scene quickly erupts where Landon last made eye contact with me. Colton and I turned towards the voice, as we watch Isaiah stomping down the hallway with his duffel bag across his body. His fist clenched, his broad shoulders seems to almost rip through his track jacket as, as all that shows on his face was pure anger.

Landon stood there, facing Isaiah as both of them were only a foot apart.

"I told you, not to get her involved!" Isaiah yells, so loud that students were even feared by his haunting deep voice. Instead of rushing towards to watch the fight this time, students froze in place as everyone was caught off guard by the confrontation.

Is he talking about me?

Colton turns back over to me, as he grabs my shoulders, shaking me, "What did you do?" he hissed under his breath in worrisome. He throws his hands all over my body, grabbing my face to check for any bruises or scars, as well as my arms.

I stayed silent as I kept my eyes on Isaiah and Landon.

Landon didn't response to Isaiah, instead the two just stood there staring at each other in the eyes increasing the tension in the hallway.

"Aubrey?" Bella's voice was soon heard as she was seen rushing down the hallway. Bella grabs my arms, in curiosity of the situation.

"I told you," Isaiah speaks up finally, stepping closer to Landon, "I fucking told you!" he screams in anger as he uses his hands to violently shove Landon back. Landon stumbled back, staying silent.

"I gave you a fucking chance!" Isaiah continues to spit. In just a second, Isaiah shoved Landon again; so hard that Landon lost balance and fell against the concrete floor. Without giving Landon a chance to move, Isaiah threw his body on top of Landon's and begins throwing punches.

Déjà vu flashed back in my head as the scene from the beginning of the school seemed to switch roles. Now, Landon was lifelessly straddled under Isaiah, and Isaiah gave no mercy. Students watched, secretly recording the two most popular and successful boys fight.

Landon lost the effort to try to defend himself; instead he just sprawled across the floor as blood start to drip out of his nose, soon out of his lips. His chokes and groan seemed invisible to everybody; as if they lost a sense to hear. Just like the situation where the boy was found harassing his girlfriend.

My eyes widened at the sight. Although I felt appreciative that Landon has finally got the punishment he deserved; something in my body felt broken as I see him possibly almost passing out on the floor.

I took a step forward before feeling Bella grab my waist, and swiftly pushing herself on top of me, "No," she demanded, "You're not getting involved again! Not this time Aubrey!" she cries as she forces my lifeless body against the lockers.

I shook my head as tears started to form in my eyes, my body shaking from the appearance of Landon getting harmed, "Do something!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, almost begging for support, "Somebody please do something!" I managed to spit out before letting out a loud sob.

The moment Colton sees me begging for help, he jumps to his feet. Without hesitation, he made his way towards Isaiah and Landon; sticking his arm under Isaiah's underarm as he manages to pull Isaiah off Landon.

"You fucking prick! You're fucking useless! I tried to fucking help you because I care and you end up hurting another person!" Isaiah screams as veins popped out above his shoulder. His face was turning red, his body was shaking as he tries to pull himself away from Colton; facing Landon. Colton has just enough power to drag the soccer player black, before switching places as he holds Isaiah against the lockers. Isaiah soon stopped fighting back, leaning his head against the wall as his fist was almost busted open; bleeding uncontrollably.

Bella had her body almost hugging me, keeping me in place and comforting me. Uncontrollable tears fell from my eyes, seeing Landon laying helplessly on the floor without anyone to help. His eyes were still open but staring up in the air; at nothing. He knew he was defeated, he knew he had to accept it.

I took a deep breath, before looking at Bella, "I'm sorry," I whispered before violently shoving Bella off of my body. She stumbles as she called my name, attempting to grab my hand before I got out of her reach.

I ran up to Landon, grabbing the back of his neck as I stared at his bleeding face. He smiles at me for a bit, before looking back at me with sorrow. I managed to help Landon up in a sitting position. After he was able to be stable, he brushed me off, removing my hand and lightly pushing me away from him.

"I'm helping—" Landon interrupts me.

"Don't."

I furrowed my eyebrows together, as Landon was able to get up in a standing position, limping his way out of the hallway. Colton released Isaiah a second afterwards, as Isaiah looks at me deeply before walking off towards the opposite direction.

I was left on my knees. I was confused as to why I was denied from his treatment; I was genuinely trying to help.

Bella sighs as she grabs me by my hand, helping up before fixing my hair, "You're so stubborn, Aubrey."

My tears quickly dried up as I shook my head from the incident, "Stupid." I mumbled under my breath. Colton came back to us, and smiles at both of us, "Aubrey was just trying to be the hero again," he releases a chuckle, wrapping an arm around my shoulder.

Chapter 22

I shook my head at her excitement and offered a reassuring smile, "It's fine, Bella. It's just Colton."

Bella shrugs, picking up a piece of grape and popping it into her mouth I looked down at my lunch and played with the mash potatoes.

- - -

I brushed my fingers through my curls, before putting it up in a high ponytail. It's half passed nine and Colton decided earlier that he wanted to watch the newest scary movie. Jokes on him I love scary movies.

I smiled at the thought as I looked at myself in the mirror. I didn't bother throwing on anymore makeup other than mascara. Shrugging at my reflection, I grabbed my back and swung it across my body, opening the bedroom door.

"Where are you going?" I heard Austin ask from his bedroom.

"To the movies!" I called out and rushed down the stairs. Very quickly afterwards, Austin sprinted down the stairs and leaned his whole body on the door.

"No," he simply says.

Caught off guard, I stared at Austin amusingly as he flashes me a sort of serious look, "What are you doing?" I asked, slightly laughing at his brotherly protection.

"You're not going," he says again, crossing his arms as he slides between me and the door.

"Austin, seriously. I'm late," I got tired of his attitude really quickly before crossing my arms also.

"You're not going," he repeated before grabbing my bag and taking it off my body. He holds the bag starts walking upstairs, "You're grounded."

I rose an eyebrow and quickly followed him up the stairs, attempting to grab onto my side bag, "Austin!" I cried.

He turned back around and points a finger at me, "Seriously, Aubrey. You didn't come home at all last time, and you didn't respond to my messages. Did you know how much you worried me? Do you even care?"

The moment I heard Austin raise his voice and question me, I stayed quiet. Austin and I usually never have fights or any complications; this time he caught me by surprise.

"Dad's still out there working, and all you're doing is going out with a bunch of guys," he disapprovingly looks at me before shaking his head, walking up the rest of the stairs.

I softened and suddenly felt guilt rush down my back. After moving here, I haven't been able to see dad a lot personally because he's always at work. I frowned at the thought and immediately followed Austin's commands. Austin had already locked his bedroom door, I entered mine.

Tossing my lifeless body on the bed, I stared up at the ceiling and randomly started reminiscing our memories with dad.

We were financially stable, with a large house and a golden retriever dog. Although the school I went to back then wasn't as beautiful as the school I attended now; and the neighborhood we had back then was a lot more dangerous than our neighborhood now, we were happy. My dad has a stable job, we had a stable education, and a stable family. Everything all went downhill when my dad was laid-off from his career. Almost everyone in the city was being laid-off, only because the government believed that there were too many employees in the small city. I was also confused at the government's belief, but no one bothered to question.

I took a deep breath, observing the textures of my white ceiling.

Nevertheless, I've always appreciated Austin and my dad for being able to take care of me; and my mother for granting me the life I'm experiencing right now.

My mother is another story. She was never there to even feel me breathe. She passed away giving birth to me; this was never revealed to me until my Freshman year. Throughout my elementary and middle school years, I was always thought my mom left me because she was stubborn. I hated her for that.

Ever since the results revealed to me, I immediately took back my hatred and appreciated her. My dad and Austin has tried nearly everything to hide the truth from me, in fear of me becoming unmotivated in life. They were afraid that if I found out my mother died because of me, I would do something to self-harm myself; or wouldn't see the purpose in living. But ever since I found out, the results were the opposite. At first it was difficult to accept, many days I was locked in my room, sad and hopeless.

After a few days I started accepting it, and appreciating the life that my mother has gave hers up for. Then I started to find passion and happiness; the main gateway to being successful in life.

A knock was heard from the door as it broke my chain of thought.

"Come in," I called out softly, still keeping my eyes on the ceiling.

Austin sighs as he opens the door, inviting himself in as he looks at me with guilt, "Are you made at me?"

I lifted my head and looked at him, shaking my head slightly before dropping it onto the soft comforter.

"I thought you were, I'm not use to this "adult and grounding" stuff," he admits as he puts my bag on the bean bag chair, and sits on the edge of my bed.

I sat up and looked at Austin, "I miss dad," I mumbled underneath my breath, looking at Austin while sending a small pout. He couldn't help but laugh at how much of a baby I was. Austin pinched my cheeks and tackled me onto the bed, "You miss dad but you don't miss your dear brother? How dare you!"

I screamed as soon as I hit my back against the bed. Feeling myself getting quickly annoyed, I kicked Austin off of me before screaming at the top of my lungs.

"Jesus," Austin screams back as he covers his ears with his hands, "Stop it Aubrey!"

My screaming soon turned into laughter. Austin stares at me with a weird expression before he pushes my legs off the bed. I couldn't help but to fall off the bed, and rolling on the floor with uncontrollable laughter.

"The fuck is wrong with you!" he screams.

Suddenly, Austin pokes his head out from my bed and looks down at me, "You got a text," he says innocently, holding the phone in front of my face.

10:01 PM

UNKNOWN NUMBER

We need to talk.

Chapter 23

10:01 PM

UNKNOWN NUMBER

We need to talk.

10:01 PM

Aubrey

Who's this?

10:03 PM

UNKNOWN NUMBER

Landon

10:04 PM

Aubrey

We don't need to talk.

10:06 PM

Landon

Please

10:12 PM

Aubrey

I've given you too many chances.

I'm done, Landon.

10:15 PM

Landon

Aubrey, you don't understand..

After I received the text message, I didn't hesitate to block the number from giving me anymore texts. I sighed, laying back against the soft comforter as I slowly drifted off to sleep.

- - -

I held my books between my arms as I made my way towards Colton's locker. I didn't cancel out on him yesterday, I was so caught up in my thoughts that I forgot the real reason why I got so dressed up last night. I pressed my lips together, seeing Colton's back facing me from afar.

"Colton," I called out. He turns around right away; his eyes weren't as bright as before, his lips didn't curve into the usual happy grin he always held.

"Hey," he greeted, turning his back towards me again pretending to do something inside his locker.

"I'm sorry about last night," I started, creeping my body to face him, "Austin grounded me, and I was so caught up with—"

"Landon, I know," Colton scoffs, shoving the books into his locker.

A dark cloud hovered above my head; I felt bad for him, I really did. I looked down at the floor and stared at it in silence before Colton shuts his locker door.

"Did you wait for me?" I finally asked, quietly.

Colton releases a small sigh, leaning against the locker with his hands in his pockets, "Of course, I did."

"I'm sorry," I leaned my head back, staring at the ceiling in pure annoyance of myself.

"It's whatever," he responded blankly.

We stood there for about a minute. Even though the hallway was filled with loud kids, nothing filled our air more than awkward quietness. I swallowed nervously and rubbed one of my palm against my thigh.

I took a deep breath, feeling my heart beat against my chest slowly. Colton then lifted his head and looked at me with his tired blue eyes, blinking twice before straightening up his posture.

"I feel like something's going on between you and Landon though," he casually mentions. From the corner of my eyes, I can see Colton's fist starting to clench as he tries to maintain his feelings.

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking at him curiously, "I've been doing nothing but trying to avoid him. You know how much I hate him."

He leans towards me, looking at me in disbelief before going on a full-blown rampage, "Remember that day when we almost kissed and you said Austin was going to drive you home? I wasn't just going to leave you alone in the parking lot in the middle of the night; until I saw you with Landon."

"Yeah, that's because he found me," I quickly interrupted him.

He held a finger up and slightly raised his voice, "And you went on a date with him, the day I confessed to you."

I scoffed in disbelief before holding my books tighter against my chest, "That's because I was trying to change him!"

"You left me hanging yesterday, when I asked you out on a date," he rebutted. He was hurt, the emotion on his face showed nothing but pain.

I looked down and mumbled, "I was grounded."

"Excuses, Aubrey!" he cries as he lightly punches the locker, looking at me with painful eyes. He shook his head and turned his back to me, clearly angry at how much I've lead him on.

I walked towards the front of him and stared up at him. All he did was avoid my gaze, staring at the floor. The bell suddenly had rung, it was time for class. We both didn't move, instead we stood there in the silence until the hallway was soon to be empty.

Colton couldn't help but to crack a smile about ten minutes later. He was still mad at me, but not to the point where he hated me. I looked up at him in confusion as he ruffled my hair, "I'm too nice," he pleases himself.

He puts his arm around the back of my neck and pulls me into a deep hug, tightening his embrace around me. I softened at his response and leaned my body against his.

He drops his head into the crook of my neck, mumbling against my skin. "For some reason, I can't stay mad at you." I felt the vibration of his lips against my neck. I couldn't help but smile at his comfort.

Just a second ago, Colton was so angry and jealous; but after staying by his side the whole way through, he lost his anger and soon was just back to normal.

He pulls himself back up in a straight posture and smiles at me, pinching my cheeks lightly, "You should get to class, your dad will get mad," he says softly.

I nodded at him, looking at him for a quick second before walking off, "You too," I cooed, with my back still facing him.

"Love you," he calls out down the hallway. I laughed at his message and continued making my way to class.

I stood in front of my Pre-Calculus class, peaking through the window. Landon was sitting in his assigned seat, next to me. He was staring at the empty seat, with a look that I've never seen before. It was a look of curiosity, worries and just a hint of empathy.

I bit the inside of my cheek and leaned my back against the door. I don't want to skip class, I didn't want to ruin my dad's values; but I didn't want to go to class, the reason was obvious. I shook my head at my thought and took a deep breath.

All you have to do is go to class, learn, and ignore him.

I blinked slowly, taking another deep breath before swinging the door open; a cold expression quickly plastered among my face.

Landon looked at me, straightening up in his seat as he watches me walk towards my seat. I made eye contact with him before ruthlessly ignore his presence; sitting myself next to him.

"Aubrey," he whispers from my right.

I tried my hardest to ignore him. I kept my eyes on the equation on my paper, pretending to debate on the steps.

He sensed I was ignoring him on purpose, and he did the lowest of the low. He raised his hand to get attention of our teacher, before speaking out loud, "Mr. Winston, can Aubrey and I have a talk outside really quick?"

Mr. Winston obviously wasn't amused by the drama between us. He waved him off giving him an approval before Landon quickly grabs my wrist and drags me outside.

Quietly, I've been trying to pull my wrist back, spitting words such as 'let me go' and 'what are you doing'. Landon opens the door and quickly slams it as soon as we got outside. I bit my tongue and crossed my arms, waiting for an explanation.

"I'm sorry," he pauses, "again."

I furrowed my eyebrows, "I get it," I spat.

He was slightly surprised by my sudden attitude. He straightens up and puts his posture, looking at me in the eyes. All that appeared in those blue glistening pearls were pain. My lips parted, slightly gasping from the cuts and bruises that remained on his face.

Isaiah and Landon had the fight three days back, but the cuts and bruises on Landon's face still looked quite as bad as they did on the first day. He had cuts along his right cheekbone, his upper lip and the left side of his forehead; where his hair parted. The cheek with the cut was still slightly healing from the bruise.

I've never got a close look at Landon's face until now. He was beat badly by Isaiah; a lot worse then how bad he beat Isaiah in the beginning of school.

"Just, one last chance," Landon mumbles under his breath, staring not at me but behind me at the lockers.

"Fine."

Chapter 24

"Are you serious, Aubrey?" Bella warns me in her motherly tone as she crosses her arms, "Again?"

I nodded slowly in regret.

"You remember what happened to you the last time you gave him a chance?" Bella scowls, tapping her foot against the white marble floor. I was sitting on one of the chairs in the school lounge, looking up at her with my sketchbook resting on my lap.

"Yeah, but," I shrugged and talked in a slightly high-pitched voice, "I still want to know what all of that was about?" I questionably answered, looking like a complete fool.

Bella rolls her eyes, and sits down on the arm rest of my chair, "Alright, fine. But this better be for a good reason this time," she sighs, looking down at her feet.

"Okay, mom," I joked, nudging her side as she jumped up from the arm rest. She squealed from her ticklish sides; earning many glares from the students studying around us. I smiled at her and hid my head from all the eyes; looking down at my notebook, and continued sketching.

The pencil lightly brushed against the paper, creating soft strokes of lead before I felt something pressing softly against my eyes. It was a pair of palms, hovering over both of my eyes. I curiously held the hands, with a smile plastered on my face, "Bella, what are you doing?" I laughed slightly.

Bella giggled and from my side and answered, "It's not me."

I could feel Bella's arm brushing against mine as she sat on the arm rest of the chair again.

"Colton?" I guess again, blinking as my eyelashes brushed against the palm. I felt the knuckles of the palm, it was scratchy; maybe even scarred.

"Guess again," the voice sang.

I shot up from my seat and pushed Isaiah's hands out of my face, "Go away," I hissed underneath my breath.

I didn't know what I was angry at him about. The fact that I trusted him and gave Landon another chance, or the fact that he beat the crap out of Landon. Those are two completely compelling reasons.

I shook my head and tried to focus my attention onto my sketchbook. Isaiah invited himself to sit on the other side of the arm rest, smiling sheepishly at me.

"What are you drawing?" he asked.

I continued to ignore him.

Bella, sitting on the opposite side leans down and whispers in my ear, "What is he doing here?"

"I don't know," I hissed back, sending a glare towards Isaiah.

"Jeez," he held up both of his hands. His right wrist was wrapped around with white cloth, probably an injury from the victory fight against Landon. I stared at his wrist uninterestedly and blinked at him.

"Come on, I told you I owed you," he pursued, looking down at me. His black wavy hair hung down towards the middle of his forehead.

"Doesn't mean you can just beat someone else up, lifelessly," I mumbled underneath my breath, turning my attention back down to my lap.

Bella started to feel uncomfortable in her seat, and suddenly stood up, "I'm going to go to the bathroom," she casually excuses before drifting off.

I pressed my lips together after acknowledging the fact that Bella had left me alone with Isaiah. I closed my sketchbook and grabbed my backpack in attempt to leave as soon as possible.

Isaiah didn't say anything. Instead, got up and stood up as if he was waiting for me to pack up so we could go somewhere together. I tried to ignore him, hoping that if I ignore him enough; he would just leave.

I swung my backpack across my shoulder and welcomed myself towards the exit; he followed. I tried to close the door on him but being the strong soccer player he is, he caught the door and pushed it open for himself. I started speeding up, walking towards the back parking lot of the school. Even though I was walking in my fastest pace; Isaiah's long strides didn't take him long to catch up with my pace.

He slightly chuckled and tapped my shoulder lightly, "Come on, stop ignoring me."

I finally gave up and swung fully towards him. Since he was still slightly behind me, he was taken by surprise and didn't come to a complete stop. Instead, Isaiah took an incomplete step and tripped when he tried not to walk into me. I screeched as his body leaned towards mine. He grabbed my arms for support in effort to figure out his balance. He nearly fell on the ground as well as I. Luckily, we both caught our balances and stood up straight.

He started laughing uncontrollably, "You should've seen your face," he bit the bottom of his lip, and held his arms against his stomach.

I groaned in annoyance before attempting to leave him again. Isaiah managed to grab my elbow and pull me back; his laugh was gone.

"I'm sorry for kind of dragging you into Landon's little drama," he pressed his lips together, avoiding my gaze as he apologizes. I found it amusing how big and masculine Isaiah's frame was but his personality was almost identical to a little three years old. Shy, timid; and always following me around like a lost child.

I shrugged in response slightly feeling bad for all the grudge I was holding towards him, "Honestly, it's not even your fault." I awkwardly responded, finding out that I was technically mad at him for something Landon has done.

"I mean, it kind of is," he rebutted, looking up at me and couldn't help but smile sheepishly, "I told you to forgive him and you did."

I nodded.

"Thanks for trusting me, I guess," he concluded, nodding as he looks down at me from his incredible height.

Isaiah was a little taller than six-foot, I was a little over five foot three. Looking up at Isaiah soon made the back of my neck tired. He noticed my struggle and bent down slightly to my height, "Shorty," he teased, sticking out his tongue at me.

I couldn't help but to smile sheepishly, putting my hand on his chest and pushing him back up to his original position, "Shut up," I mumbled.

We both started walking towards the art room I usually spend my after school hours in. I stopped in front of the door and waiting for Isaiah to remember about his game. I pressed my lips together awkwardly and stood there; watching him.

He stares back at me and blinks blankly; oblivious of the reason why I stopped in the first place.

"Game," I bluntly stated.

Isaiah's lips formed into a little 'o' as the only sound escaping it was a long hum. I couldn't help but laugh at how slow he was. He raised up his arm and looked at his wrist watch before strengthening up and bouncing on the upper half of his feet.

"I'm kind of late," he nervously tells me, putting his hands impatiently in his soccer joggers.

I rose my eyebrows and immediately pointed towards the end of the hallway, "Go!"

"Come to my game!" he hollers. Before I could formally answer to his demand, he dashed out of the hallway leaving nothing but trails of dust behind his tracks. I sighed at the look, putting my hands on the handle of the door.

Should I go?

I kept my hand on the handle as I was second guessing my free time. Pulling out my phone and pressing the home button; it was about ten until five.

I've got nothing to lose.

Making my final decision, I made my way towards the end of the hallway that Isaiah had rushed down earlier. Shoving my phone in my back pocket, I fixed the bag across my shoulder and continued my way towards the soccer field.

I have only watched Isaiah practice once, never have I seen him play competitively. Jones High was known for soccer; rumors had said that we were the top in the league, but I never really paid much attention to the sport.

Millions of people were lined up outside the opening gate for the soccer field. It was as if people were standing in line for a concert; never have I known that people supported soccer this much. A smile suddenly appeared across my face as I watched all the players squeeze their ways through the front gate.

"ID please," a girl sitting at the desk in front of the gate requested. Swiftly, I pulled out my wallet and showed her my school ID before getting a wristband for the game. The girl hands me a red t-shirt with the school logo, and willingly I accepted it. As I entered the gate, I noticed that the bleachers were already packed.

Students and parents were dressed in red in support of Jones High, as we were playing against Wilbur High, black. I managed to find a seat at the front row bleacher and quickly made my way towards the opening.

I threw on the shirt over my tank top underneath my windbreaker and tied my hair in a high ponytail. The horns blew, initiating the beginning of the game.

Chapter 25

Isaiah, dressed in his red soccer uniform was running back and forth on the field; screaming at the his teammates in effort to keep up their connections. Each players on the field were extremely tall and fit; very good stamina as they were able to run almost miles in the grass.

I clenched my fist as I watched one of our players pass the ball around near the goal.

"May I sit here?" a voice asked me. Without worrying too much about it, I nodded with my eyes kept on the field. I bit my lower lip as Isaiah stole the ball without effort; and carelessly kicked the ball into the net. A big smile was plastered on my face as I clapped in excitement.

I know him! I thought.

"Never knew you were a fan of soccer," the voice spoke up again. After realizing that the voice belonged to Landon, I nearly jumped out of my seat.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, furrowing my eyebrows as I lean away from him.

An entertained grin crept upon his lips as he casually shrugged, "You let me sit here."

I scoffed at his response, "I meant like at this soccer game."

"What? I can't support my best friend?" Landon asks sarcastically as he passes me a short, but happy laugh.

I couldn't help but to smile at how different Landon looks today.

His hair was still sticking up, his face we still as attractive, however he was wearing the red school t-shirt and he looked less . . . mean.

Landon smiles back at me before he turns his head back towards the soccer field. I watched him as he rests his chin casually in his palm, elbow easily placed on his knees, gazing out into the field with much attention.

I felt my cheeks suddenly warming up. I quickly got irritated about myself; and turned towards the front, soon to be distracted by Isaiah playing around with the ball.

From afar I could hear Isaiah laugh and disrespects the other player as he crosses sections between two opponents, easily passing the ball to another player. Not for long, Isaiah runs behind another opponent and catches the ball that was passed back to him. I bit the inside of my cheeks nervously as I watch him fiddle around.

Suddenly, an opponent runs up from behind Isaiah and intentionally elbows him in the side, knocking him off his feet before face planting onto the floor. The guy dressed in green snatches the ball and quickly makes a goal.

I looked at the scene, amused by how competitive these teens are.

"Oh, Come on!" I heard some people around me screaming at the referees, "Where is the red flag?"

Isaiah quickly got back up on his feet and ran towards the other side of the field. It didn't take long for the ball to be under his control again; he races down the field towards his goal. The same player with red hair that elbows Isaiah earlier, runs up to him towards the side and intentionally shoves Isaiah with his palms. He tripped over the ball and rolled a few steps on the floor before getting back up on his feet.

The crowd follows along with ongoing 'boos' and screams of anger. I rose my eyebrows. Is that allowed to happen?

Again, the referees didn't do anything.

Isaiah got up a second time with his hands up in the air. I couldn't hear what he was screaming towards his opponent, but he did not look happy.

"Oh no," I heard Landon say under his breath before sitting back on his chair; with a smirk creeping among his lips.

"What?" I asked him, totally annoyed by his presence.

Instead of answering me, he lifts up a finger towards my lips; telling me to hush before he points off towards the field with the same finger. I turned my attention back towards the field as I saw the players slowly running towards another crowd of players.

I could see Isaiah's body up against the same guy with the red hair; soon to be covered by both teams attempting to pull them apart.

"Chaser!" our coach screams at the top of his lungs, "What the fuck are you doing!"

There was one head coach, and three other coaches that guides the team. The head coach was pissed; his face was all red along with his hands. The coaches all matched in high-neck white athletic jacket; while the head coach was dressed in the same red jacket. He gripped the clipboard between his hands before throwing it with anger towards the ground.

"Fucking shitheads!" he screams.

Suddenly all the teammates that were lined up on the side line, scattered towards the crowd on the field. All the coaches tried to pull their players back; but due to the unequal ratio of players and coaches; they were only able to hold back only a handful of players.

"Stay on the fucking sideline!" the head coach growls.

The crowd of black and red jerseys quickly grew as the group runs across the fields throwing punches and kicks at each other. Handful of players from both teams were rolling on the ground, earning punches and kicks from the opposite team.

Coaches from both sides ran up and pulls the players apart. After about ten minutes of breaking up the group; the game was put on a pause as both teams were awarded with lectures and discipline from their coaches.

"If the referee doesn't call on them, then don't get mad!" the head coach screams at Isaiah, "Play! Because you're so fucking good why the fuck would you let them get in your head!" he grabs Isaiah by the shoulder before ruthlessly shoving him to the side.

"You could've cost us a game, Chaser!" he growls, "You're benched."

Isaiah dropped his head, gazing at the grassy floor with his hands behind his back. I could tell he was rather disappointed then mad. I shook my head at the situation and pulled out my phone.

"This almost always happens," Landon starts, "hopefully it doesn't happen on the day that scouts come." He shrugs as he pulls out a cigarette from his pocket.

"Scouts?" I managed to ask him before getting quickly distracted by Landon's carelessness. My jaw drops as I grabbed Landon's hand, shoving it back into his pocket. I stared at him with wide eyes before leaning towards him, "You're going to get in trouble," I whispered.

Landon raises an eyebrow as he looks at me with a sarcastic expression. He seems to be amused as a smile suddenly sweeps across his face, "You like that?" He asks teasingly.

I looked at him confused before I feel his fingers press against mine. Both of our hands remained in his pants pocket. With a slight gasp, I tried my best to pull my hand out of his pocket but he fingers intertwined with mine.

"Landon, stop," I whispered into his ear nervously, looking around us as I see eyes from other girls' dead planted on us, "People are looking."

Landon gets up from his position, still holding my hand in his pocket as he leans towards me. His lips brushed across my cheek as he casually rests his lips next to me ear, "Let them look," he whispers.

Taken aback, I managed to pull my hand out of his pocket and pushed him away with my hands pressing against his chest. He didn't budge; however he did back up and sat back in his original position. I took a deep breath and leaned back against my seat, crossing my arms as I awkwardly stare off onto the field.

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After the game has ended, Landon and I was walking side by side towards the parking lot. For some reason, I tried to make myself hate him because of what he's dragged me into; but I couldn't. He did help me get away from the weird guy that one night.

Who is that guy anyways?

"You seem to always be thinking a lot," Landon says softly, breaking me out of my thoughts. I turned my head and looked at him, completely lost by what he said.

I held my jacket in my hands in front of me as I innocently looked at him, "What?"

He released a chuckle and smiles at me, with his hands in his pocket. He shakes his head in response and casually pokes my head on the temple with his finger.

From afar, I could see Colton's blonde hair popping out from his car. The driver's door was open as Colton was standing there; looking as if he was talking to someone on the passenger side.

"Colton!" I called out. He didn't hear me, we were a little too far for my soft voice to be heard. Suddenly, the passenger door opens as another girl with brunette hair steps out, looking at Colton across the roof of his car. They shared a genuine laugh before she walks towards the driver's side.

I blinked in surprise as I see Colton holding his arms open towards her, hugging her tightly between his arms. Just like what he's done to me.

I was taken aback by the situation. I stopped my tracks and just observed the couple from afar. Suddenly, Landon steps in front of me. All that was visible to me was the school logo of the Landon's spirit t-shirt, "We still have to go on our second date," he casually says, leaning down towards me locking his light blue eyes with mine. He flashes me a soft smile before wrapping his arm around my shoulder, leading me to perhaps his car.

I blankly followed him, accepting him opening the passenger door for me. I sat inside the seat as he casually slams the door closed. I looked out of the window, seeing Colton still wrapping his arm around the girl. He looks up and somehow manages to lock eyes with me. Colton's eyes were filled with lust and love. He smiles at me for a bit, as I smile back, waving at him. He then turns his attention back towards his girl and looks at her with a huge smile on his face.

"Keep your eyes on the window," Landon says inside the car. I slightly jumped and turned towards him.

Landon was sitting in the driver's seat, shirtless. My eyes automatically locked on his body. He didn't quite have perfectly defined abs yet; but they were forming. His smooth tan skin slightly glistened under the sunlight as his arms were fair enough with muscles. He didn't have the "model attractive" body, but he honestly still had a beautiful figure.

He laughs at my reaction, looking at me as he had his white polo, already wrapped up towards the upper half of his arm, "I told you not to look."

I pressed my lips together awkwardly as Landon throws on his shirt. I turned back around towards the window, looking outside of it but thinking about the recent awkward encounter.

Chapter 26

Landon's hair was effortlessly pushed upward, as he keeps his eyes on the road. Déjà vu flashes back into my head as I remember about the day we went out for dinner. I couldn't help but smile at the heartfelt stories he's shared with me.

I couldn't confirm that he was telling the truth, but what was there to lie about? I turned my attention back towards the road, leading us towards an outdoor mall. I rose an eyebrow and looked at him, making a face, "We're going shopping?" I asked.

"I kind of have to make a run for something. But there is this one place I wanted to show you," he casually states.

"What is this, a date?" I attacked him, looking at him as if I wasn't interested in his daily routines.

He released a chuckle and looks at me with his daring blue eyes, "If you want it to be."

I scoffed and leaned back against the seat, watching as he parks us in a handicap zone. It occurred to me that we were two totally fine looking young adults, "What are you doing?" I asked, looking at the handicap sign in front of us.

"Perks," he smiles at me as he flashes a wink. He reaches behind my chair, grabbing a handicap sign from the pocket and hooked it on the back-view mirror.

"Right, you're rich," I blankly stated.

Landon glares at me but softens the moment our eyes made contact. He got out of the car and somehow made it over to my side when I was searching through my bag. He opens the door for me and patiently waits for me.

Second thinking his actions, I got out and stood in front of him, "Why are you doing this?" I asked him casually, putting my bag on my shoulder.

"What do you mean?" he questions, closing the door behind me.

I shrugged and made my way towards the entrance of the mall. He tags along behind me just like how Isaiah normally does; however it didn't feel like it annoyed me as much.

The moment we entered the front gate, Landon immediately straightens up and fixed his gold necklace. His smile suddenly turns into a disappearing smirk soon to be replaced by a blank expression. He sticks his hands in his pocket as he peers across the scenery. I was taken aback by the sudden change in mood, but quickly ignored it.

"So why are we here again?" I asked him.

He shook his head and made his way towards one of the luxury stores. Without a second thought, I followed him.

Walking down the outdoor mall, all the stores that were surrounding us were only high-end luxury stores. Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, every single name brand company that you could think of. I swallowed nervously as I suddenly felt out of place.

I was still wearing out school spirit shirt, with a random black denim jacket over myself. I followed him into a random store and I didn't even bother to look at the name. Surrounding the store, were very minimalistic suits and ties lining up against racks. The shop looked squeaky clean; the white marble floor didn't even have a tiny scratch against it, the glass of the windows were almost invisible, while the female workers were dressed in what almost looks like flight attendant uniforms.

"Greetings, Mr. Carthy," a blonde girl with perky breasts that was clearly seen through her blazer enthusiastically greeted him, hooking her arm about his, "We saved our latest editions like you've asked for. Come! Try it on."

I rose an eyebrow at her actions as the rest of the workers acted as if I didn't exist. However, being the lost girl I was, I followed him towards the back of the store near the fitting room. I sat down in one of the leather seats and leaned back, playing with my fingers as I watched the ladies drag Landon back and forth.

For a second, Landon probably forgot he even brought me here in the first place. But it didn't bother me because I was more worried about how left out I was feeling in this mall.

The same worker, the name tag clearly stating "Brittany" drags him into the fitting room in front of me with his arm in one hand and his suits in another. She closes the white blinds behind them and all I could hear from the outside was giggles from her and silence from him.

I slightly cringed at the idea of those two hooking up in the dressing room.

About ten minutes after, the blinds open and all that appeared in front of my eyes was a man beautifully fitted in a navy suit, with a white dress shirt and black bow tie. I bit the bottom of my lip as I soon to notice that I was innocently checking him out.

Brittany follows him a little after as he welcomed himself to the big mirror that was built in a shape of half a hexagon. He knew he looked good. He looked at himself in the mirror with one hand in his pocket, buttoning a button on his jacket as he turns to both of his sides, looking at himself up and down.

I nervously scratched the back of my head, why did I feel myself heating up from his appearance? Yes, he's attractive but I can't just be gushing over good looking guys. Again, I like Colton.

Suddenly thinking about Colton brought back the memory of him hugging another girl. Who is she anyways? She just popped out of the blue.

I stared off into space, wondering about Colton and how much my feelings have been hurting recently because of him. I did a good job of ignoring my feelings until now, when I'm slightly alone and have nothing else to rest my mind into. I felt anger building up in my system as my back started to heat up uncomfortably.

"Let's go," Landon breaks my chain of thought yet again. I blinked up at him, confused as to how he changed out of his suit and back into his old outfit so normally. He holds the black bag in one hand as he sticks his other hand into his pocket, casually strolling out of the shop.

He held the door for me as I exit after him.

We walked silently through the mall, looking at merchandise through the window.

"Why aren't you talking to me?" I questioned in, rather curiously.

He rose an eyebrow at me and scoffs slightly, "I am."

I stopped my track as soon as I realize his sudden change in attitude. I growled as my fists clenched, "Seriously?"

He sensed the toxicity in my voice as he turns around on his heels, staring at me blankly before taking a step towards me.

"Why are you being like this?" I hissed underneath my breath, looking up at him as our faces were only inches apart, "I'm tired of your stupid attitude. You asked me to give you a chance, I've given you so many chances. Honestly, why do I even trust you? Even after you apologize to me, technically promising me that you'd change your ways towards me, why are you still treating me like shit?"

He was suddenly taken aback by attack. He probably didn't expect me to suddenly confront him especially from how many times he's had stomped over me. However, my anger built towards Landon was probably also anger that I've felt towards Colton earlier today. Landon, without a doubt grabs my face between his hand as he stares at me deep in my eyes.

Trying not to get lost in him light blue eyes, I pressed my lips together before clenching my fist, continuing with my rampage, "You're just a privileged boy, Landon. You can't treat people good, and you know it. Even when you try to treat me good, you bring my hopes up and then you immediately crush me the moment we're in front of other people. What? Do you think you're

better than me? You think I'm just a girl who sits and draws and lets people stomp over me? Like what the fuc—"

My voice was immediately cut off the moment his lips crashed against mine. His soft lips planted against mine quickly turns into a rough kiss. I was so angry at the world that I kissed him back with a lot of force, and without a single care. My hands were resting on his chest, his hands were at my waist. The moment I realized that I was making out with the guy that I plotted to hate my whole life, I pushed him away. Even though I was clearly aware of us making out, I was still shocked that we had that impact in the first place. We both were breathing heavily from the intense kiss.

I wiped my lips, attempting to wipe off his germs before glaring towards the open air. An amused smile plastered across Landon's lip as he brings his hand up towards his lips; resting the back of his palm against it. He releases silent laughter as he looks at my childish tantrum. I had my arms crossed across my chest, eyes glaring off into space, and my lips formed into a frown.

"Alright, I'm sorry," he chuckles in the middle of his apology as he drops his hands from my waist. He positions himself as my side as he nudges my arm, slightly pushing me forwards as we continued our journey down the mall, "Don't be mad at me."

Chapter 27

Landon swings the shopping bag on his side, walking next to me as we exit the mall. We were both holding ice cream cones; he had vanilla, I had strawberry.

I licked the ice cream and savored the taste like a child. A second ago I was heated, for a bunch of reasons that is; now I was enjoying the time of my life. I smiled at the ice cream as I took another big lick. A hum escaped my lips as Landon couldn't help but release a chuckle.

"Who was that guy?" I randomly asked him, remembering about the incident a few while back.

"Who?" he asks innocently, raising an eyebrow oblivious of who I was referring my question towards.

"The night of dinner," I trailed off, biting the cone.

Landon suddenly became quiet as he continues to enjoy his ice cream, obviously avoiding my question.

"Landon," I called, catching his attention.

He ignores me again and jogs towards the passenger side of his car, opening the door for me. I invited myself in and sat in the seat, waiting for him to enter on the other side. I kept my eyes locked on him.

"Landon Carthy," I ignorantly complained. He stopped licking his ice cream and froze in place. Landon sighs in defeat as he puckers his lips, staring ahead at another car parked in front of us.

"It's my brother's friend," he explained.

It confused me as to why his brother's friend would do such thing to me, and why he left me in the car alone in the first place. What did this guy have that Landon did not have?

I noticed Landon trying to avoid me asking anymore questions again. He inserts the key into the ignition before turning on the engine. Swiftly, I reached over and turned off the engine. He looks at me with disbelief.

"Why did you leave me alone that night?" I asked him, turning my body towards him.

I could tell that his expression suddenly turned into a rush of guilt. He opened his mouth, but no words came out. Instead, he brought the ice cream towards his lips and blankly stares at the car, licking his ice cream.

"Landon," I said his name again.

"I can't tell you!" he finally exploded. He pulled down the window and casually tosses his ice cream cone outside. I could tell Landon was annoyed, he held up his hands towards his face and angrily motions it back and forth, "I want to, but I can't!"

I looked at him, shocked.

"You asked me for a second chance," I mumbled underneath my breath, "I thought you were going to fully explain to me what happened that night. That's the only reason I gave it to you."

Landon turns his body towards me slightly, but stares off at my thighs, "You have to understand that I can't, Aubrey."

"He harassed me!" I screamed at him, trying to hold back the tears from the pain that I felt that night, "You harassed me," I said quietly.

Suddenly, Landon drops his head, staring at his hands that were placed on his lap.

"I know," he slightly whispers. He rubs his face with his palms as he releases a slight groan, "Fine, I'll tell you. Just please don't cry right now."

I blinked back the tears and noticed how dramatic I was being in the moment. My feelings quickly cleared up as I faced the front window of the car with my arms crossed.

He turns on the engine again and backs out of the parking lot, "Let's just go somewhere with less people," he mutters between his lips as he pretends to have more interest on the road.

The car ride was normally quietly. The windows were up and the only sound that could be heard through the vehicle was the smooth sound of the engine. The sun was beginning to set, as all that surrounded the sky was blended colors of purple, pink and orange.

"You're actually such a child," Landon chuckles out of nowhere. He had one of his hand rested on the wheel, the other hand was on the gear shift. For some reason, he had a very contagious smile; I almost wanted to smile back at him. He turns shifts his attention back and forth from the road and onto me.

I ignored him and looked out of the window.

"I never knew I'd ever be babysitting before," he concludes, as he turns the wheel.

"Not even your own kids?" I asked curiously, mumbling between my fingers that were casually rested over my lips.

"Well," he trails off, "I guess I do want kids."

I scoffed at his response as I notice him backing up against a sandy parking lot. Looking around questionably, I was trying to conclude where we were at. Instead, the only scene that caught my

attention was the beautiful scenery of the city and hills. I knew Landon was driving uphill, but never did I expect us to end up somewhere so, beautiful yet quiet.

He turns off the engine of his car and exits. Landon quickly jogs and stumbles towards my side of the car, opening the door before I got the chance to. I blinked at him cluelessly and stepped outside. Having Landon opening the door for me was becoming a routine, and I soon got use to the kind gesture.

I followed him towards the back of the car. He opens the trunk of the car and all that caught my attention was pillows and blankets. A smile of amusement slipped out of my lips, as I stared at the organization in awe.

"Why do you have these?" I questioned eagerly like a child, running my hand through the fluffy cream-colored blanket.

He walks over towards the side furthest to me, and squeezed his lean body into the trunk, sitting with his legs hanging out. Landon casually pats the open spot next to him, motioning me to sit. I welcomed myself and was able to crisscross my legs and fit perfectly in the small space.

We both leaned back against the car, and pulled the blankets over my lap. I grabbed the small decorative pillow and hugged it, resting my chin on it.

"The guy you saw," he slightly stuttered, "he's considered as my uncle."

I suddenly felt uncomfortable by the relationship between the two; feeling the rush of fear in me. I pulled my knees up to my chin, slightly tilting my head towards him and pushed myself to listen to the rest of his story.

"He threatens me sometimes. I can't do anything about it because he's such a good friend to my brother and dad. He's second in charge of the company and he just doesn't like me," he shrugged, easily admitting the truth, "I didn't fully finish telling you the story about my past girlfriend."

Landon suddenly seemed hesitate to continue his story. I bravely rested my hand on his shoulder, and comforted him.

"You don't have to tell me," I trailed off as he interrupts me.

"He tortured her too. He touched her in ways where I couldn't do anything to stop him because he used our family's fortune against us."

"What do you mean?"

"He's second in charge in the company. He knows things that I don't know, and for sure he knows things that my dad doesn't even know. He threatens me to the point where I actually regret being

born into this family. Even though my relationship with my dad isn't as good as my half-brother's, I love him and I can't let his company be taken away from our family."

I sat there and listened to him quietly, keeping my eyes on the beautiful scenery in front of us.

"Being rich doesn't sound all beautiful as it seems. Although we can afford so many things and I'm grateful for that, our family within the company is honestly fucked up. I never wanted to get too involved with our company but being born in one; you can't avoid it."

Landon releases a small chuckle, also staring off into the sky that was now dark, "I'm just rambling now."

I looked at Landon and sent him a reassuring smile, wrapping my arms around my knees.

Silence soon took over the scene as I felt the sudden need to apologize to him, "I'm sorry about earlier."

He looks at me with a confused expression, slightly raising an eyebrow as his eyes found its way to mine, "What do you mean?"

"For getting angry, and throwing a fit," I slightly whined, throwing a small punch at his thigh, "It's so embarrassing."

Landon shook his head and leaned his face towards mine, teasing me as our faces were only a few inches apart, "It's cute."

Taken aback, I leaned away from him uncomfortably.

Suddenly, I felt the need to speak up about the first thing that popped up in my mind.

"Colton has a girl," I blurted, soon to realize that I randomly started a vent to him.

Landon's smirk suddenly turns into a genuine smile, he raises his hand towards my head and ruffles my hair. He suddenly wraps his arm around my neck, pulling me closer to him. I lost my balance and leaned all of my weight against his body. I tried to push myself away from him but he held me down.

I sighed in defeat and stayed there, "What are you doing?" I asked in an irritated tone.

Chapter 28

With my body wrapped in the blanket and his arm around my shoulder, the breeze still caught up to my skin, sending chills down my spine. Despite the beautiful scenery that we're looking at, the chilly breeze from the hills didn't make the sit anymore peaceful. I soon found myself shivering, as Landon was sitting as if the cold didn't have any little affect his icy cold persona.

Without debate, I dragged my frozen hands towards my lips, blowing warm air into it attempting to bring some heat into my limbs. I felt Landon taking his arm off my shoulder, and soon enough grabbed my hands.

It was too cold to fight back, and by this time, I started to feel comfortable with Landon's touch. His presence didn't seem to bother me anymore, in fact I was more joyful of his company. He pulled my hands towards his pink lips, softly blowing warm air into my hands. I couldn't help but crack a smile at his thoughtful doing.

Why am I smiling? I thought to myself as I shake my head.

After blowing a few times, Landon rubs both of his hands against mine. The body warmth from both of us made me feel a lot warmer against the foggy mist that soon started to appear. As much as I hate to say, his company made me feel special, and happy for once.

"Why are you so friendly now?" I teased him, pulling my hands away before shoving it in between my laps under the blanket.

"I can't be nice?" he answers sarcastically. His straight-white teeth appeared as he grins unconsciously.

"Let's take you home," he says softly, before holding a hand out for me and getting out of the trunk. I grabbed his warm hands and pulled myself off of the car, wrapping the blanket around my body before walking towards the passenger side of the car.

Landon watches me, amused. He jumps to his feet and grabs the bottom of the blanket that I was dragging on the dirty ground.

"Sorry," I simply apologized as I sat in the car with Landon tossing the end of the blanket on me, slapping the door.

I couldn't help but think about Colton in the car ride home. It felt as if Colton and Landon suddenly just switch roles. How could Colton lead me on like that? Why is Landon being so nice all of a sudden? These questions filled up my mind before I noticed that Landon was already parked in my front garage.

Unwrapping the blanket from my body, I grabbed my bag and stepped outside. I leaned down to the window and waved goodbye before turning my back to him.

- - -

"Dad!" Austin screams almost at the top of his lungs.

Dad's home?

I dropped my bag near the door and rushed myself into the kitchen. Part of me was wondering why Austin was suddenly scream, but most of me was excited to see my dad.

"Dad, why would you do that?" I overheard Austin say quietly, almost hissing at our father.

Suddenly, I stopped my track by the kitchen wall.

"I was trying to help our family, son," I heard my dad's fragile voice linger pass the wall.

"You're not helping! We could get hurt, you could get hurt!" Austin cries. I was utterly confused by the situation in the kitchen. Even though I tried my best to piece together what they were saying, there wasn't much said.

There was a moment of silence before Austin spoke up again, "Who?" he asked bluntly.

I felt a sudden rush of annoyance up my back. Without a second thought, I stomped into the kitchen and crossed my arms. I stopped in front of my older brother, red hair still as messy as always, "Who what, Austin," I defended my dad.

Both men in the room suddenly jumped, surprised by my sudden entrance. I saw Austin hesitate to answer, before dad came in and answered willingly.

"Nothing honey," he reassured me, with a very tired voice.

"I just came home to you guys arguing, of course there's something," I rolled my eyes at both of them.

"Why are you yelling at dad?" I growled at Austin. It's been a long time for us to give each other hard taps and disrespect, but I couldn't help watching Austin yell at our dad. Especially due to how hardworking dad is, it never feels right for us to ever raise our voice to him.

"Aubrey," Austin sighs, "Go to your room." He puts his hand on my back, attempting to lead me towards the exit of the kitchen. I shook my head and didn't bother to budge.

"No, Austin," I looked at dad for a brief moment before turning my attention to Austin, "Tell me what's happening."

"I borrowed money," dad suddenly interrupted our little drama. His words made me freeze, I slowly turned towards him on the tip of my heels.

In disbelief, the only word that I could mutter out was "What?"

My dad never believed in borrowing money, even if we were failing miserably in finance. We all are aware of the consequences if the money is not returned within the time frame that they give us. It shocked me for him to do something so bold, when all we were taught by him was to almost live under the shell.

"I borrowed money from," my dad hesitated to continue.

"From where? Dad," I asked curiously, making my way towards the dining table and sat across from him.

A sad frown was clearly shown on his face, as he tries to avoid both Austin and I's eye contact like a child. He had his finger intertwined as he rests his lips on top of his hand, covering his mouth while sighing in defeat.

"Someone named Charles," he finally continued, lips trembling the moment he said his name, "I ran into him not too long ago. He noticed that we were struggling and said that he was able to help me."

I looked at Austin as both of our expressions were mixed, but the same: confusion and curiosity.

"How can he notice us struggling, when we don't notice it ourselves?" Austin brutally interrupted dad, pointing fingers between him and I. Austin was clearly unhappy with the trade, and the lack of communication in this family.

I sat there, frozen as I tried to accept the fact that my dad was struggling without Austin and I's acknowledgement.

"Why didn't you tell us? We can get a job, we can help," I leaned across the table, looking at my father's tired eyes.

"I wanted you guys to focus on your education," he pleaded. I've never experienced my dad showing any signs of weakness in my life, let alone him struggling. During that moment, I was speechless by his actions and words. Never did I expect my father, a person who abides by his own rules and beliefs, turn against his own will.

Austin pulled out a chair from the side of the dining table and sat between dad and I.

"How much did you borrow?" Austin asks quietly, pressing his hand against each other.

Dad pressed his lips together, before rubbing both of his hands down his face. His eyes were getting red, I noticed him sniffing but holding back his tears.

"More than I can make in a month," he mumbles underneath his breath, "about eight thousand."

My heart suddenly dropped against my stomach. My heart beat started slowing down and all I was able to think of was the rock bottom we were soon about to hit.

"Dad!" Austin screams, dropping his hands from his mouth and slapping them against the table.

"It was for both of your education, our house, our grocery!" my dad responded, with his voice slightly raised.

"I thought you told us that we were stable enough," I murmured.

"My boss hasn't paid me yet," dad responded.

It's been nearly six months since we've moved into this new house, and since I've attended Jones High. The prices and story didn't seem to click.

"Why?" I simply asked.

My dad shrugged, Austin sighs loudly. He wasn't known as someone who was gullible enough to work for someone for free. I licked my lips that were now dry, and placed my hands on my eyes, resting my elbows on the dining table.

Suddenly, I heard sniffing coming from across the table. I looked up from my hands, not expecting to see the saddest thing I've possibly ever laid my eyes on. Austin's eyes were red, my dad's eyes were red. Both of their red hair was messy, their posture was drooped, as both of their hands were covering their lips.

I observed my dad's face carefully, noticing the twitch in his cheeks before tears started to form in his eyes. Silence of sadness quickly fills the air as our family cries silently in support of each other's struggles.

I was too blinded by Landon and Colton to even notice about my own family.

Chapter 29

Bringing my hands to my lips, I stared at the paper in front of me and couldn't help but feel my lips tremble. My eyebrows rose in sadness as my body refuses to move. I swallowed as I kept my eyes on the white sheet on the dining table.

It was already pass midnight, but I managed to find a slip of paper that was peaking out of my father's work file. I bit my upper lip, attempting to not think of all the possible odds that would affect my relationship at school.

Charles Carthy: (916) 555-8923

I stared at the last name in fright, my fist tightened as all that occurred into my mind was the familiar last name.

It can't be.

- - -

I sighed as I walked myself towards my locker, mind still wondering about the situation that happened last night. Furrowing my eyebrows, I couldn't see anything but the focus point of my destination: the old metal box.

"Aubrey," a voice called for me, more than once.

Finally, I turned around slowly towards the voice. All that approached me was the person who seemed to possibly hurt me the most. I sent a small smile at Colton, as he keeps the wide grin plastered on his face. He was oblivious of everything that was happening with my family. During this moment the last person that I want to have a serious conversation with his Colton Adams.

"Hey," he greeted, with his book in one arm, "how are you?"

"Great," I lied. Ruthlessly, I spun around on my heels and dialed in the combination for my locker, before yanking the handle with much force for it to pop open.

"I saw you with Landon yesterday," Colton sends me a cheesy smile, as he squeezes his way between the locker and I. I couldn't help but release an irritated sigh before furrowing my eyebrows at him.

"Move, Colton," I spat.

Colton obeyed quietly. Right after he moved out of the way, I tossed my books into the locker and closed it with a loud bang. It was loud enough for a few students to turn my way when they walk by.

"What's wrong?" Colton asks innocently, as if he didn't know anything that has happened between us, "What did Landon do?"

My lips twitched, "Landon?" I asked him, raising my voice.

He nodded.

"He's been a great friend, for your information," I growled, "A lot better than you."

Colton was suddenly taken aback by my attitude, and straightened up from his relaxed position. I sense him feeling uneasy with the fact that I was obviously unhappy with him. He pressed his lips together in a thin line and swallowed, looking at me with guilty eyes.

"I'm sorry," he trails off.

I shook my head and started walking down the hallway. He tags behind me, caught up with my speed and swiftly slid in front of me. I was able to stop my tracks before I ran into his chest; I turned around.

"Aubrey," he calls my name again, "I'm in love with her."

My jaws dropped. How was he able to say that phrase to me so easily, but has such a deep meaning when it comes to the other girl of his?

"She was my girlfriend," he muttered down at me, attempting to look me in the eye as I was avoiding his, "I can't let her go. I'm sorry."

I scoffed and crossed my arms, "I never felt that way towards you anyways," I concluded; obviously lying and hurt by his apology.

Colton sighs with guilt, wrapping his arms around me without my consent. He gave me a tight squeeze before whispering "I'm sorry" again in my ear. I could hear his heart beat, much calmer than mine. It was almost like a tragedy romance story; but only one gets sent to happiness.

He finally lets me go as I stood there, looking at him in the eyes before turning around and making my way towards the art room.

- - -

For some reason, even when painting usually keeps my mind off of problems, all that rushed through my head were replays from yesterday and today. Despite the fact that I had a little bit of

fun hanging out with Landon, the name Charles Carthy immediately makes me think that everything Landon put his effort into, was fake.

What if the apology was only a way for him to get closer to my family and I?

I gritted my teeth as I stroked the brush against the canvas board rather hard. All that was on my canvas were colors and random splashes of paint. There were even a few brush bristles shredded off of the paint brush due to how hard I scrapped it against the canvas. My patience started to shorten, as my throat started to get tighter. I gripped the paintbrush and couldn't help it but to throw it at the canvas, slightly growling underneath my breath.

It has come down to the point where I didn't know who to trust. My dad lied to our family, and did something against our own virtues; Colton convinced me that our relationship was something strong, powerful and turned me down without a notice; and Landon is just a complete mess, an utterly complete mess.

Speaking of Landon, the door from my side suddenly opened, revealing Landon in his black rain jacket and khaki pants. He was wearing the latest edition of Gucci shoes, while his hair was swept back into a slick comb over. His light blue eyes were as bright as normal, lips were flushing pink, as his face stayed almost as attractive as always.

"What is this?" He asked, not even bothering to look at the canvas in front of me. Instead, his eyes were locked in mine.

I swallowed my saliva, chills running down my spine. I felt my palms getting sweaty as my legs nervously started bouncing up and down. Without giving me time to answer, he took a step closer to me, eyes still locked in mine. Each time he inched closer, I used my right foot to slowly push myself and the stool back. It seemed to be the only option to get away from him; until he forced his hands below the sides of my thighs, holding the stool in place. He released a soft chuckle as he eyed me from my eyes, down to my lips.

"You're beautiful," he said. From his voice, I couldn't tell if he was being serious, or messing around. It sounded sincere, however there was a smirk on his face. The smirk that he always has on his face when he's found an amusing target.

Then he averted his attentions back to my eyes. His expressions softened up the moment his eyes landed back on mine. His smirk disappeared.

I cleared my throat and broke the eye contact. I looked down at my palms as I rubbed the sweat against my jeans, "What do you want, Landon?" I asked, almost whispering.

I felt his hand brushing against my right cheek, as he tilts my chin up to look back at him. His messy brown hair, his light blue eyes and his pink soft lips were just centimeters from mine. I felt

his breath lingering on the upper tip of my lip. In a panic, I pressed my palms against his chest and push him off.

He stumbled back with a surprised look on his face.

"Aubrey."

The moment I heard my name escape from his lips, I couldn't help but feel the heat rising up in my body. As much as I hate to admit that I've spent great moments with him, I knew I could never trust his privileged actions.

"Don't fucking touch me," I hissed under my breath as I grabbed my bag, avoiding his eye contact.

Before I was able to grab my bag and leave the room, I felt a little tug on my sleeve from the man who perhaps played me. Pressing my lips together in a line, I pulled my arm away from him; only to be introduced to a tight wrap around my wrist. Almost immediately, my body was shoved against the wall; both hands locked in his grip. Landon attempts to look me in my eyes, leaning side to side as he calls my name out gently from his disgusting lips.

I tried my best to avoid his gaze; looking behind his shoulders, under his arms, even at the floor.

"Aubrey," he growls, a little louder. Feeling defeated, he grabs my face with his hands holding it tightly yet carefully, in order to force my eyes to lock in his.

I can see Landon's eyebrows furrowing even from the close distance between our faces. His eyes were filled with worry and fear; although his mind probably differs.

"What's happening? What did I do?" he asks me, almost whispering at me. I could smell the fresh scent of his gum, lingering upon my nose and lips. I dared to look into his eyes, his light blue eyes that seem to sweep every girl off of their feet. He could tell I was furious, my actions already spoke high enough; the look in my eyes would've confirmed how much I hate this guy with a passion.

I shook my head in disappointment. He knows what's happening with my family, he knows what's happening with his; he knows that his family is doing to mine. He knows everything.

"How dare you," I couldn't help but whisper.

Even though he probably knows about what's happening, a look on confusion was plastered on his face. He shook his head and slightly closed his eyes before opening them, leaning closer towards my face.

"What are you talking about?" he asks me in annoyance, with his hand still gripping over mine.

"Charles Carthy, Landon. Charles Carthy," I repeated the name, yanking my wrist away. His grip suddenly loosened the moment I mentioned Charles's name. His face froze, he looked at me almost

in disbelief. After staring at his reaction for a little less than a minute, I pulled a paper from my bag that was crumbled up into a small ball.

Peeling open the paper, it had a bill signed by Charles Carthy on it. Stapled to the paper was a business card, and a loan check. My throat tightened at the look of his last name and my dad's full name.

"You people are full of shit!" I exclaimed almost at the top of my lungs, to the point where my voice was cracking. I shoved the document into his chest as he slightly stumbled back, catching the paper before it falls off his chest. He scans the paper as his hair soon slumps in front of his face; eyes never leaving the paper.

"You're literally full of shit," I mumbled.

Chapter 30

We stayed in that room for about fifteen minutes after the incident, none of us bothered to speak up after the corruption. Landon held the paper between his fingers, his lips calmly pressed against each other while his eyes tracks down ever single word on the document. The only thing that was heard through the silence were each of our breaths.

I was now leaning against the wall almost comfortably, while Landon maintains his position in front of me. His hand was resting on the wall next to my head while his other hand held the paper carefully between us; I didn't feel trapped under his control. His attention was fully kept onto the paper, and my attention was fully kept onto him.

My eyes trailed from his messy dark hair, to his diamond blue eyes. His face was still as beautiful as ever, and for some reason I never got tired of the same old physical appearance he has. He was always dressed a little over the top for school, maybe even something in relation to the next top model's everyday outfit.

Landon looks up from his paper, with the same expression of disbelief swept across his face. He opened in mouth in effort to say something but froze instead. Instead of continuing his sentence, he did a double take on the document and flipped through the pages rigorously.

"But how?" he asks himself in a low tone.

"What do you mean how?" I interrupted his thoughts, loud enough for my voice to almost echo throughout the empty art classroom.

We both observed the paper, although I knew he had more knowledge on what was written on it than I was.

It was then when I felt a hand slip into mine. I felt a lightning struck from my hand and almost immediately, I yanked my hand back; only for the grip to tighten around my palms.

Landon exchanges a look at me, and without giving me a second option, he drags me out of the classroom closing the door with a loud bang.

Upon impact of the door, students started to turn our way as their jaw slightly drops in amusement, shock, and mix of feelings. Almost everyone in the school knows that Landon and I have issues between each other. The love and hate friendship we have sent many different messages towards our peers which results to many rumors. However, seeing us walk hand in hand as if we were ready to fight in the war was something almost no one expected to see.

As I was dragged down the hallway, I caught eyes with two familiar pairs of blues and browns. Colton and Bella were hanging out by her locker until both of them locks eyes with me one after another. Colton wasn't surprise by my dramatic run through with Landon, Bella was almost the opposite. Bella almost fell off her feet, seeing Landon and I hand in hand.

Before I was able to exchange any sort of communication towards my two best friends, I was immediately dragged out of the hallway and on the way towards the student parking lot.

"Landon," a familiar voice called out.

Landon almost hesitated to continue walking, but fell back in place as he continues to walk faster.

"Landon, man," Isaiah slightly chuckles as he jogs up towards Landon and I, almost ignoring my attendance, "Why are you in such a rush?"

Isaiah's eyes trailed over to me, and back to Landon; soon leading up to our hands locked in each other's. His expression suddenly hardened the moment he realizes that we were both together. By the time Landon stops his tracks, Isaiah was already in front of him eyeing him down as his he was a dominant predator.

"What are you doing," Isaiah muttered underneath his breath, trying to hide his words from other students who were casually spectating the situation.

Landon sighs and pushes Isaiah aside as he attempted to walk forward, "Trust me, I'll explain later."

I couldn't do anything but to follow Landon due to my desperation in getting the explanation. Within barely taking the next step, I felt Isaiah's hand suddenly clutching my elbow, yanking me back with full force. Immediately, we all stopped out tracks as the both men hung onto the each of my arms.

"Landon," Isaiah growls quietly.

At this time, students started to crowd around us with a little distance for some 'privacy'. This didn't hide the fact that they started to bring out their phones, and record probably the most dramatic high school encounter ever.

"Let her go. I will explain later," Landon mutters in a very aggressive tone. Isaiah was almost taken aback by Landon's attitude however the grip on my elbow wasn't loose enough for me to just slip out of his hand.

Landon started to grow impatient with Isaiah, and lets go of my hand.

"I will tell you one more fucking time. Let her go," he repeats, louder this time. Isaiah looks at Landon with a bit of trust, before letting my elbow go as my arm fell back by my side. They

exchanged stares for a couple seconds before Landon grabs my hand again and drags me towards his new sports car.

I was too shock from adrenaline to even notice the new matte black Ferrari casually parked up in one of the parking spaces. Landon opens the passenger door for me before I welcome myself in. With a dead expression, I kept my eyes towards the front window; while clutching the envelope with the loan documents inside both of my palms.

- - -

We pulled up into a driveway that took almost a full minute to drive towards the valet parking of the building. In front of the car, laid a fifty-story building towering over all the other little buildings around them. It was clear that all the floors had windows from ceilings to floor, but the window were fully tinted until the building was fully black.

On the front door painted in small minimalism letters stating "Jones 'Carthy' Med" clearly stating who this building must have belonged to.

Landon pulls up the car to one of the employees and steps out of his car with a rush, almost tripping on the way out from the low vehicle. He opens my door before I had the chance too, and tosses his keys towards the employees. The short, bearded man swiftly caught the car keys, knowing almost immediately where to park the prince's car.

"Don't touch anything," he scolded quietly as he leads me towards the front door. The automatic door welcomes us in to the fine smell of a new lobby. Located at the front desk were three men dressed in a full formal attire, with a curly wired earpiece that made them look as if they were security under cover.

They immediately greeted Landon with smiles and greetings as we made our way towards the elevator. I was oblivious of how beautiful and nearly romantic a corporate building can look like. In offices, I've always imagined it to be minimalistic, boring, with only colors of white, grey, and black filling the aesthetics of a boring workplace. This building consisted of metallic golds, marble white and hints of red wine.

Trying my hardest to not get distracted by the building's attractions, I followed Landon towards the elevator that was located in the far right of the building. The elevator door was pure gold, even the buttons were outlined with gold as well as the arrows.

"Where are we going?" I asked Landon as we were waiting for the elevator door to close.

Landon took the bill from my hand and folded it in thirds before tucking it into the inside of his bomber jacket, "Just don't say anything if we run into someone."

What is this, the storm breaker?

The elevator door opens quickly afterwards, locating in front of us were just a white hallways with dozens of black doors. Each of the doors had a gold plaque with I'm guessing the employee's names. We walked down the hall, every name listed on the doors had a male name, following with 'Carthy' in big capital letters. Apparently this family is a lot bigger than anyone had expected.

Landon stops at the furthest door on the right. Name in bold, 'Charles Carthy'. I was suddenly taken aback by the situation and grabbed Landon's arm. He sharply looks at me with almost a serious expression, eyes piercing into my body as if he was able to kill my soul.

"I don't think we should," I whispered at him, shivering at the name and the sight of his dominant eyes.

He brings up a finger, setting it on my lip as he turns his back towards me again. This time, he grabs my hand from his arm and holds it, intertwining our fingers together as he pulls out a card from the inside of his jacket. He scans the card against the reader at the handle of the door and with a smooth click, the door was unlocked.

He opens the door almost carelessly as all that was revealed in our vision were papers and files scattered on a simple black desk. The office was huge, with a ceiling to floor window; everything in this room was almost as if it was able to pull off as a bedroom without a bed. There was a television hung up against the wall, plants and paintings to represent a little life in the room, couches facing the television and even a fridge lined up in the corner.

A person can live and hide here.

Landon pulls me to a seat, motioning me to sit down on the chair facing the desk as he jumps back up on his feet. He shuffles through the files and papers on the table, and I couldn't help but to be stunned by the aesthetic of the office. I sat still, without even daring myself to move from this spot afraid to accidentally break anything in this expensive room.

After watching Landon flip through files for about ten minutes, a click on the door was heard. My heart skipped a beat as I slightly jump from my seat, mouthing words towards Landon as his body was frozen on the other side of the desk. His eyes slightly widened as he smoothly grabs out of the file with one hand and my arm in his other.

I saw Landon's lips cursing slightly as he drags me towards one of the dresser on the other side of the room. Without a second thought, I grabbed the handle and pulled the closet door open, stepping into the wardrobe area that was only big enough to squeeze us to in. Landon climbs in after wards and shuts the door as quiet as possible, our bodies leaning against each other.

We were squished in the closet; his body was extremely close to me as the only space between our bodies where are faces resting on the opposite side. We both had our heads leaning slightly to our rights, I could feel his warm breath lingering against my neck.

The main door opened and closed right afterwards, followed by a loud groan from possibly Charles. Then the only sound in the room was pages flipping. I squeezed my eyes shut tightly, pressing my lips together as I felt Landon leaning his forehead against the back of the closet next to my face.

"Fuck," I heard Landon whisper underneath his breath.

Chapter 31

It was already about fifteen minutes since we were silently hiding in the closet, and my legs were about to give out. Even though I was leaning against the wall, I was trying to hold myself up straight in order to give Landon the space his bigger body needed to not expose our hiding spot.

The back of my neck was tired from keeping up my head for so long that I casually leaned my head forward, resting it on Landon's shoulder. I felt the warmth of his hand resting on the wall next to my waist, as we were waiting for Charles to finally leave his room.

At this point, I was already tired how everything was set up. I should've kept my mouth shut about the loans, dragging Landon into this situation only brought us into worse situations and I should've seen that since the beginning. I was standing there, slightly getting angry with my thoughts as Landon releases a sigh that only us two could hear. I wasn't enjoying how our body was pressed against each other in this tight space. The last thing I ever wanted was to be stuck in the same room with Landon, to my stupid luck that's where I am.

"Jeffery, I can not find the file," the voice, I suppose from Charles begins to speak up. Considering that the door did not open after Charles, he was probably talking on the phone with someone.

The moment we heard Charles's voice, we both jerked up. Landon quickly puts a hand over my lips, afraid of me making a sound. I hissed and pulled his hand off of my mouth before exchanging a glare towards him.

"I told you I do not have it," he spoke up again, this time there was a hint of anger in his voice, "Are you sure you put it on my desk? You had fucking job. Seriously, who the hell hired you?"

I peeked in Landon's jacket seeing the manila folder pressed between his chest and the coat. I bite the top of my lip nervously as I started to feel my body heating up from Charles's realization of the missing file. Landon however, shoots me a reassuring look initialing me to keep calm and not to freak out and rests his hand on my shoulder. I shrugged off his hand as he respectfully puts his hand back down.

"I need the file, Jeff!" Charles screams one last time before I heard a loud bang from outside the closet. After a short minute, the door opened and closed again as Landon and I sighed from relief. Landon presses his lips together as he breathes almost heavily, leaning his body against me even more, squishing me against the wall.

I clicked my tongue and pushed him off of my body. The door opened with his stumbling body almost falling backwards onto the velvet carpet.

"Shit, Aubrey," he dared to mutter as he caught his balance. He stood up straight and straightened his body before fixing the file and letters in his coat. I nearly laughed at his clumsiness the moment I pushed him, however kept my cool because I was still mad at him.

"Let's go," I blankly stated as I crossed my arms and stubbornly made my way towards the door.

Landon jogs up after me and pulls me back with the back of my t-shirt. I almost released a scream before I shut myself up as I shoved my hand against my lips. Landon makes his way in front of me as he leans his ear on the door. When he noticed that the signs were clear, he opens the door and motions me to follow him outside.

As we stepped outside, Landon closed the door quietly as we both straightened up. From this point on, if we did get caught it would've looked like we came from Landon's office. As the office across from Charles's has Landon's full name in bold on a gold plaque.

A nineteen year-old with his own office. He doesn't even do anything.

I rolled my eyes at the office located on our right, as Landon was surprised by my selfish attitude.

"What is up with you?" Landon smirks, obviously amused by all the mood swings I've given him throughout our moments together. I huffed as I kept my arms crossed, ignoring him as I walked down the hallway and towards the elevator. In the corner of my eye, I could see Landon shaking his head as he walks by my side. Honestly, it's kind of fun acting like a brat in front of someone who tries to act like a bad ass everyday in school. It shows him that he isn't only the one with the attitude that everyone has to abide by.

I pressed the down arrow on the gold button before turning back towards Landon.

"You're explaining about all of this, when we get back to the car," I said bluntly, motioning my hands at his chest area of where the file was located.

The ugly smirk swept across his face against as he takes a step towards me, "Sure thing, princess," he teased. Surprised by his sudden rise in ego, I took a step back and stumbled onto the elevator door.

"Stop it, Landon," I scolded as I hear the ding from the elevator. The door opens behind me as I smoothly stepped back and into the elevator. He steps in with a low chuckle as he presses one of the button that leads us to the lobby.

"I'm just kidding," he mumbles loud enough for me to hear.

- - -

We were sitting in his car after Landon was able to get his car keys from one of the workers. Parked in the parking garage, surrounded by thousands of sports and high-tech cars; I couldn't help but to keep my mind on just one thing: the file.

"What is my dad borrowing money for?" I asked Landon curiously, peering over his shoulder as he begins to pull out the folder.

"I don't know, Aubrey."

"What does Charles do?"

"He's the uncle I told you about," he states slowly, looking up at me knowing that I was going to explode from his answer.

"What?" I screamed, furrowing my eyebrows at him.

Landon slightly jumped from my sudden complaint, and quickly held my body down by my shoulders against the leather seats.

"Calm down," he says to me, rather calmly.

"What relation does my father have with Charles?" I asked again.

"I don't know, Aubrey."

"Do you know about all of this?"

"Obviously not."

"You probably do, you piece of shit."

"No, I don't."

"You're part of this family for god sakes."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"Well it does mean something if you're a Carthy, son of the guy who technically owns our school."

"Okay, but that doesn't mean anything about me."

"You're the kid with the 'bad boy ego'. Oh, mister popular who doesn't give a shit about girls and their privacy."

"Aubrey."

"You're a stupid jerk who loves to ruin people's days and ruin people's lives and loves to kiss girls randomly on a daily basis."

"Aubrey."

"You're friends with a soccer player who hell freaking knows that he's a lot better of a friend to you than you are to him."

"Aubrey."

"Your family is the one putting mine in possible debt right now, and possibly one of the victims to one of your stupid schemes."

"Aubrey."

"You're an asshole that's probably using me right now to get more into my family to possibly ruin my loving family. Why am I even trusting you? Why am I even in this car?"

"Jesus Christ, Aubrey!" Landon finally loses his temper and screams back at me, shaking the folder filled with paper in front of me. I jumped from his sudden anger, surprised that his voice was able to even be that loud.

"Will you please calm down?" he asks, his voice softens the moment he sees my body jerk up from the loud volume from his stupid mouth.

I sunk back down in my seat, realizing the sudden fool I've turned myself into. However, our tempers towards each other disappeared the moment Landon opens the folder to the page with all four of my family portraits on it.

My eyes widened seeing the picture of my mother.

The two top pictures were my dad and Austin, labeled below in bolded letters were the name "Keith Watson" and "Austin Watson. Directly underneath the two names were two pictures of my mother and I, "Emily Watson" and "Aubrey Watson".

My mind went blank as I looked over the old picture of my mother. She was beautiful, absolutely stunning. I never bothered to look at any pictures of her, afraid that I was going to feel some type of guiltiness for her death. Ignoring Landon's presence, I ran my fingers over the colors photo that was carelessly glued onto the paper.

She had dark curly brown hair, and hazel almost dark-brown eyes; exactly like me. While Austin had red hair, in relation to my father and dark brown eyes. My lips slightly quivered as I observed her happy smile, a smile that resembles both Austin and I. Our relatives were right when they talk about how much I looked like my mother. I swallowed my saliva as I felt my throat tightened.

Never did I think that I could feel so much sadness towards a mother that never existed in my life.

An arm sneaked across my shoulder as Landon pulls me a little closer to him, despite the arm rest and cup holders blocking us. He held me tightly as I leaned my head against his shoulder, turning my body slightly as my eyes never left the photograph. Although I was sad about my mother's absence, it wasn't so sad to the point where I wanted to bawl out and cry. It did tug my heartstrings and made me feel a little sensitive thought.

"You're beautiful," Landon spoke up from the silence, "Have I ever told you that?"

Chapter 32

Landon looks up at me from the paper, eyes filled with a little worrisome but mostly guilt. My mouth was open, speechless as all I could do was stare off into the blank space. It felt like my heart had stopped.

I shifted uncomfortably from my seat.

For three years? Eight grand in three years.

I can hear Landon turning towards me in his seat, the soft leather creating a soft sound of friction as he tries to make eye contact with me.

"I can help you," he spoke up in the silence, voice soft as it'll ever get.

Even though I know his intentions were to help me out, I couldn't understand how a nineteen-year-old man, is able to throw around his money; specially to help out someone who he probably despise since the beginning of our meeting.

"No," I bluntly answered, shaking my head in disbelief, "I don't need your help, Landon."

He leans towards me. Although there was a tight space in the car, his body managed to speak itself as well as giving me the personal space that I rightfully deserved.

"Please," he begged, whispering in a sense. He places his hand on my knee as he peered through my gaze.

"No, Landon," I said again, in a harsh tone, "Every single time you've tried to be nice, something has to go wrong."

Silence fills the air again as I laid back against my seat, closing my eyes from the stress that was rushed over my body. Half of me feels annoyed by Landon's constant insist on helping, the other half of me feels guilty from my always pushing Landon away. No matter how many times I've attempted to push Landon away whether it's physically or emotionally; he still shows up out of the blue.

"Fine," he answers as he closes the manila folder, tossing it in the backseat carelessly. I can sense Landon starting to feel heated from my denial. He sighs, loud enough for me to hear before starting the engine on his car, "You handle it then."

I pressed my lips together, realizing that this was possibly the first time Landon has ever showed his anger towards me. Normally, he would fight back or do something to make me feel a little more insecure; this time he was quiet. He was really mad.

Without bothering to second guess his actions, he stomps on the gas as he reversed in speed; changing gears and sped out of the parking garage. My heart skips its beat multiple times but I had to much pride to admit my sensitivity in fast moving cars. Instead, I slipped my right hand underneath my right thigh, gripping the back of my leg tightly as he rushes down the empty street that was starting to get darker.

Although there was awkward tension in the car, I was too busy thinking about the life-death crisis that could kill us in any minute. Landon keeps his eyes on the road, blankly. His left hand resting on the driver's wheel as his right hand was casually holding the gear stick. He looked extremely calm ironically to his actions of swerving left and right on the highway while running over a hundred miles per hour.

While cutting off another sports car, the driver of that car soon gained some aggression and caught up to our speed. I watched in shock as I see Landon making eye contact with the other driver controlling the white Tesla. I felt the two of them smirk from both of my sides before they exchange winks; racing down the highway as the two begins to charge at each other.

Second after seconds, both of the car were head for head, switching lanes and cutting off other drivers acting as if it was a police chase. I shut my eyes tightly as our car sped up, I could feel my body being forced back into my seat due to the face paced car. My heart has skipped too many beats for me to even feel alive at that point.

"Landon," I finally screamed out, fear rushing through my nerves. My hands couldn't help but cover my face as all I can hear were engines and tires screeching from the two cars.

Almost immediately, I felt the car slowing down. It was still moving in a fast pace, but the car that was racing against us earlier has already sped off into the darkness. I heard Landon laugh a little bit, as he starts to feel joy from the adrenaline and fear we both just experienced.

Soon enough, the car was slowed down to the following speed of other normal drivers on the highway. As I removed my hands from my face, I saw Landon's face looking at me with amusement. His whole attention was off of the road as he smiles as me; his anger seemed to quickly disappear from before.

"I can't stay mad at you," he states in a soft-lowly voice, as he turns his attention back onto the road.

Crossing my arms, I sighed in relief as I discovered that we were still alive even after that deadly situation. Landon however, didn't seem to be so affected by it. I'm guessing he does this on a daily basis; which explains to how calm and experienced he was as we were racing down the highway even with cars lingering around.

It didn't occur to me until a few minutes later that Landon had already passed the exit leading back home a long time ago. He was still speeding straight, passing all the exits that can possibly take us out of this highway.

"Landon," I asked quietly. He looks over at me for a brief second, returning his gaze to the road, "You passed my exit."

"I know," he casually stated, smiling at the road.

"Can you please take me home?"

"Nope," he teases, emphasizing the 'p' with the pop sound through his lips, "Can't do."

Rolling my eyes, I soon got comfortable with the faster pace he was going on the road, "Seriously Landon. I've had enough."

"Trust me," he reassures, holding his hand up from the gear shift. I sighed and leaned back against my seat; knowing that I won't be able to win over the driver of this car. I sat there in defeat as we continued our way down the highway for as long as a lifetime.

As thirty, forty uncountable minutes passes by, Landon finally turns into an exit leading up to no where but darkness.

"Where are we going?" I asked him, shifting uncomfortably in my seat as I squinted my eyes through the darkness.

Landon releases a chuckle, "Calm down," was all he told me as he continued his task.

After many turns and lane changing, within the darkness shined a little light. As we get closer to that little light, it appeared to be many lights. I furrowed my eyebrows in curiosity as the view of the lights begins to multiply, changing color, and getting larger.

My mouth slightly opened as Landon finally stops the car in what appears to be a cliff. We both sat there as we observed the scene in silence.

There was a beautiful big bridge; we had front seat views of it. It was diamond white, cars racing down the bridge as the red and white lights compliments each other beautifully. Further behind the bridge was the view of the downtown city. Lights flickering, standing out from the darkness and represented nothing but pure beauty.

I was so speechless, I almost forgot about what had happened prior to this moment. Stumbling upon the thought, I pressed my lips together and sucked up all of my excitement, replacing it with a stubborn crossed arm and an exhausted sigh.

From the corner of my eyes, I see Landon amusingly grin, pulling the lever on his seat for it to lean back.

"Aren't you hard to impress," he cooed, tossing me a teasing wink as I continued attempting to ignore him.

"I want to go home," I say as I feel my body sulking against the warm leather seat.

I looked over at Landon, already seeing him relaxed against his side of the car. His hands were resting behind his head as he stared up at the roof of the car, something obviously lingering in his mind. He seemed to ignore my beg as I couldn't help but think about what was keeping him so distracted.

Should I call his name?

I shook the thought out of my head as I looked forward, softening up my little mood as my eyes landed on beautiful lights. For some reason, the thought of my mother traveled back into my mind, as both of us were sitting in deep thought.

My mom was beautiful, I couldn't exaggerate that enough. It sucks to not be able to see her face. I missed out on the motherly figure that everyone else seemed to have. I couldn't help but sigh, my eyes blurred out the lights in front of me as all I could picture was the photograph of her on the file.

My gaze dropped towards my hands resting on my lap. Unknowingly, my lips form a small frown as I felt my heart tugging against my chest.

I wanted my mom.

Never have I thought I could feel a certain way towards someone I haven't met before.

Soft breathing from Landon slowly broke my chain of thoughts. I looked over at Landon where his head was tilted towards me, eyes closed peacefully as his soft lips rested against each other perfectly. His eyelashes were extremely long for a male, and his hair was effortlessly flared upwards, revealing his perfect sized forehead.

I stared at his face, soon feeling guilty for everything I've caused him today. Yes, he's done some things that I possibly wouldn't thought of forgiving him for, but he's also done things for the benefit of me too. I sighed again, smiling a little bit at the thought of his kindness.

A strand of hair suddenly slipped from the bundle, landing in the middle of Landon's forehead. The little movement seemed to disturb Landon a little bit as his eyebrows furrowed, however quickly unraveled as he took a deep breath. He drifted back into his dream.

Staring at the bothering piece of strand, I stuck my tongue out slightly as I quietly leaned towards him, bringing my hand up to his face. Trying not to disturb his slumber, I gently grabbed the piece of hair and pulled it back up towards the rest of his hair.

His eyebrows furrowed again as he shifted from his seat, head still facing me. I jolted back, bringing my hands defensively towards my chest as I watch him settle down again. The piece of hair was still there.

Dang it!

I bit my tongue this time, and leaned towards him again. Slowly, and as quietly as possible, I pressed my index and thumb finger together as I held the strand of hair, attempting to set back to its original place.

Then Landon's eyes fluttered open.

I froze in shock, my jaws slightly dropping. Landon looks at me in a confused expression, soon to realize that our faces were only a few inches apart. His eyes were still slightly widened, his cheeks turned into a rather rosy color; something I've never seen before. The color of his cheek was quickly replaced with a smirk, indicating that he's successfully woken up from his little nap.

Shit, Aubrey.

Chapter 33

It didn't take long for my body to react unnaturally as I pushed myself away. To my luck, my hand was resting on one of the red cup that was sitting in the cup holder. As I pushed, I felt myself unbalanced as my whole body tumbled forward.

A soft yelp escaped my lips as our heads found each other's. The moment my forehead hit against his, I started to feel a painful tingle lingering in the center of my head. The water from the cup I'd just tumbled over went flying as all the water sprinkled over us as if there was an indoor rain.

Regaining my senses, I put my hand on Landon's seat and pushed myself upwards, covering my forehead with the other hand.

"Ow," I murmured as I watch him do the same. We both stayed in that awkward position, slightly wet from the cup and suffering from the pain we've just experienced.

"How can you be so clumsy," he mutters under his breath. I might've just knocked the sleepiness out of him.

"Sorry," was all I managed to say before groaning as I dragged the upper half of my body back to my side of the car.

He blinks multiple times, rubbing his forehead while pulling the lever underneath his seat. As he adjusted the seat back into a sitting position, he looked at me with his eyes squinted. I couldn't help but feel the knot in my stomach spinning around and hitting every nerve in my body.

I flashed an awkward smile, soon adjusting my attention back to the city view.

Silence fills the air as all we could hear was each other's brushing from the water that dampened our clothes earlier. I could sense Landon getting quickly annoyed at he looks at his shoes; to what I infer probably got wet. A smirk sneaked across my lips as I quickly pressed my lips together in a thin line when Landon looks up at me.

A smile crept upon his lips as he slightly leans towards me, elbow resting on the shoulder of his seat.

"If you wanted to kiss me, you could've just said so," he teased, raising an eyebrow at me; flashing an uncontrollably attractive wink.

Holding my messed up feelings back, I leaned away from him and against the window.

"Woah there, buddy," I awkwardly spit out, curling my arms against my chest in effort to defend myself from him, "The last person I'd ever want to kiss is you."

As he leans further towards me, I felt my air being sucked out of my chest. It was getting harder breathe every single time he inches closer to me.

"Doesn't look like it when you kissed me back at the mall," he teased, poking a finger at my head playfully.

I sat up in defense and couldn't help but gasp at his comeback. That moment when we kissed at the mall slipped my mind quickly after it happened.

"You kissed me!" I screamed at him, pointing my index finger at his chest almost stabbing my nails through his rain jacket.

He shrugs before recovering back in his seat, "You wouldn't shut up, so," he mumbled underneath his breath as he stretches his arms out.

"You seem to hate me, a lot," he speaks up again, however this time there was a sense of weakness in his voice.

Brushing off his sudden change in attitude, I answered with a sly, "Because I do," before silence quickly fills the air again.

Meanwhile, Landon drifted off into the hard thinking stage that he was in before he took his nap. I licked my upper lip, observing his features as he kept his gaze ahead of us. Although his eyes were traveling back and forth on the city lights, he was lost in deep thought. He had his tongue slightly sticking out between his lips. Can't believe I kissed that thing.

I cringed at the thought.

It was quiet for about five minutes before I found myself getting seriously curious of what was on his mind. I swallowed nervously, overthinking the situation. Maybe he was mad at me?

It took up so much courage before I finally spoke up, snapping him away from his thoughts, "What's wrong?" I asked, with the soften tone as I can possibly put it.

Landon looks at me, a small smile plastered upon his lips as he shakes his head.

"Nothing," he responded. However, there was something in his eyes that tells me otherwise. There was definitely something wrong.

"Are you sure?" I turned my body slightly towards him, pulling my left leg onto the seat as the other rests casually off the seat.

He nods, breathing in deeply before answering with a tired "Yeah."

I scoffed at his act. Even though he's put on quite the show to convince me that he was fine, I was able to look through his little act. But I shook off the idea. It wasn't my position to force the situation out of him, I don't own him.

I leaned my temple against the headrest, fully turning my body towards Landon. I found myself just observing his face as he looks elsewhere but my face. He seems to be looking back and fourth at the features of the car. The window and door behind me, the seat, the cupholders; anywhere else but my face.

Observing the awkward scenario, I couldn't help but release a laugh from his actions. He finally looks at me, amused by my laughter.

"What?" he asks, slightly laughing himself.

"Nothing, nothing," I reassured, slightly giggling between my lines. Never have I thought, Landon Carthy would be so awkward with a girl in his car before. That little ego that he had at school definitely had changed.

"You make me feel so," Landon chuckles as he pauses between his sentence, "nervous."

His words caught me by surprise, my heart begins to flutter as the knot in my stomach comes back to make me feel light on my feet. My lips slightly parted, without any words slipping out. I was slightly speechless by Landon's confession.

"What?" I managed to speak up, slightly stuttering with my words as he looks at me innocently with his light blue eyes. Although it was dark, the lights from the city peaked through the front window, flashing us with bright yellow tinted highlights.

"Nothing," Landon shakes his head, feeling slightly defeated from my response. He sends me a smile before flipping the key that was resting in the ignition. He turns on the engine, as the car rumbled, smoothly vibrating against the sandy floor below us.

It didn't take long before he reserved the car, hopefully taking me back home to where I should be in bed by now. A yawn crept out of my system as Landon keeps his eyes on the road. I leaned back against my seat, feeling the warmth of the leather seats quickly making me comfortable. I was trying so hard to fight against the blackness that was soon taking over my eyes.

Sighing in defeat, I just closed my eyes as I still tried to keep myself internally awake.

- - -

"Aubrey," a voice echoed through my mind, "Aubrey," it calls again.

I felt a hand resting against my shoulder as my eyes fluttered open. The visual in front of me came clear after blinking for more than five times. I took a deep breath that seems to relax me more against the warm seat.

I heard a soft laugh as the hand continues to shake my shoulder, before I could close my eyes again.

"What?" I muttered between my teeth, tired. I opened my eyes a little wider revealing a wild Landon, hovering over me through the car door.

"You're home," he whispers softly, not wanting to interrupt my sleepy bubble. I felt annoyance creeping up my back, groaning as Landon continues to shake me softly against the seat.

I heard Landon releasing a loud sigh, before he says something my mind couldn't figure out. Suddenly I felt two hands creeping behind my neck and my lower back. My eyes widened at the sudden action and before I was able to figure out what was happening, I felt the cold air brushing against my back.

"Landon!" I called out as I clung onto his body. His arms were wrapped around me, my face were only inches away from his chest as I heard him grunt from my sudden push. As much as I love to go to my bed, the seat from his car was extremely comfortable and I am not the type of person to easily wake up from a slumber.

I growled, irritated as I slapped his chest uncontrollably, almost crying from the sudden shock that crept upon my body. All I knew that was happening was the fact that I was waken up, in the most uncomfortable way.

"Aubrey," I heard Landon releasing a laugh as he drags me out of the car. I groaned, finally forcing myself on my feet, pushing Landon away from my body.

"Good night," he amusingly stated, as he watches me lurk towards my house. I released a yawn before sending him a half wave, entering my house after unlocking the door.

"Hey, Aubrey," Austin greeted.

With my eyes half opened, I turned my attention towards Austin as I mumbled a greeting, closing the door behind me.

"You have a visitor," Austin tells me, as he sits nearly sprawling out on the couch. I furrowed my eyebrows in confusion, as I approached the living room.

As I stepped closer towards the living room, the view of the room widened as I was able to capture the rest of the scene. Sitting on the love seat sofa with its back facing me, a familiar figure with short black hair and a track high-neck jacket was staring off straight ahead. Until he heard my name, he turned around.

"Isaiah?"

Chapter 34

"Isaiah?"

Even though Isaiah has only been to my house once, I could never imagine my brother and some random friend of mine to just meeting. Colton doesn't even have the guts to come inside my house.

I was utterly confused as all I could do was look back and forth between Isaiah and Austin. Fiddling with the strap of my bag, Austin motioned me to come sit next to him as I followed his little command.

By this time, I didn't feel tired anymore. It was as if I snapped out of my lazy consciousness and regain a pinch of reality.

"What are you doing here?" I asked Isaiah, with no intention of being rude.

Isaiah smiles at me sheepishly, as he has his arms crossed against his chest. Being an athlete, Isaiah was quiet fit as a teenager his age. Although he was the same age as me, he would have the benefit of pulling it off as a legal drinker. He had very masculine features, especially due to his very fit athletic body and his serious face would come off as very intimidating.

"I just had to talk with Austin," Isaiah responded casually, poking a finger at Austin. My eyebrows furrowed together as I glanced at Austin. The last time Isaiah came here, Austin and Isaiah had absolutely no contact aside from exchanging looks and small threats towards each other. Something about this situation didn't link up.

"About what?" I asked, sending a small laugh as I made the situation a little bit more awkward than it should be.

Austin releases a smile as he rests his hand behind me on the couch. He leans back as he releases a yawn, brushing his other hand through his red locks as they stay up for a few seconds before leaning back against his head. I was jealous of how soft his hair turns out to be.

"We were talking about soccer," Austin answers, avoiding my eye contact. Even though he had his ankle resting calmly on his knees, and his voice showed a lot of confidence; I knew my brother and can always look through his lies.

"No really," I turned my body facing both Isaiah and Austin. I peered over at Isaiah to see him staring at me in an almost sorrowful expression.

The room got quiet, as the two attempted to find ways to break me the news. I was quick to get impatient as I collapse my body against the coach, observing one of my old paintings that was hung on the wall.

"If you guys won't tell me what's happening around here, I might as well just leave," I murmured.

I could hear Austin taking a deep breath as he sits upwards in his position, closing his eyes for a brief second before exchanging glances with Isaiah.

"I know about the debt," Isaiah suddenly spoke up, catching me by surprise. As I expected myself not to believe him, I looked at Austin for clarification before reality hit me like a ton of bricks.

Pushing my speechless self away, I managed to speak up towards Isaiah, "How?"

Isaiah releases his arms from his chest as he rests them on the arm rest. One hand was up at his mouth, with his thumb rubbing against his chin.

"You can't expect my family to be best friends with Landon's and not know what's happening in his business," Isaiah stated quietly.

"I don't understand," I muttered underneath my breath, trying to solve the puzzle pieces of this mystery.

I looked at Austin again for any source of assistance, but instead my dear brother just shoots me a look of pure helplessness.

"But Landon told me he didn't know anything about," I trailed off, furrowing my eyebrows together as I jumped towards the conclusion.

He lied to me.

Almost immediately, Isaiah was able to read the expression on my face, "No, he didn't."

"What?"

Now was I even more confused.

Isaiah pressed his lips in a thin line before looking down at the floor.

"Before you and I even met, the Carthy's family and mine appointed to dinner at a gala. It was about three years ago, before I was fully developed into training for the next ownership position for our athletic organization. Because Landon's family, and my family were so close; deals were passed back and forth rapidly between our dads, and the oldest sons. Landon was excluded from this conversation. I remember specifically that an older man had joined the conversation later on that evening, talking about the big lay off that happened in around Eastern. That guy who I later found out was Charles, ended up helping a lot of people by giving out loans for survival." Isaiah

paused as he regains his look from the floor. He casts Austin and I a hesitant look as he suddenly uncomfortably rubs his palm against his knees.

"But those were never Charles's intentions. I found out about a year later that his deal was only offered due to the huge interest that he 'mentions' in the contract," Isaiah stops talking. Instead, he reaches into his duffel bag and pulls out a thick black folder. He flips through pages and pages until he stops his track on the same copy that Landon had shown us earlier.

Isaiah gets up from his seat and walks over towards the coffee table in front of Austin and I. He drops the folder onto the table as he pulls out loose papers from all over the folder. Every page he pulls out, he rests it on the table side to side until it filled up the whole table. As the end of his task, there was over twenty loose pages of documents on the table.

I can see him bit his lip nervously as he finally looks me in the eyes.

"Aubrey," he trails off, as I looked up at him.

"Your dad owns over thirty thousand dollars," Isaiah informs carefully, "There were more deals behind the eight grand."

My heart immediately dropped. I looked at each of the paper resting on the table. Loads of zeros and commas, it's unbelievable how much money a person can borrow.

Without able to tolerate the information, I dropped my face into my hands. I felt Austin's arms creeping around my shoulder as he pulls me into a warm embrace. Something about his hug tells me that Austin knew about this a lot longer than I did, maybe even when it started.

"Why are you telling us this?" I asked Isaiah, soon getting offended by the wealth.

There was a moment of silence before he spoke up, "I want to help you guys."

"Aubrey, we became friends before I fully understood the situation. I didn't know the debt was from your family. If I knew that, I would've avoided you and decided not to get into the Carthy's and your family's businesses." He tries to explain.

I looked up at Isaiah in disbelief, my eyes red from tiredness and the pressure I'd laid against my face, "Then why didn't you avoid us the moment you found out?" my voice slightly rising from annoyance.

All the information I had to take up within these past two days were completely unmanageable. Half of me wanted to wake up from this horrible nightmare, but the other half of me knew that this was a reality I couldn't escape.

"I owe you," he states almost calmly.

"What do you mean?" I growled at him, throwing my hands in front of me with my fingers bent angrily. I could feel Austin's grip around me was getting tighter as he sits in silence, hoping for me to adapt to the reality of the situation.

"When you helped me from my best friend," a soft chuckle escaped his lips, "I told you I owe you something."

I shook my head, rolling my eyes at him.

"What are you going to do?" I was screaming at this point, "What can you possibly do!"

My throat was clenching in anger as I felt the back of my body heating up in frustration. The back of my neck had a tingling sensation where I wanted to claw my hands into Isaiah's throat and nearly choke him out. But I knew I would never have the heart to do that.

"I can pay it off," Isaiah shakes off.

Being raised under the rule of keeping low profiles, quickly made me contemplate Isaiah's offer. As much as I hate to admit that Isaiah is finding ways to help us out, the assist on terms of money was too sketchy.

"No, you can't," I simply responded. I got up from my seat and took the all papers on the coffee table, stacking them in a neat pile before respectively closing the folder. I was able to slide the thick folder towards Isaiah's direction as I see his hesitance to pick up the folder.

"We don't need you help," I bluntly stated, with a much serious and colder tone.

Isaiah sighs in defeat as he grabs the folder in front of him.

"Just call me if you need help, I guess," he finally admits, pulling the folder towards him as he strolls back to the duffel bag. He carelessly drops the folder as it flops into the bag, grabbing the strap as he swung it over his shoulders.

As he was making his dramatic exit, Isaiah turns around one more time looking back and forth between Austin and I.

"Colton and Bella said they miss you, by the way," he managed to slip through before sliding out of the door.

The last sentence quickly left my mind as I looked over at Austin. Yes, I cared about my two best friends, but it was best not to include them in any of my life drama. It would cause nothing pity towards me and that's the last thing I want on this planet: pity from a friend.

"You should've let him help us," Austin finally speaks up from the moment of silence ever since Isaiah has left our home. I took a deep breathe and sighed as to why this idea had popped in Austin's mind in the first place.

"We don't need his help," I muttered.

"Yes we do, Aubrey. It's thirty grand, how are you going to pay it back?" Austin jerks up, removing his arms from me as he raked his hand through his hair.

Something about Austin's movement quickly irritated me, "Austin, please!"

"We can't pay it off. Final. Dad's working but he's barely getting paid over minimum. We're both full time students, part time jobs will still be useless," Austin fights back, finally getting up on his feet as he hovers over my small body tossed on the couch.

I crossed my arms as I felt myself getting stubborn, "We will find a way."

"Aubrey, this is reality. This is thirty grand. It's not something we can just casually earn and pay off easily," Austin convinces.

Closing my eyes for a brief moment, I took a breath as it made me calm down my rage for just a second.

"We don't need Isaiah's help, or Colton's help, or Landon's help!" I finally screamed at him, voice cracking mid-sentence.

All three of both boys definitely had enough money to easily pay off our debt, but that's not how friends should treat each other. If I go up and beg for someone to pay off my debt, that's not friendship, that's called being used.

"Then what are we going to do?" Austin sighs, dropping his hands by his side.

I shook my head, answering calmly with, "Anything but borrow money from anyone else."

Chapter 35

Days after finding out about the debt, I've been avoiding almost everyone from school and keeping my head low in the art room. I brought my own food during lunch, so it was almost never necessary for me to leave this art room unless I had a class to attend to. Even though I was lonely, keeping a low profile kept a lot of drama outside of the circle and I had time to relax to myself.

I brought the sandwich towards me lips as I took a bite of the dry bread with peanut butter and jelly. I couldn't help but make a face at the disgusting lunch, before bringing my other hand up to paint on the canvas. I didn't know what I was painting, perhaps a sky?

The door opened quietly, and I didn't bother to look. A few people have bothered to come in and out of the art room, joining me for a small paint bonding moment, but no one I personally knew has came in here and checked up on me.

I spoke too soon.

"Aubrey," I heard Bella's voice from behind me.

Without a second thought, I turned towards Bella as I flashed her a small smile. However, I was quick to regret that action when I found out that Colton was right by her side.

As expected.

Turning my attention back towards the painted canvas, I pretended that I was paying a lot more attention towards my work. But ironically, I wasn't. My attention was leaned behind me, feeling Colton and Bella's eyes staring at the back of my head. I squeezed the paint brush in one of my hand as I painted.

"Aubrey," I heard Bella speak up again. Bella slid next to me and pulled the stood up towards me. She sits next to me, rubbing my shoulders with both of her palm before relaxing her chin on her arm.

"Why have you been avoiding us?" she asked me innocently. By now, I thought she would've already figured out about Colton and his little schemes; but she sounded as oblivious as ever. I shook my head in response.

"I haven't," I lied.

Bella released a scoff as she shakes her head at me, "Yes, you have! You don't think we'll notice?"

I tilted my head backwards as I mumbled underneath my breath in defeat, "Okay, I have been. But everything's fine, I promise."

I could feel Bella frowning next to me as we both forgot about Colton's attendance behind us.

"Bella, can I have a talk with Aubrey really quick?" he finally spoke up.

I shot Bella the eye and tried to shake my head as still as possible. However, she didn't get the message and stood up from the stool, respectively nodding back at him.

"I'll meet you in Elder's classroom," she concluded at Colton, smiling at both of us before exiting the classroom.

Great.

Colton slid back on the stool Bella was previously sitting on, his whole body facing towards me. His legs were spread with my stool between his grip. I looked at Austin and finally set my sandwich and the paintbrush before finally giving him an ear.

"What, Colton?" I asked bluntly, looking at him. I couldn't see him as the same person anymore, I see him more as a threat to my happiness.

"I'm sorry," he started out, looking at me with sorrowful eyes. I avoided his eye contact, scared of losing my pride in his eyes.

"It's fine," I mumbled in response, staring ahead of me.

"No, seriously," Colton whispers, slipping his hand under my chin as he pulls my face towards him, "I didn't mean to just ditch out on you like that," he chuckles in defeat.

My heart felt like it stopped beating the moment he touches me, but I couldn't find the courage to push him away.

"She came back randomly," he attempted to explain, "I was lost in my childish thoughts. I was in love with her and I thought she came back for me."

"Okay," I responded, listening to his explanation with half a heart.

Colton started stumbling on his words from my cold response, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. At that time, I was just caught up and," he stopped talking. We both knew that he was in the wrong, but his excuses couldn't make up for what he's done.

"Colton, it's okay," I sighed from his effort. It was clear that Colton never had the intentions to hurt me, and it was also clear that he was trying his hardest to make it up to me.

Finally, I concluded on what sounded like the best option for both of us, "We're still best friends," I started, "Nothing less, nothing more."

A small smile crept upon Colton's lips as his eyes differ. I could tell from his light blue eyes that he still felt guilt, and sadness; but continuing our relationship as best friends seems like the right thing to do at this moment. I'm too wrapped up in this hay, I can't handle turning my back against my own best friend because of something so childish.

Colton held his arm out as I leaned my body towards his. He wrapped both of his arms around my shoulders as I sat there and slightly enjoyed him embrace.

"I brought you lunch too," Colton says as he lets me go, making a face at my sandwich that was resting on a piece of napkin.

He pulled off his backpack and reached inside, pulling out a Lunchables pack from his backpack. I was caught by surprised. A grown teenager with a Lunchables. I couldn't help but laugh at him as his face turns red from the sudden embarrassment.

"What?" he questions, releasing a small laugh along with mine, "At least I got you food."

I grinned happily and took the Lunchables from his hands, nodding at him, "Yes, Colton. At least you did." I leaned towards him and scrunched my nose before opening the pack. He smiles, bringing his hand up to my cheeks before pinching them softly.

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After lunch, I worked up the guts to attend math class. Even though Landon helped me piece out the details of our family's debt, seeing him would just remind me of how much his family impacts mine.

Sure, Isaiah convinced me enough to believe that Landon wasn't capable of his family's doings, but just the fact that he's own up to his apology only for his family to put mine into so much trouble. I sighed, clutching the strap of my bag on the shoulder as I head towards the classroom. I opened the door and entered without trying to hesitate. However, I stopped after I closed the door, staring at a pair of eyes that had been laying on the door as his he was waiting for something.

I swallowed nervously, heading towards the original seat. Landon smiles at me as I slightly returned the smile respectfully.

I toss my notebook on my desk and sat down, setting down my bag afterwards.

"So," Landon whispers, leaning my way as he taps my cheek bringing my attention to him. Everyone else was well aware of his actions and suddenly started whispering to each other. I was too overwhelmed to even bother to pay attention to the gossips around us.

Looking up at Landon with wide eyes, I was waiting for his response.

"I found another way I'm able to help," Landon begins.

I attempted to interrupt his offer before he holds a finger directly in front of my face. I couldn't help but flinch at the sudden action, clutching the chair and the table with each hand.

An amused laugh escaped his lips as he set his hand back down, "Sorry."

"Isaiah's family is throwing a party," he trails off.

I squinted my eyes, "What does that have to do with anything?"

"My family is going too. Including my uncle, Charles," Landon explains, "I was thinking if Isaiah brings you as his date, we can somehow threaten Charles to confess and take back the debt."

The more Landon tries to explain himself, the more confused I was getting.

"How does me being Isaiah's date do anything? I don't get it."

"Isaiah's family and mine are like best friends. Our companies are the biggest allies and we need each other in order to grow more profit. Long story short, athletes needs hospitals, hospitals needs patients, and boom money for the both of us."

"That doesn't make sense," I shook my head, as we both leaned towards each other trying our best to keep the conversation as quiet as possible.

"Business never makes sense," he sighs, "Anyways, if you go as Isaiah's date it's almost automatically that my family needs to get on your good side. If Charles figures out the relation between you and your father – which he most likely will, he has no other choice but to drop the debt in order to keep the alliance of the companies going."

Even after the long explanation, I decided to just go with my trust towards Landon and agree to whatever his scheme was.

"Okay," I mumbled, "I guess it wouldn't hurt to try."

Chapter 36

I found myself being dragged down the same mall that Landon and I went to not too long ago; with a wild Isaiah tagging behind us. Sighing as I held my hand out in front of me, I acted in defeat as he pulls be towards random stores that I've never even heard of. I tried to convince Landon that Bella probably had something in her closet for me to wear, but he did nothing but hush me and explain how important and formal this party was supposed to be.

Couldn't relate, it's just a party.

"Just pick one, and let's go home," I whined, slightly tapping my feet against the floor as I see him dig through the few glistening dresses that were hung on the rack.

He ignored me, "What size are you?"

"I don't know," I mumbled, "Two?"

Landon shoots me a look of disbelief as he pulls out a random dress, holding it out in front of me. I smiled in amusement as his fashionista side starts seeking through. I looked over my shoulder revealing Isaiah, who was absolutely clueless as to how dress hunting actually works. I was on the same page.

"Is this where they really buy their dresses?" Isaiah muttered.

I gave him a shrug as Landon tosses him a glare, "Really, Isaiah? Your family is just as rich as mine, you know how these parties work."

Isaiah mocked Landon's shrug and shook his head, "Yeah, but I never knew dresses cost over a hundred. They all look the same."

"Here, try this on," he says, ignoring Isaiah's presence as he pulls out a long white, sparkling maxi dress. It was an expensive piece, I was able to tell the moment we walked into the store; before he even laid eyes on the dress.

"No, no," I put my hand up defensively as I looked at the dress of money.

Landon shrugs, "Alright then," he simply responded as he drags the dress towards the cash register.

"Wait, you don't have to buy it for me," I called out, following behind him as I grabbed the bottom of the dress that was dragging against the carpet. It was too pricey for it to be dragging around in the store.

"Do you want to buy it?" Landon rebutted, tossing the dress over the counter as the cashier grabs the dress carefully and scans the card.

I slipped my body between Landon and the register, attempting to block him from paying, "I can borrow a dress from Bella. I'm sure she's going to have something I can wear for the night."

My idea slapped me in the back of my head as Landon rests both of his hands on the counter, locking me between his arms.

"Aubrey," he releases a smile of dominance as he peers over my body, "I told you already, it's not just a party."

"Yes it is," we hear Isaiah said as he was casually third wheeling our little affair.

"Isaiah, please," Landon was quick to get annoyed. He turned half of his body around, lifting one of his arm up to hold Isaiah back from fishing anymore excuses.

Taking this chance, I slipped out of the little jail cell and revealed a lost Landon, who soon to check out the dress.

Isaiah and I exchange glances as to how extra Landon was acting.

"Is the party really a big deal?" I asked Isaiah.

He finally releases a smile and nods, "Yeah."

The more I listen to these two argue, the more confused I am with the plot.

"Okay, Aubrey," Landon turns behind from his seat.

Isaiah and I argued over riding the shotgun. Unfortunately, Isaiah caught me by surprise when he told me that he could easily back out of the scheme Landon had planned out. I took defeat and seat in the back of Landon's Ferrari with my arms cross and a pout across my lips.

Both of their eyes were peering towards the backseat, as Isaiah allows Landon to scold me about the upcoming event.

"Isaiah will pick you up at seven, party starts at eight."

"But why-"

"You're dating the son of the host. You have to be there early to greet his parents and all that jazz," Landon shrugs casually, "tradition."

"You got that right," Isaiah butted in.

Landon sent Isaiah a glare for almost the thirtieth time, revealing nothing but an amused Isaiah sitting in the passenger seat.

"I'll come along a little later around eight thirty. The Carthys never arrive on time. I'll try to meet with you guys a little earlier, but to be sure I will arrive with Charles, however and I'll find a way to introduce my uncle to my best friend's date," Landon points at the both of us.

"Okay," I trailed off.

"And we'll figure out the rest from there," Landon concludes, earning a look of satisfaction from Isaiah.

I rose and eyebrow and exhaled in complete stress. Tonight is going to be a fun night.

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Six forty-five came along and I found myself panicking with my attire. I had my dress on but never really had the time to take a complete look at it in the mirror. I was sitting at Bella's vanity table, doing my makeup and she was attempting to do my hair.

"Bella! Hurry, Isaiah's going to be here in fifteen!" I screamed in panic, throwing mascara onto my lashes.

"I'm trying!" she calls back, tugging on my hair almost viciously at this point. Instead of complaining from the pain that was spiking on my scalp, I was more appreciative of Bella for her effort in putting this ball of tangles together.

Ten minutes has passed, and I've finished my makeup. Bella finished my hair with a side fishtail braid, that matched up with my minimalistic makeup. I took a deep breath and stood up, sliding my feet into a random pair of flats that Bella has picked out for me. Walking around in heels didn't sound like a good idea especially if the dress was going to cover my feet anyways.

"Oh wait," Bella starts, "The tag is still on your dress."

Bella reached behind the v-backless dress and unclipped the tag. Her face froze, as her lips fell apart. She stares at me with shock, however I was too busy packing up my stuff to even bother paying attention to what she's looking at.

"What?" I half-heartedly asked, as my attention was peered on top of my pile of clothes. Walking over to the pile, I quickly folded the clothing before setting it on the edge of Bella's bed.

"This dress is really expensive," Bella mumbles, setting that tag carefully on top of her drawer.

I scoffed sarcastically, "Landon didn't let me argue about it."

"He's a really nice friend for offering you that dress," she smiles, walking towards me as she observes the dress wrapped along my body, "It looks very nice."

I shook my head and casted her an assuring look, "No way I'm keeping this, I'm going to return it to him after this party."

Bella nods, "So, you're going to Isaiah's party because?"

It just occurred to me that Bella was stuck in the darkness. I didn't explain to her anything about my family, and anything about Landon's plot to help fight the debt. I pressed my lips together in a thin line and slightly felt guilty for not catching her up with the details.

"Because," I started.

My phone started ringing as my contact name clearly states 'Isaiah' in bold letters.

"I'll tell you everything later, I promise," I panicked and quickly jogged out of Bella's room, closing the bedroom door behind me before she was able to sneak in an 'okay' through the cracks.

Almost in fast motion, I skipped down the stairs and out the door. I brushed the loose strand of hair behind my ear as in front of me laid a single white Tesla; who's door automatically opened upwards.

I was caught my surprise and jumped back a little. Isaiah sure doesn't flaunt his money around like this.

"Hey Aubrey," Isaiah calls out through the door. He was formally dressed in a gray suit, with a burgundy colored tie. His hair was gelled back nicely, unlike his originally messy hair he always has in school. He had a gold-plated watch that was clinging onto his wrist as on of his hand casually rested on the gear shift.

My eyebrows were still furrowed in surprise of this luxury car.

"We don't have all day," he broke my chain of thought, sending a soft chuckle along my way. I shook my head and proceeded towards the car, sliding into the passenger seat as the door came down and softly closes itself against the frame.

I had my eye on the door as if I just saw an alien from another planet. Better yet, an alien car.

"It's not mine," Isaiah smiles at me as she presses the button to start the car. The soft engine turned on, as if it wasn't on at all. I was amused by how fancy a car can actually get.

"I have a soccer mom van," he concludes, slightly laughing at the reference.

I found it ironic and funny how a person with clearly so much money, is so humble and accepts the fact that money doesn't mean anything. It's probably because Isaiah had a passion for soccer,

something to keep him distracted from money; aside from his best friend. I laughed at his joke and shook my head.

He drove; or well the car drove, us into the highway and towards a restaurant that was rented for the party.

"Is there anything I should know about your family before I go and meet them?" I asked him, curiously.

"Well, my parents are pretty nice. They'll just accept you as one of my dates. Just say we met at school through Landon or something," Isaiah smiles confidently.

"Why am I going as your date again?"

Isaiah sent me an 'are you serious' look before sighing in response, "Because it will be less obvious if you come as my date. If Charles sees how much we actually really like each other, it'll hurt my family if we all found out about Charles's little schemes. Then it all goes into this big 'Should I hurt my allies's son to keep the money' type of thing. To conclude, just follow our lead and we should be fine."

"What if your parents believe that we're actually dating?"

He pauses, before looking over at me, "Well that sucks for them, doesn't it."

I was taken aback by Isaiah's answer but finally tried to settle myself down. There was no point on dwelling on the fact that this plot line might not work out, but it was too late to back out now. I sighed as I watched all the cars we sped past.

Soon enough, we ended up in front of a big cruise ship with the name 'Chaser' printed in beautiful calligraphy on the side of it. I was starting to feel lost. Isaiah didn't turn out to be someone who I thought I knew, he definitely had a lot more to him than just an innocent boy who loves soccer.

My door opened as I saw Isaiah holding his hand out to me. Faking a smile, I grabbed his hand as he pulls me to my feet. We interlocked our fingers as he presses the button on his keys, closing the door and locking the car. In silence, we both walked towards the ship and onto the dock that led us towards the basement.

"Carthys family called in and told us they'll come in around nine. They have some business to attend to beforehand," a voice echoed through the fancy wooded area, "So I guess we'll have to wait before sailing."

"Mom?" Isaiah calls out to the voice, pulling me behind him as we strolled into the spacious basement. There were shelves with wine, top to bottom of the ceiling, and big couches laying around that made this place look more like a lobby.

A lady with dark black hair, that was pulled into a slick bun turns around and greets her son by planting a fat kiss on his cheek. He leans down to accept the kiss before tugging me in front of him.

"This is Aubrey," he started, "She's a friend back from school and I wanted to introduce you two." Isaiah had his hand resting on my lower back, rubbing it as the warmth of his hand assures me that it's okay to trust his mother.

Before I was able to formally greet her, a big smile gaped across her face as she threw her arms around my shoulder, "Great seeing you, Aubrey!" The smell of her luscious perfume caught my attention as to how young she also looked considering that she was a mother of a high school senior.

"I was hoping for him to bring you home, he's been talking about you for quite a while now," she whispers in my ear, pulling back as she sends me a playful laugh.

Although I had a smile on my lips, my head was utterly confused as to where this conversation was going. I glanced over at Isaiah who was currently busy greeting the rest of his family member; catching eyes with me before sending me a soft smile.

What?

Chapter 37

Isaiah and I were sitting in the basement together, joking about the little fangirls he had around in school during his soccer games. Even though Isaiah never talks about the little fan group he has, he was very well aware of the existence of girls gushing over him.

"Come on, you were probably like 'Oh my goodness, Isaiah's so hot I wish he can kick the ball like how he – ow!'"

I kept a killer smile on my face as my hand made impact to the side of his head. There was a loud slapping sound while laughter escaped my lips. I couldn't help but find amusement in Isaiah's cheerful personality. The only side that I've experienced was his childish moments where he seemed to not be aware of his surroundings.

Isaiah leans towards me as he grabs both of my wrist, laughing as he attempts to growl at the same time. I leaned away from him and shaking off my shoes, bringing my feet over the couch and onto his chest. I pushed him away with the strength of my legs, uncontrollably laughing at the sight of a wild Isaiah.

"Stop! Stop, I'm sorry," I cried, trying to hide my face under the decorative pillow.

"Aubrey Watson!" he snarls, shaking my arms with my wrist with a devious smile.

"You two are getting along pretty well," a voice interrupted our bonding moment. We stayed in that weird position, looking up at the interruption as if we were just caught as cat and dogs.

Standing in front of us was Landon, dressed in a regular black suit and a bowtie that complimented his slightly tan skin and dark brunette hair. His light blue eyes were piercing at both of our bodies and Isaiah and I were bewildered from his stunning appearance; and getting caught in the act.

I looked up as Isaiah against and pushed him with my feet once more as his hands releases my wrist. We both sat up and brushed our outfits and hair before obediently facing Landon. My cheeks were gushing red; not because I had a little fun moment with Isaiah, but because the embarrassment of getting caught in that position by Landon. That position probably brought in so many misunderstandings.

"Anyways," Landon trialed off as he sat on the coffee table, facing both of us.

Isaiah suddenly cut him off, "Wait, it's only eight. Why are you here already?"

Landon blinks at Isaiah and innocently answers with a "Because I can."

"But that wasn't part of the plan."

"Isaiah, me arriving early has nothing to do with the plan." He sighs, covering his face with his palms.

"What?"

"I just came a little early."

"But you Carthys always come 'fashionably late'," Isaiah rebutted, putting quotes into the air as he jokes around with Landon.

I looked back and forth between Landon and Isaiah; amused by their little random argument.

"That's why Charles isn't here yet," Landon slightly whispers, looking at our surroundings before continuing with his sentence, "When he comes, then we'll introduce Aubrey to Charles and the rest of my family."

"The rest of your family?" I asked, suddenly feeling my back heating up as my palm starts sweating. Originally, I believed that I was already nervous to see Charles, let alone the rest of Landon's family.

Footsteps behind us were heard rushing down the stairs before Isaiah's mother motioned us to come towards the set of stairs, "Children, come! Greet yourselves."

She didn't seem to notice Landon's early appearance through her rushing to get us upstairs.

- - -

I held Isaiah's hand, palms slightly sweating from the anxiety trailing down my back. I found myself greeting other guests alongside with Isaiah, shaking many other hands and exchanging multiple smiles that was good enough to his my nerves jolting in my body.

Suddenly, I felt Isaiah's hand trailing behind my back, resting on my waist as he leans down towards me.

"He's here," Isaiah whispers in my ear before standing up straight, shaking hands with the last person from the group who previously entered.

Strolling through the door came four males. One with a top hat, oldest of the bunch who I assume is Landon's father. Landon was standing next to an older guy, who I assumed to be his brother. They didn't look the same at all, after all they were only half-brothers. Lastly, came cruising in a familiar figure with a scruff and light blue eyes. He eyes immediately landed on mine, a smile crept among his face as his eyes spoke nothing but recognition.

When Landon was planning out the plot, it sounded as if we were able to flow through the scheme very well. However, Landon left one thing out; the most important thing.

Charles and I have met.

My hand immediately jolted towards Isaiah's hand that was resting on my waist. He sensed my nervousness and slightly squeezed my hip, assuring me that it was okay. However, it made me feel even more anxious. Landon's father smiles at me, holding out his hand as I shook it with ease.

Followed by Landon's older brother who had almost better features than his younger brother. He smiles at me, showing his straight white teeth as he greeted me with a "Nice to meet you," his deep, husky voice flowing towards me.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you," I responded, pushing out the shakiness in my voice.

"Hey," Landon greets, winking at me as we made eye contact. Landon came in for a hug and I wrapped my arms around his waist softly, "Loosen yourself," he whispers in my ears.

I swallowed nervously as the last man came strolling in. The closer Charles got to me, the more my body started shaking. I pressed my lips together in a thin line as I watched him exchange greetings with both of Isaiah's parents. Luckily, Isaiah's parents were able to stall out enough time before I finally thought of the first thing that popped up in my mind.

As soon as Charles releases his hand shake from Isaiah's father and took a step towards Isaiah and I, I swiftly turned my body towards Isaiah's. In a smooth motion, I grabbed Isaiah's face and sneaked my thumb between our lips, closing my eyes as I pretended to have a meaningful kiss with my finger. Isaiah seemed to stumble in surprise and placed his hands on my back, holding me up as he soon fell into the act. We both stayed like that for a few seconds, before I pulled away, smiling up at Isaiah as if I was 'in love'.

I removed my thumb and caressed his cheek, using that as an excuse as to why my hand was cupping his face. Isaiah looks back at me and mouthed the words 'What are you doing' before Isaiah's mother came up to us.

Her laugh caught us off guard as we pulled away from each other, "Well aren't you two lovebirds just having a great time?"

"Yes, mother," Isaiah chuckles and smiles back at her.

"Go ahead, and enjoy yourselves. Go grab some food, we're done with greetings for today," she sighs playfully, motioning us to head towards the main facility of the restaurant.

I can't believe that worked.

Even though Charles was still standing there, I turned my back towards him and pretended that I never noticed his presence. The introduction could wait.

"How could you be so stupid!" I whispered, in an angry tone.

Not too long ago I was able to peel myself away from Isaiah, and dragged Landon into some small storage unit. It was surprising how I even manage to find a little closet in this big yacht. We were in the water now, floating along who knows where and here I am stuck on this ship with a person who sexual assaulted me.

"You wouldn't have agreed otherwise," Landon whispers back to me, almost in a hissing tone.

"The answer to that should've been obvious!"

"What are you going to do instead? Pay back the debt on your own?"

"Anything but confront the guy that assaulted me. You saw it happen too," I pressed my lips together in a thin line, "Landon, how is this plan going to work? He knows we have some type of relation, and now I'm out there as Isaiah's date? How is this all making any sense?"

Landon raises both of his hands slightly in annoyance, placing each of them on the sides of my face, "Just, trust me. I know it sounds confusing and out of place right now. Just trust me."

With that, I sighed in defeat as I found myself getting caught up in the complicated situation. Landon saw my stress and placed his hands calmly on my shoulders, "Just trust me," he repeated, leaning his face towards me.

The expression on his face shows his sincerity. He places his forehead on mine slightly, moving his hands down my upper arm as he wraps his fingers around my elbow. We found ourselves unconsciously rocking back and forth to the ship's gravity, and pushed ourselves away the moment we felt the heat rising in the storage room.

As soon as we got out of each other's grip, I stumbled towards the door and peeked it open before stepping out. No one seemed to pay attention to us getting out of the weird room, until I felt a set of eyes landing on us. I straightened up and turned towards the feeling. Charles was watching both of us in the middle of the crowd of people. I turned back around finding out that Landon had slipped out of my sight, replaced by Isaiah, casually greeting me as he places his arm around my shoulder.

"You ready?" Isaiah asks. Without me answering, he slowly pushed me towards the crowd, and in the crowd we held hands again, dragging me around older audiences drinking and listening to the classical music in the dim setting.

I breathed slowly, following Isaiah as I found myself getting a lot closer to Charles. Charles had his eyes pierced on me, eyes never leaving my body. I felt uncomfortable real quick. But I was able to work up enough guts to look at him in the eyes.

"Sorry, we didn't get the chance to greet you in earlier," Isaiah started as we both stopped in front of Charles.

Charles looked quite young to be considered an uncle to Landon. He was probably only a few years older than us, even with his clean stubble he was able to pull off the look as the early twenty year old.

"Chaser," he simply greeted, shaking Isaiah's hand tightly, eyes never leaving mine.

I smiled at him, holding my hand out, "And Aubrey," he introduced. Surprisingly, he held my hand softly. Instead of shaking it like a normal business greeting, he pulled my hand towards his lips, planting a soft kiss on my knuckles before flashing a wink my way, "Even more beautiful than the last time I've seen you."

My heart stopped. I felt Isaiah's hand creeping along my lower back as he tightens his grip along my waist, "I could say the same," Isaiah chuckles, pulling my body towards him. Charles got the hint and let go of my hand, looking at Isaiah. The two were the same height, they easily exchanged glares as it was obvious that there was some sort of tension between them.

"Where's Landon? He should take a look at this," Charles spat, eyeing Isaiah's hand on my waist.

"Take a look at what?" I heard Landon's voice. Landon appeared by my side a little later, followed by his older brother Aiden. The two brother exchanged a smile, as if they were able to communicate telepathically.

Aiden definitely had more a broad body structure than Landon does. Even though the two look attractive in different ways, it was clear that Aiden appeared a few years older than Landon. Landon was thinner, he had slightly a baby face to him as his height was a few inches shorter than his brother.

"This beautiful structure that god has created," Charles mumbles underneath his breath as he starts taking steps towards me. The grip from Isaiah has tightened as he remained by my side, holding me from any sketchy scheme that Charles had in his mind.

Charles started strolling around Isaiah and I, feeling his eyes scanning my entire body as he lands in front of us again.

"Aubrey," Charles smiles, standing not even a foot away from me, "Beautiful, beautiful creature," he taunted.

"Charles, you know what will happen if we tell dad about this behavior," Aiden speaks up, swirling the cup of wine in between his hand. He had his eyes on the deep red liquid in the cup, almost not caring about the consequences from his uncle.

Charles smirked, "What behavior? I'm just acting friendly."

"Aubrey Watson doesn't think so," Landon speaks up, putting both of his hands in the pocket of his pants as Charles's expression suddenly changes.

"Watson?" he rose an eyebrow, his look suddenly hardened the moment he repeated my last name.

I looked back at Aiden who simply nodded, taking a sip from his wine, "The Watson family, doesn't that sound familiar? Charles?" he asked as soon as he swallowed the fresh liquid. Aiden looks at me before turning his attention to Landon who's eyes seemed to be kept on me.

"Of course it does," a dark smile appeared on Charles's face, "Aubrey Watson. Who's dad that begged for money. Too bad your mother was never here to tell him it's not a good idea."

Oh hell, he did not.

Chapter 38

"Are you okay?" Isaiah asks me.

We were both sitting in the seats of the very top level of the yacht. It was an open rooftop, we were able to see the beautiful water unbalancing against each other and the pitch-black sky that was only lit by the moon.

It was about eleven at night already, and I was tired of everything that had went down today.

After Charles had mentioned about my mom, I couldn't help but suddenly back out of the act. It sounded like the plan didn't go out as smoothly as we expected it to, and I was already too drenched in nervousness to continue on with the game.

"Yeah," I responded, eyes peering out into the ocean. Isaiah sat in the seat next to me quietly. It was only the two of us on the rooftop. There were a few people here earlier, but they respectfully offered us a little privacy; it was Isaiah's party after all.

Isaiah sat there quietly, he was smart enough to give me a little silence for me to recollect my thoughts. I could feel Isaiah's eyes never leaving my face though. Although it did sound pretty weird, I got use to Isaiah's little stares.

I took a deep breath from the cold air; soon to realize that it was something I regretted doing. Instead of relieving my exhaustion, the cold air lingered into my body causing me to jerk, automatically wrapping my arms around myself. My body started shaking as I suddenly felt the goosebumps arising on my skin.

I was so distracted about the situation, I didn't even notice it was possibly before forty degrees outside.

It didn't take long for me to feel some sort of warmth around my arms. I looked back at Isaiah and noticed his jacket was suddenly draped around my shoulder. He smiles back at me and casually pulls out his phone. His other arm was resting on the back of my chair, legs propped up to where his ankle was resting on his other knee. He relaxing position soon made me lean back against my chair as we both sat in silence.

The silence didn't last so long until we heard footsteps coming up from the stairs. I turned my body around and captured Landon's odd expression. I couldn't read Landon's expression clearly however I just assume it was from the amount of stress we had to put in about the situation of Charles.

"I guess the plan didn't go as well as I expected it to," Landon mumbles, words suddenly slipping out from his lips in a cold manner.

"Tell me about it," I responded, patting the seat next to me motioning Landon to sit. He came over and sat down silently, I can smell his cologne lingering my way. I watched him as he leaned against his seat, releasing a slightly loud sigh.

"I really thought it was going to work," Landon mutters, bringing his hands up to his face as he rubs his eyes.

"It sounded like it was going to work," Isaiah says as his eyes were pierced onto the cell phone.

The three of us sulked in defeat. Isaiah had his right arm draped behind my chair, eyes focused on his device as if it was the only way out of this black hole. Landon had his elbow resting on the headrest of the chair, slightly facing me as he has his other hand rubs both of his temples with his index and thumb finger. I was leaning forward, with my elbows resting on my knees; chin on my palms. The iconic trio, at their lowest point.

Suddenly I felt a hand touching my shoulder, grabbing it softly in support. I sat up and looked towards whom I thought the hand belonged too. Landon finally removes his hand from his face, looking at me with a slightly confused expression. I blinked multiple times before realizing that Landon might not have been the person touching me.

I turned my head towards Isaiah.

All that was filled in Isaiah's eyes was softness. His dark brown eyes showed me nothing but protection. His phone was put away; one hand resting in the pocket of his pants, the other hand resting softly on the shoulder closest to Landon.

Isaiah smiles at me without showing his teeth, squeezing my shoulder lightly. I brought my hand up to his, and rests mine on top. I appreciated the support that Isaiah has been showing me since the beginning. Although he has annoyed me a couple of times, he didn't deserve the attitude he managed to put up with.

I smiled back at Isaiah, leaning towards him slightly as I innocently rested my head on his shoulder as a small thank you. I pulled away quickly and leaned back against my head. Isaiah removes his arm and pulls out his phone again, doing who knows what.

Landon has stayed quiet the entire time. However, he's been watching the entire time. I felt a little bit guilty, sensing that he probably felt left out from Isaiah and I's little moment. But I brushed it off. Something little like this won't hurt his feelings, he's Landon Carthy after all.

I closed my eyes as I let the breeze attack my neck, sending cold signals down my spine.

After what felt like hours on the roof top, my mouth started to feel dry and my bladder was on the edge of exploding. I pulled off the expensive grey blazer of Isaiah's and set it on the chair, before pulling on my dress and letting it softly flow with the wind.

"Where are you going?" Isaiah asks, looking up at me as he grabs his blazer.

"To the bathroom," I responded.

I noticed from the corner of my eyes, Landon getting ready to stand up as if he was going to escort me to the bathroom.

I smiled at his gesture but held a hand up, "I can go by myself."

Landon willingly sits back down and leans back against his chair, also pulling out his phone.

The two best friend had almost an identical position. Phone resting in their left hand, right hand in their pockets, both legs straight out in front of them and their eyes resting on the phone calmly. The only thing that was different between the two was that Isaiah's hair was gelled back, as for Landon's hair softly dancing along with the wind.

Feeling the awkwardness in the air as I was observing the boys, I snapped out of the trace and made my way towards the door that lead me downstairs towards the main entrance of the party.

Making my way to the bathroom, I couldn't help but notice how mature this party was. Sure, it was business party but there was hardly any dancing, or loud music bursting. It was more like a get together with hundreds of people at dining tables and classical music. I pressed my lips together as I grabbed the handle of the bathroom.

It was locked.

I released a sigh, feeling my bladder about to explode on this ship ride. I leaned back against the wall in front of the bathroom, staring at the door and waiting for it to open.

Without having the intention to, I closed my eyes feeling the cruise bouncing up and down lightly from the motion of the waves.

"Hello again," a voice spoke up.

I opened my eyes slowly seeing Landon's older brother smiling at me with a soft grin as he offers a hand towards me.

"Hi," I simply responded, grabbing his hand.

I expected a handshake from the guy, instead he brought my hand towards his lips, planting a soft kiss on it. He stands back up straight again and pulls out the wine glass that he's been hiding in his other hand during the mini greeting.

"My brother mentioned about you once," Aiden says, looking at me with the green eyes that he may have inherited from his mother. Unlike Landon's blue eyes, Aiden's vision showed a lot more kindness and happiness.

I smiled at his sentence, "What did he say?"

"Well first, he was complaining about a new girl from school. And how he hated her the moment he's laid eyes on her," Aiden chuckles, swirling the wine around in the circular glass, "Coming to the conclusion that the girl was you, he continued to talk about how much he's gone so far with his hatred."

I was slightly taken aback by Aiden's story telling, however I couldn't help but feel a little bit relieved that the hardship between Landon and I was over.

"You two seem very close," I responded.

"Of course. Even though he is a pain in the ass sometimes, he's still my younger brother," Aiden commented.

I pressed my lips together in a thin line, remembering about the story that Landon has told me long ago.

"I heard you guys are half-brothers," I said in a questioning tone.

Without a doubt, Aiden nodded.

"Yeah, we are. But we've been together since he was born. We consider each other as full, blood brothers."

I nodded to his response at there was a quick silence between us.

Then Aiden spoke up again.

"I heard you have a brother?"

"Yeah," I nodded again, "Austin."

"How's he?"

"He's good, he's going to college right now," I responded, crossing my legs as I started to feel the desperation of needing to release my bladder.

"How about your parents? Mom and Dad?"

I smiled softly and shook my head, "No mom."

Aiden stops swirling the wine in his glass and softens his posture, "Sorry," he apologizes as he takes a sip of his drink. I noticed him feeling uneasy after he's touched an uncomfortable subject about my life.

"It's okay, don't stress," I responded.

The door in front of us suddenly opens, revealing an old high-class lady dressed in red. The moment she steps foot outside, the smell of rich and strong perfume fills the air. Aiden turns around towards her and greets her with a smile.

"Hello, Ms. Winthrop," he greets.

Taking this chance, I swerved around her and shoved myself into the bathroom. I didn't care about sending so-called Ms. Winthrop and introduction; I just had to pee.

- - -

The two male sat there in silence as they fiddled around with their phones, mentally begging for this business party to quickly finish. Landon was the first to glance away from his phone, Isaiah was the second.

The two friends looked at each other before putting away their phones, as if they both knew that they had something to discuss.

After his brother, Isaiah was the person Landon admires the most on this planet. There was no better feeling in the world but to be accompanied by his own best friend. Although the two may have heated moments, they were always forgiven almost immediately.

Landon slightly turns his body towards Isaiah, pressing his lips in a thin line as he shoves both of his hands into the pockets of his pants.

"I.C," Landon calls. Isaiah sits up straight as he hears his initials.

"You and Aubrey," he mumbles, looking at his best friend's large brown eyes before continuing his sentence, "Did you guys have fun?"

"Of course," Isaiah sends a soft smile, "Did you?"

Landon nods. He allowed the silence to fill the air before feeling his nerves jolting against his skin. Finally, he worked up the nerve to confess.

"Do you like her?" he asks.

Isaiah was quiet for a second. However it didn't take long for him to nod and respond with an easy "Yes."

Something about Isaiah's response suddenly made Landon angry. With both of his hands in his pockets, he squeezed his leg, feeling his knuckles almost becoming numb and white from the harshness. His heart started beating rapidly against his chest, and something inside him made him what to scream and punch his best friend across the face.

But he couldn't.

He couldn't do that to his best friend.

Not again.

"Something tells me that you do too," Isaiah speaks up again, turning his head towards Landon. They exchange looks of pain. There was no more hiding to the fact that the two best friends may have shared the same love interest.

Landon didn't respond after that.

It was quiet.

"Guys," a soft, high-pitched voice spoke up. The two males turn their head at the same time and landed on the girl that they both perhaps love.

Chapter 39

I opened the door of my bathroom to reveal Aiden and Ms. Winthrop still having a conversation. They both looked at me, and Aiden motions me to come forward.

Ms. Winthrop had a beautiful red satin dress, that was poufy and long. The train of her dress trails at least a foot behind her, and she had a white faux fur scarf that was elegantly wrapped around her elbows from the back.

"Greetings, my dear," she introduces to me, rubbing my upper arm the moment I've reached their meeting bubble.

"This is Isaiah's date, Aubrey Watson," Aiden says.

She nods at me willingly, and looks at my dress from top to bottom.

"This is a stunning dress you have on dear," she mutters, admiring the beaming sparks from the white dress.

"Thank you," I smiled, "Landon actually bought it for me."

She propped a smile on her thin red lips, "I've heard."

As I kept my eyes on Ms. Winthrop, I felt a weird tension on my shoulder. Something about the weird vibe told me not to turn around, and ignore it.

Something about the tension told me to leave.

"Speaking of Landon," I started, "I have to go talk to him about something. It was nice meeting you, Ms. Winthrop."

I waved goodbye at Aiden and turned my back towards the uneasy feeling, walking away from it as soon as possible.

I found myself regretting my decision as soon as I felt a hand around my wrist, pulling my body into the storage room that Landon and I was not too long ago. My breath stopped as the figure leaned against me, hand in front of my face.

It didn't take me long to recognize the bright blue eyes and scruffy chin. Charles had my body pinned against the shelves, his eyes glaring straight into my eyes. There was something about Charles that made me immediately feel defeated.

"Hey there, beautiful," he growls, leaning his lips towards my right ear.

I looked up at him, trying not to show my fear.

I can feel his cold hands brushing against my arm, trailing down to my hand. With a jolt of surprise, he grabs both of my wrists, pinning them above my head and his other hand continues to travel around my body.

"Scream and I'll make sure your father gets arrested for not paying me back," hissed Charles.

I pressed my lips together, looking at him with my toughest expression. But on the inside, I felt helpless. I felt hopeless. There was nothing I was able to do.

I blinked back the tears as Charles continues to put his hands where they didn't belong. There must be something I could do.

I felt his hand trail behind my neck, unzipping the dress from the top to my waist.

The moment I felt the world crashing down around me, there was only one thing that occurred into my mind.

I kicked upwards.

Then I kicked again, hoping to land between his legs.

Third attempt and Charles finally stumble back, clutching onto his stomach as his shoulder hits against the shelves behind him. I growled as tears gushed down my face uncontrollably. I brought my right leg up towards his stomach and kicked him against the metal shelf, before picking up the bottom of my dress for myself to freely run without tripping.

My throat tightened as I clenched my teeth, trying my hardest not to gather any attention towards my quiet sobbing. I gripped the knob on the door and busted it open, running towards the place I felt the most protected.

I swerved around people, not caring if my dress was still unzipped and my back was exposed. Nothing could be worst than to be molested by your friend's uncle. I made my way towards the stairs and raced up.

Sitting in front of me were the two men I've been longing to cry to.

"Guys," I choked between my tears, silently hiccuping from my sobs. Landon and Isaiah both turns around. I closed my eyes, bringing my hands up to my face as I started crying loudly against my palms.

It didn't take long for me to hear them stumbling out of their seats, running up to me and grabbing my shoulders and arms.

"What happened?" I heard Isaiah snarl underneath his breath. I removed my hands from my face, looking at him just once before he mentally figures out that happens.

His expression hardened.

Without giving me the time to explain, Isaiah stomps off. He managed to kick one of the chair, knocking it over a few times before dashing down the stairs back to the main floor.

Landon stood in front of me, mouth opened by my reckless appearance. He brought his hands up, cupping my face as he moves the loose strands of hair away from my face. His eyebrows furrowed, and nothing left his lips.

I stood there, looking up at him, sniffing.

"I'm sorry," he finally mumbles under his breath.

My heart beat begins to slow down as the only thing I can look at to calm down was his face. He brushed his thumb against my cheek, as I willingly leaned against his hand; tears uncontrollably dripping from my eyes.

After a minute, he removed his hand from my face and walks behind me. I turned my head, watching him until my head couldn't turn any further. Then I turned my attention forward, as I feel the heat of his hand on my lower back.

He grabbed the zipper of my dress, pulling it up slowly until the dress started to hug my body again. As I stood there, I couldn't help but feel lost from life.

Just like the first time I've encountered this with Charles, I felt dirty. I didn't want anyone else to touch me, or anyone to even look at me. I looked ahead, warm tears dripping down my face as all that appeared in my vision was the blur of the moonlight and ocean.

A few moments have passed by and we were sitting on the chairs, my head calmly resting on Landon's shoulder. Landon reached up his hand, and tapped my chin. I turned my attention to him as I lifted my head off of his shoulder.

He stands up and reaches into his pocket, walking towards the railing of the cruise ship.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

He smiles at me before pulling out a pack of cigarettes. Taking one out, he places it between his lips before returning the pack into his pockets and searches for his lighter.

Seeing the cigarette between his lips reminded me of the first day I met him. The day he shoved a cigarette in my face.

I found myself out of my seat, walking towards him unconsciously as I was reminiscing about the earlier days of high school. The first few months where he bullied me, and I hated him so much for it. And now here we are, working together to solve a little quest that we personally planned out.

Landon kept his gaze on me as continued to walk closer to him.

"Aubrey?" he asks me. But I ignored him. Instead I looked up at him, and stopped as our body was only an inch away. With the until cigarette still hanging between his lips I inched my face forward, grabbing the cigarette between my lips before taking a hold of it.

I took the cigarette, feeling the cancer between my fingertips. I twirled the cigarette around my fingers before letting it rest in the middle of my palm.

I can hear Landon chuckling, watching me. I crumpled up the cigarette, flakes falling into my palms and onto to the floor.

The unconscious side of my brain suddenly told my arms to lift itself, to hold the railings on both sides of Landon's; and trap him in my little space. I threw the cigarette into the water as I kept my gaze over his shoulder.

"Aubrey," Landon whispers, feeling inferior.

I snapped out of my little daze and realized that I might've made myself look a little crazy. But my body didn't want to move.

There was something that made me want to be with him, hug him and possibly kiss him forever. But I knew that would be impossible. Charles is related to Landon, and there was no way I was going to bond with someone who is related to my predator.

My body rejected my thought.

Instead my arms trailed up his shoulders, and around his neck. I pulled his warm body towards mine, one hand resting behind his neck and the other resting behind his head. I buried my face into his neck, feeling his rapid pulse and stiff body movement.

I heard him clear his throat, before wrapping his arms around my waist, pulling me in even tighter. I felt him leaning his body towards mine, breath lingering on my neck as all we could hear was each other's heartbeat.

"Are you okay?" he whispers. His deep voice just made me want to cling onto him, and cry against his chest. I felt so much protection around him in this moment, I didn't want anything else to ruin it.

"No," I responded.

Chapter 40

After the party, Isaiah met up with us one last time before coming to the conclusion that Landon should drive me home. It was already half passed midnight, but so much has happened over these past few hours that it felt like we've spent a year on this cruise.

Austin called me a while ago, asking me where I've been and if I was safe. All I managed to tell him was that Landon, Isaiah and I were working out a plan to get help for our debt. He almost immediately gave in and decided to cover for me when our father gets home.

There I was, strolling down the empty parking lot with Landon. The rest of his family decided to stay back in the ship – even when it was already parked, to talk about other business plans for their growing companies. It was quiet between Landon and I, but there was no sense of awkwardness or uncomfortableness. There was just some peace and quiet.

"You can have the dress," Landon says, with his hands in his pockets; probably fiddling around with the pack of cigarettes.

"Isn't this expensive?" I asked him, patting my thighs as I feel the glitter sequences hitting against my palms.

He shook his head, "Maybe to some people," he mutters.

"I can't accept this," I guiltily responded. It was kind of Landon to offer me a beautiful dress, but this was probably the only night I'll ever be needing a beautiful evening gown like this.

"I won't take it back," Landon chuckles, his shoulder slightly bumping into mine as we were walking.

"Why not?"

"I don't need a dress," he raises an eyebrow, nudging me softly with his elbow.

I smiled at his smart answer, however didn't want to give up, "But you paid for it."

"I know," he nods, "But I bought it for you."

"But—"

"Aubrey, just keep it," he sighs, sending me a slight smile, "If you don't want it, then sell it."

I pressed my lips together in a thin line and finally took defeat in our little debate. There was no way I was able to win over Landon Carthy. I looked over at him. Landon was facing forward, hands still in his pocket as his gaze was off into the night sky where his car was probably parked.

There was something about Landon's appearance that bothered me. Although the suit fits his toned, yet skinny body structure very well, there was something a little off about it. I furrowed my eyebrows as my eyes suddenly landed on his bow tie.

It was untied.

Half of me wanted to just let it be, maybe he untied it for a reason.

But majority of the tie was hanging off of his neck, about to slip off any second. I spoke at the correct time. The little fabric slipped off of the back of his neck, sliding down his chest as I held my hand out, gracefully catching the tie before it was able to hit the ground.

That was when we both stopped out tracks.

Both of our attention was on the little black fabric I had in my hand. But our eyes started to exchange glances that may have felt like a longing friendship that's begging to continue. I swallowed nervously as I straightened up, holding the tie in my hand.

Our eyes were still locked. His blue eyes were now dark, his black hair feathered across his forehead as it slightly covers the first half of his eyes. Under his hair, I could feel his eyebrows inching together as all that his eyes managed to show were misery and sorrow.

My body started to sulk, I wanted to hug him and tell him that everything was okay. However, I could sense the horrible feeling of him knowing that his uncle has done such things to me. But no one can be a hero more than once.

I finally lifted my hand and wrapped the black fabric around his neck, laying the bow tie resting along his shirt as I patted them down against the wind. I didn't want to tie the bow tie, in fear that it might be uncomfortably to him.

And that's when I felt his hands pressed against mine.

With his hands on top of mine, and mine on top of his chest, I could feel the warm air flowing around us. The cold wind didn't seem to bother us as our loose strands of hair danced against the wind.

His hands then wraps around mine, lifting them off of his chest as he brings both of my hands towards his lips. Déjà vu flashed back in my mind where a few months ago, Landon had blown warm air against my hands to keep them warm. That's what he did again.

My heart beat started to steady. The butterflies in my stomach didn't exist, except the feeling in my stomach was a lot more warm, comfortable and easing.

As if everything happened in fast motion, Landon pulls my hands away, dropping them, cupping my face in one of his hand while the other fiddles with my fingers softly.

His rough skinned fingers, trailing along mine. I felt his fingers sliding between mine as we both willingly intertwined them.

Our faces were now a few inches apart. The wind was blowing his hair away from his face revealing the sharp features he had on his face. The small light from the lamp post shined on his light blue eyes, staring down at me with mixed emotions.

He leaned towards me, slowly as I stood still. We both closed our eyes, waiting for the special moment to come.

But it didn't.

All we felt was our lips brushing against each other's, breathes lingering on each other's faces. Even though our eyes were still closed, we sensed the hesitation between us. I swallowed nervously, my breath started to shake and came out unstably.

Our foreheads pressed together, as we opened our eyes at the same time. I gazed down at the floor below us as he did the same. There was no way we could continue this journey after all that has happened.

I pulled away from him, hands against his chest as I pushed him away softly. His face suddenly hardened, as he grabs onto my wrist, pulling me towards him as I was cut short on my breath. Our face again, was only an inch away. But this time his eyes showed me pain.

Taking this moment, I finally gave in and pushed out my second thoughts. I tilted my head upwards, until our lips had finally met. There was something about this kiss that put me at ease. Even though Landon and I has shared a kiss before, this one was tied in with so many emotions that made this feel as if it was both of our first time.

Moving my lips along with his for a quick second, we both pulled away and looked at each other. All the dirt I felt that was lingering on my body suddenly felt clean, I felt like everything that has caused me to look down on myself disappeared.

I suddenly felt confidence.

I lifted my hand and held the back of his neck, pulling him in for another short kiss that he willingly gave back. His hand slid up to my waist, resting on them lightly as my arms unconsciously wrapped around his neck. My eyes were closed, but for some reason I was able to picture us in the paradise. I pulled away a second time.

I opened my eyes first as his fluttered open second. We exchanged looks of passion and deep feelings. I might've felt a way towards Landon that I promised myself not to ever feel. But I

couldn't help but to appreciate all the effort he's put into our friendship even after the first few months of hardship that he's given me.

Landon sends me a soft smile, brushing my hair through his fingers softly.

"The bad boy has lost his ego," he jokes. Even though it was almost pitch dark outside, I saw his cheeks gush into a slightly pink color before he breaks lose from our holds. He turns back towards the front and continues to walk along my side towards the car.

Chapter 41

After that night, a week went by without any of us speaking out about what happened. Austin managed to convince our father to let him get a part time job, in order to help pay at least just a little portion of our debt. The deal only went through for Austin to work, and for me to only focus in school.

Landon and I exchanged a few normal conversations, but we somehow kept our distance. Meanwhile, Colton, Bella and I caught up the past few days about all the stuff that happened when we were all separated. I couldn't work up to nerve to tell them about the debt though, there was possibly no way they would've sit still hearing about it.

Colton's current girlfriend is named Cathy Johnson. He explained to Bella and I about their two year long relationship, until they had to deal with long distancing ever since she's moved away. I didn't feel quite as bad as I did back when I felt a certain way towards Colton. There was something in my heart and told me thanked the lord that Colton and I didn't work out. I couldn't necessarily put my tongue on it though.

I opened the door into my Pre-Calculus class and did the usual. Walked to my seat, casted Landon a small smile, and proceeded to take note from our lousy teacher. Our classmates got use to the friendship between Landon and I. At first, they found it odd and disgusting that Landon was hanging out with a wallflower like me, but after time has passed; no one really bother to give it anymore attention.

I bit the top of my lip, tapping the lead of my pencil against the paper as I studied the equation in front of me. With a sigh, I wrote down the answer to our example question and put down the pencil, leaning back against my chair to slightly stretch out my back.

"So," I heard Landon whisper towards me, "Is your phone number still the same?"

I furrowed my eyebrows at the random question, and squinted my eyes as I blew him the word "Yes."

I just watched him as he nodded and casually returns his attention to his phone.

Landon was an odd student. He never takes notes, barely pays attention in class, however would end up with an almost perfect score on his tests. He's that kid.

I didn't think much about the question he just asked me earlier, I didn't think much about the thing between us either. Yes, we've shared a few kisses but for some reason it felt normal to be around with him. It felt like we were together, but not together.

I leaned back against my seat and stared at the white board with an unamused expression. Mr. Winston was still on his little rampage about the horrible test scores that everyone had gotten during the last test.

"So what did you do with the dress," Landon speaks up again, finally putting his phone into the pocket of his. He looked over at me, turning his body slightly to me as I kept my eyes pinned straight onto the board in front of us.

"It's in my closet," I responded, not really caring about his curiosities.

I can see Landon nodding at me from my peripheral vision.

- - -

I yawned as I threw my body back against my bed. Stretching my arms about and releasing a loud groan, I rolled over to the side and covered my face with the pillow. I decided that if I closed my eyes and fall asleep, dad and Austin would come home soon.

The house felt lonely without Austin around. It usually is just always us two in this small house; but now that he's got a part time job, there's not one else but me.

Just as I was about to drift off to Neverland, my phone chimed, alerting me that there was an incoming call.

"Seriously," I hissed underneath my breath as I reached over to my phone that was resting at the corner of my bed. Without even looking at the contact, I swiped answer on the call and pressed it against my ear.

"Hello?" I muttered in an exhausted voice.

"Hello? May I speak with Aubrey, please?" a woman's voice responded. I was suddenly taken by surprise, the voice sounded extremely familiar, but I couldn't put my tongue onto who it might actually be.

"This is her," I answered, a little bit clearer this time.

Before I had a chance to breath, she immediately beams.

"Aubrey! This is Mrs. Winthrop, how are you?"

At that point, I was silent. Mrs. Winthrop?

A light bulb suddenly popped on my head as I remember the little talk I had with Aiden and her after using the bathroom. She was the older lady with the beautiful red dress.

A smile unconsciously appeared across my lips as I answered, "I'm good, how are you?"

"I'm doing great! Honey, I have a big favor I'd like to ask you," she says, almost in the most friendliest, delicate voice I've ever heard.

"Oh yeah?" I slightly laughed, "What is it?"

"Remember that dress you were wearing?" I can sense her smiling through the phone, "Darling, is there any way for me to get a hold of that dress?"

I suddenly sat up straight, "You can have it!"

I heard her gasping from the other side of the phone, "Dear, god no! It's an all original Elie Saab haute couture!"

Okay?

"It would be a crime for you to just give it to me for free," she concludes.

I pressed my lips together in a thin line, "Are you sure?"

"Of course, there's no way I'm getting that dress for free," she simply responded, "How about thirty grand, is that fine with you?"

I could feel my heart sink to my stomach. There was nothing else on my mind other than the price of the amount of debt my family owns. My heart started to skip multiple beats, my breathing started to step up in a faster pace.

"Hello? Sweetie?" I heard her calling out for me.

"Yeah," I stuttered, swallowing nervously as I rubbed my palm against my thighs.

"Is thirty grand alright for you?" she repeated the offer.

I immediately nodded as if she could see me, "Yes!" I responded almost screaming from happiness.

I heard her laughing on the other side of the line before replying with, "Alright, I'll come to pick it up tomorrow. Thank you, sweetheart."

"No, thank you!" I grinned widely, biting my bottom lip.

We exchanged goodbyes before I hung up first, bouncing on my bed happily. It was almost to the point where I wanted to cry in happiness.

I caught a shortage of breath, until I pulled out my phone again. Without hesitation, I tapped on the messaging icon of Landon's contacts.

6:32 PM

Aubrey

Where are you?

- - -

Landon looks up at his best friend, fiddling with his own finger on his lap while the two exchanged nothing but a sad aura. They both had ordered milkshakes, but none of them bothering to take a sip from the melting desert.

Isaiah had on his black athletic jacket, that covered up his whole neck and chin, revealing his lips popping out from the neck of the jacket. He has a baseball cap that was covering his eyes from his best friend, and a duffel bag that was casually resting on the side of him on the boost.

Across from him was Landon, dressed in a black leather jacket, a white v-neck shirt and his regular gold chain. His eyes lingered across the table, following the plain red surface.

Finally, Isaiah sat up.

"You and Aubrey," he choked up, clearing his throat after his stumble of words.

Landon leans back, staring blankly at the table.

"I saw you guys in the parking lot the other day," Isaiah mumbles, looking downwards as the baseball cap covers his face.

Landon closes his eyes softly, furrowing his eyebrows before reopening them. The last thing he wanted to do was emotionally hurt his best friend. He had physically hurt Isaiah many times, but never once did he tug the string on Isaiah's heart.

"So we both feel the same way," Isaiah concludes, letting out a disappointed chuckle.

"Look, Isaiah—"

"Dude," he interrupts, holding his hand out as he finally looks up at Landon, "Seriously, just stop it."

Although Landon was surprised by Isaiah's sudden rage, he maintained his patience and sat still.

"Stop coming up with excuses about why you can't be with her," Isaiah tilts his head back, staring up at the ceiling before returning his gaze towards his best friend.

"What do you mean?" Landon asks.

"I know you like her, Landon." He says, pressing his fingertips against his opposite hand, shaking it boldly as he tries to make his point.

Landon stayed quiet.

"You're heads over heels for her," his voice rises. Isaiah always has one of the most intimidating voice when it comes to arguments. His deep voice puts the opposing person in nothing but a trap.

However, Landon tries to refuse and shakes his head. Deep down he had a special place for Aubrey, but he couldn't work up the courage to take the girl that his best friend has dwelled over since the first day.

"Admit it Landon," Isaiah pauses, "You like her."

He still didn't respond. There was nothing that was able to force Landon to confess.

"You like her too," he responded.

"Yes, I do," he stubbornly stated, "I like her. I admit that I would do anything for that girl's heart."

Silence suddenly grew across them. There was no awkward tension, just plain sadness that swept across both of their emotions.

It was quiet for about a minute, until Isaiah finally looks back up at Landon.

"But you love her a fuck ton more than I do," he whispers, tears almost forming in his eyes as he hands over the girl that he longed for over to his best friend.

The two boys were holding back the angry and sad tears that they forced inside of their bodies. They didn't want to show any sign of weaknesses; crying over a girl seems to be one of the most immature thing to do.

"I don't, Isaiah," Landon mumbles, voice shaking. His hands were trembling on his lap, uncomfortably rubbing against his thighs.

"You do," Isaiah slightly chuckles, "Haven't seen you this motivated for anyone ever since your past. And this time, I've seen another side of you that I didn't get to see when you were dating your ex."

Landon shuts up, staring at both of their milkshakes. He did love her. He worked for her forgiveness. He worked for her trust. There wasn't a doubt in his heart, that he would ever just leave the girl that he possibly love even if it's for his best friend.

Landon finally sulks, "I'm sorry."

His best friend looks at him, both of them slightly frowning. However, there was a little weight off of both of their chests. Isaiah glances over at Landon one last time before nodding.

"Don't worry about it," he passes a small smile before grabbing his duffel bag. He swiftly slides out of the booth, and swung his duffel bag over his shoulder before turning his back to his best friend.

"We're cool," Isaiah managed to slip out, before making his way towards the exit.

Chapter 42

After hours of waiting, Landon finally texted me back.

7:54 PM

Landon

At Scoop.

Second thoughts never occurred into my head as I ran down stairs and throwing on a random hoodie of Austin that was casually hanging on the railing. I couldn't manage to wipe off the huge grin that was plastered on my lips as I hopped into the car that I've abandoned.

Having an older brother definitely had its perks, but since he's away now there's no other way but to just myself.

While driving to Scoop, I couldn't help but think about how much happiness my family and I would be feeling after paying back the debt. We were a happy family, and I'm doing everything I possibly can to bring that back again.

I bit my bottom lip, trying to stop myself from smiling like a huge idiot while driving down the sun setting road.

My heart started beating a little faster as I felt my car getting closer to Scoop. All of our hard work and failures is granted by a magical person, no other than Mrs. Winthrop. After being stuck in the darkness, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. No matter how cheesy that line may sound, it was true.

When I reached to my destination, I swiftly parked in one of the spaces before stepping out. Slapping the door to my car and locking it, I dashed into the ice cream parlor filled with a bunch of students from two different high schools hanging out on a Friday night.

My eyes scanned the packed space before landing on an the only empty booth, with the blue eyed brunette staring at the two milkshakes in front of him. A small smile crept among my lips, my heart fluttering and warming up from the look of him.

The closer I walked towards him, the more I curiosity I started to feel.

Landon didn't seem to act as confident as he always was. His was leaning back against the red seat, eyes barely blinking and showing any liveliness in his actions. He seemed to be so deep in thought.

I approached behind him quietly, standing behind him as I was hesitating to greet him. There was something about it that didn't make me want to approach him.

I took a quiet deep breath before speaking up, "Hey."

A second after I spoke up, Landon immediately turns his head around, looking up at me as he passes a small smile, "Hey," he responded.

I stood there awkwardly before making my way towards the opposite side of the booth, sitting myself down across from him. He watched me as I watched him. His light blue eyes were suddenly darker, his eyes were a little bit red, while his body posture showed signs of exhaustion.

I was about to speak up and tell him about the good news, but he stopped me. He held his right hand up, shaking his head as me working weakly speaking, "I'm sorry, Aubrey."

"What?" I asked, confused.

"I have to go," he stared down at the table, fiddling with the pocket of his leather jacket before standing up.

I furrowed my eyebrows together in pure confusion, watching him get up as he turns his back towards me, "Landon," I called his name.

He started walking away from me, and for some reason I started to feel irritated from his change in mood. Why is he acting like this?

I got up and followed him out of the door, calling his names multiple times without him even bothering to pay any attention to me.

My back started to heat up as I felt myself soon losing patience with his bipolar mood swings, "Landon, seriously!" I exclaimed almost at the top of my lungs.

And that was when he finally stopped his tracks.

I squinted my eyes, staring at the back of his head with my lips slightly parted. I felt like he was avoiding me, I felt like I must have done something wrong for him to push me away like that.

We both remained quiet as all we did was stare forward.

"What's wrong?" I asked him, with a calmer voice this time.

I watched him as he tilts his head backwards, staring up at the sky that was soon getting darker. His brunette messy hair was flapping against the wind as I see him tilting his head back down, shoving his hand into his pocket as he pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

With the silence peering over us, I watched him and ignored all the other loud customers that were walking in and out of the parlor. It didn't take long for me to see smoke exhaling out of him, floating into the open air in front of him.

I looked down at his feet, slightly parted as they were fully facing the opposite way of me. I pressed my lips in a thin line and started walking towards him.

No words escaped from my lips as all I had the urge to do was wrap my arms around him and feeling the warmth of his body against mine.

And that's what I did.

Trailing my arms around his waist, I could feel his body suddenly stiffening in surprise of my touch. I leaned against his back, closing the gap between us as I leaned my head against his shoulder blade.

A second into the back hug, I could feel his body softening up, soon allowing me to continue holding him. I closed my eyes as my breathing begins to stabilize.

Suddenly, I felt a little jolt in his body. I sensed his hands dropping as I heard the little cigarette hit the floor. His body moved just a little bit as I assumed that it may be him stepping on the lit cancer on the floor.

Then he turned.

I loosened my grip and looked up, as he spins around in my arms. Without being able to realize anything in that moment, his arms sneaks around my body, pulling me into his chest as he plays with my hair.

I tightened my arms around his waist, as my head was perfectly resting on his shoulder. I was staring at his neck and the wall besides us. One of his hand was wrapping around my back, as his other was caressing my head against his shoulder. I could smell the lingering stink of the cigarette, but it didn't bother me enough to pull away.

"No matter how much I try," Landon whispers, "I can't get myself to push you away."

My brain started to cloud up. I furrowed my eyebrows and made a weird expression to myself before looking up at him, "Why would you want to push me away?"

I saw him sighing with a soft smile, as he looks down at me. Since our faces were so close, he had to inch back a bit, before locking eyes with me, "It's a long story."

"I have time," I muttered.

"But," he paused, "It's not my story to tell."

With that, he lightly pushed my head against his shoulder again, hugging me tightly. That seemed to shut me up pretty well before I felt his hand brushing up and down my back. He's the sad one, yet it feels like he's the one comforting me.

"Anyways," I mumbled onto his body, feeling his heart beat against my hand, "I came here to tell you—"

He interrupted me with a hush, combing his fingers through my hair as he rocks ourselves back and forth, "Don't ruin the moment," he whispers softly.

I awkwardly stood there in silence, blinking in confusion.

- - -

I zipped up the cover of the dress, then hanging it on the over-the-door hanger I had on my bedroom door. I smiled at the sight of it. It was a beautiful dress, and I fell in love with it. But there was no use in keeping it if there are no other occasions for me to wear that beautiful creation for.

I sent a sad smile towards the dress, as if it could read my emotions.

It didn't take long for my attention to peer from the dress to the ringing of the doorbell. I straightened up, fixing the little strands of hair that was hanging on the sides of my face with my hair a ponytail. I rubbed my palms against my thighs and made my way downstairs and towards the front door.

Slowly, I opened the door revealing Mrs. Winthrop, dressed in a white, formal long sleeve a-lined dress. She had a nice pink blazer and to complete the look with soft elegant curls that were bright orange against the sunlight. Although Mrs. Winthrop was an older woman, she could easily be pulled off as a late thirty-year-old lady.

I smiled at her.

"Greetings, Aubrey," she greeted, peering behind my shoulder as she looks into the cramped house.

"Morning, Mrs. Winthrop," I grinned, stepping to the side as my body motion has welcomed her in.

She steps in without judgement on how small my house was. Instead, she looks at me with a soft smile, playing with the strands of my hair before removing her hand to hold her clutch, "You look beautiful, darling."

I heaved a small giggle, "Thank you," I politely answered before leading her towards the stairs.

"I've put the dress a the cover it came with so it wouldn't get dirty or messed up," I told her, facing forward as I heard her following me up the steps towards my bedroom.

"That's fine," she beams, I can sense her smiling behind me.

I skipped towards the dress that was hung up on the door, and took it off. I turned around and handed the dress carefully to her. I laid the dress in her arms as she held it bridal style, in effort not to mess up the beautiful piece.

"Dear, you know these dresses are over forty grand?" she asks me.

I pressed my lips together in a thin line, and shrugged my shoulders, "I knew it was expensive, but I didn't know a dress is able to cost more than a car," I slightly laughed at the comparison.

Mrs. Winthrop laughed along, nodding her head in agreement, "This is the only piece ever created by Ellie Saab before his retirement."

I tilted my head to the side, not understanding the importance of an Ellie Saab dress.

"This dress was passed down, royalty to royalty until it was sold off for a bid for fifty grand," she explains.

My lips unconsciously formed a circle, as I blinked at the dress.

"I don't know how Landon managed to get this dress for you," she chuckles, "but you must be very special to him in order for him to spend so much money on this dress."

"I went with him and it just seemed like he threw the dress in front of me, and just took it," I joked. We both laughed, showing our pearly white teeth.

"That's adorable," she commented.

I nodded to her response.

In the end, Mrs. Winthrop and I spent hours talking in my room, bonding over things such as boys and how much she missed the past stories with her husband. It was a memorable moment. She was definitely someone I would love to go to for advice in life.

Chapter 43

I held the check in both of my hands, staring down at the paper in awe from all the zeros scribbled into the box. I couldn't imagine happiness after receiving this piece of paper that could hold my whole family's fortune.

A small smile was swept across my lips before I opened the sketchbook, sticking the check in the middle of my two favorite sketches before shoving it into my book stand. I breathed out in relief before backing away from the bookshelf, staring at it in awe.

I can't believe it.

I rubbed my palms against my dark washed jeans and walked over to my bag, swinging it over my shoulder before I made my way out of the bedroom. Austin chose to sleep in today, and my father has already left early for work as usual.

I still yet have told them about the debt.

My phone suddenly dinged.

7:55 AM

Colton

I'm outside.

I squinted at the phone, confused. I don't remember asking him for a ride to school. However, I curiously walked towards the front door, opening it as the bright rays from the sunlight lit upon my face.

"Aubrey!" Bella beamed.

Her curly, orange-red hair reflected the sunlight. The upper half of her body was sticking out from the sunroof, while the bottom half was covered by Colton's dark tinted windows.

The moment my lips formed into a large smile, the passenger window of Colton's rolled down; revealing him in his Ray Ban shades. He sent me a large smile and motioned me to come towards them.

"We missed you," Bella cooed, pouting at me as she rests her elbows on the roof of the car.

"I missed you guys too," I responded, crossing my arms in a joking manner as I skipped towards the car. Bella climbed down from the sunroof, and propped herself in the backseat as Colton unlocked the door for me to enter.

I jumped into the passenger seat and turned towards Bella, grinning widely at her. I held my arms out between the small space between the drivers and passenger's seat. Bella didn't even hesitate to jump into my arms as we both hugged each other tightly despite the cup holders and arm rest between us.

She pushed me away as she cupped my face, squealing as if we haven't seen each other in years.

"You look so grown!"

I laughed, "Bella, we only haven't seen each other for like a week," I shook my head at her.

"Yeah," she groans, "Ever since that thing dramatically dragged you down the hallway."

A smirk appeared onto her lips as my lips formed into a defensive 'o', gasping for air as if what she said wasn't true.

"So, what about him?" Colton speaks up, tilting his sunglasses downwards as it hangs on the tip of his nose, mimicking Bella's devious smirk.

I looked between my best friends, giggling nervously from their attack.

"I mean he's cute," I innocently defended.

Bella's gasp was heard over Colton's start of the engine. Colton's eyebrows were raised as both of my friends started panicking from my little confession.

"What have you two done?" Bella grinned, leaning onto the arm rest that was set between Colton and I.

"Nothing," I smiled, shaking my head as nothing honestly popped into my head. I turned back around to face the front, leaning back against the chair before Bella bolts up.

"You guys didn't at least hug? Kiss? Maybe hook up?" Bella squeals, leaning her head towards me as she tries to escape from the seat belt hugging around her waist.

Memories suddenly jumped back into my mind about the moments that Landon and I had shared our special scenes together. I stared at the road in awe, with my lips slightly parted as it was soon replaced by a wide smile.

"Oh my," Colton trails off, as I see his finger pointing towards me, "They did!"

A loud laugh escaped from Colton's lips as he retracts his hands, setting them both on the steering wheel before turning the corner.

Bella stares at me with convincing eyes, "So, details?"

I casually shrugged, "We hugged," I trialed off, my voice suddenly turning into a higher pitch, "and kissed, maybe more than once." I tried not to smile as I stared off into the road. I failed to contain my smile once I heard the two screaming and crying in disbelief.

"More than once?" Bella gasps.

I nodded and turned my heads towards both of them. Even through Colton's jet black tinted sunglasses, I could tell his eyes were as wide as Bella's.

Looks like I've got something to explain.

- - -

"Aubrey," Isaiah's voice spoke up from behind me.

I turned around on my heels with my huge canvas in my arm, paint smudges almost everywhere on my body. I noticed Isaiah's shock reaction when he saw the mess I was drowning in. However, it didn't stop me to flash him a smile, giggling with happiness as I greeted him with a simple "Hi."

Isaiah's hand suddenly jumped to the back of his head, scratching it softly, "Uh," he trails off, "You look a little busy."

Isaiah was dressed in his normal tracksuits. Like always, an athletic jacket that covered his entire neck, and matching pants that had three stripes coming down on both sides. However, he didn't have a duffel bag on this time. He has a normal black backpack, with cleats dangling through the straps of one backpack, and his jersey shirt hanging through the other.

I laughed at his appearance, eyeing at the odd hanging technique he had going on, "You seem to be more busier than I am."

He couldn't help but crack a wide smile at me.

"So, what's up?" I casually asked, hugging the large canvas onto my body as I tried to balance my bag on my other shoulder.

Isaiah takes a step forward and grabs onto the canvas. I didn't deny his offer as he easily carried the canvas between one arm and the side of his body.

"Thanks," I said.

He nodded in response.

"Guess what," he leans down towards me, whispering lightly in my ear before jumping ahead. He started walking backwards as I started walking forward; our attentions drawn towards each other.

"What?" I asked, tilting my head.

"Someone may have just earned a scholarship to a Division I school," his voice raises, as his head tilts up slightly.

My jaws dropped in excitement as we both stopped out tracks. I couldn't help but jump up and down from excitement as Isaiah announces the life changing moment for him. I pursed my lips together proudly as I tiptoed towards him.

He grins and pulls me into a tight hug. Although only one of his arm was around my body, the strength from the athlete seemed to almost push all the air out of my body.

"Congratulations," a voice spoke up from behind me, revealing no other than Landon.

Isaiah immediately pulls us apart, looking back at Isaiah with a wide smile, "Thanks bro."

The two guys stared at each other proudly as I got tired of their masculine egos. I groaned and snatched my canvas from Isaiah's arm, casually shoving Isaiah with all my might towards Landon.

Isaiah waddles towards Landon slowly before the two finally claps hand lowly, pulling each other into a tight side hug. However, the side hug seemed to last a little longer than normal. I stood there awkwardly as I observed the two best friends bonding. I tilted my head and sighed happily at the sight.

Then it occurred to me. I didn't tell the two boys about the check.

"Guys," I spoke up.

"Hold on Aubrey," Landon mumbles from Isaiah's shoulder. The two boys laughed as they were still frozen in the bromance position.

Chapter 44

Furrowing my eyebrows together, I leaned towards the canvas as I squinted my eyes at my painting. Trying to be careful as possible, I dabbed the thin paintbrush onto the board, focusing on the line as much as possible.

To my luck, I felt a hand on the back of my head. Before I could react, the upper half of my body was pushed, knocking myself off of the stool and onto my painting. A loud gasp escaped from my lips as I watched my artwork in front of my knocking down.

The bully stood there and was shocked too.

I turned over slowly towards Landon and glared at him. My fists clenched as I felt a strong sense of annoyance rush up my body.

He stood there, hiding his laugh.

One.

Two.

Then he winked.

"Landon Carthy!" I screamed until my voice cracked, lunging at him with my body as I tackled him onto the floor. We both were surprised as to where my strength has come from. I growled as the upper half of my body was laying on top of his, my arms securely wrapping around his waist as the rest of my legs were sprawled across the floor.

Landon grinned, soon followed by a loud laugh that echoed throughout the empty art room. I smirked deviously as put my hand on his face, thumb on his left cheek while the rest of my fingers cupped his other cheek.

I squished his face together as he still manages to laugh through the squeezing mouth of his.

I slightly laughed at his funny appearance before changing my face back to a serious look. Quickly, I pushed myself off of him as I took my paint brush and chucking it at his body on the floor.

He froze.

My eyes widened.

The white paint that was remained on the paintbrush, landed on the arm of his bomber jacket. There was an extremely noticeable white mark on top of his matte black, probably high end clothing.

The room quickly got quiet.

There was only the two of us in the room.

I watched him as he got up slowly, an 'aw' escaped his lips as he looked down at the fabric, observing his favorite clothing. Landon looked up at me and slowly took off his jacket.

He took a few steps towards me, with his eyes still locked in mine. When he got out of the hold of the jacket, it collapses on the floor with a smooth sounding impact. I continued to stare at him, slightly in fear as he inches closer to me.

"Aubrey Watson," Landon smirks, clicking his tongue together thrice before reaching behind me.

I turned towards his hand and watched as he dipped his finger into the puddle of paint I spilled in the small jar earlier.

"Oh no," I whispered, blinking once.

"Oh yes," Landon grins. Before I was even able to move away from him, I felt the wet paint draw from my nose to my cheeks.

My mouth opened so wide in shock. I turned around and grabbed a handful of the paint, throwing it towards his direction before sprinting off to the other side of the room. Landon cackled, not even bothered by the amount of paint he was swimming in.

He copied me and grabbed a handful, tossing it at me. With smooth reflexes, I spun towards the side only feel the little bit of paint landing on my pant's back pocket. A yelp escaped my lips as soon as I felt myself losing balance.

I grabbed onto whatever was in my way.

Paper.

A large piece of poster paper was hung on one of the racks and I managed to grab the empty paper by the middle. I heard the paper ripping as well as my body inched towards the ground.

Even though it all seemed to happen in slow motion, it didn't take long for me to feel the soul knocked out of my body as my back hit the ground.

I released a loud groan as all I can hear was Landon dying of laughter in the background.

Soon enough, I heard his footsteps rushing towards me, his voice choking out my name through his giggles.

"Are you okay?" He asks, getting on his knees as he helps me up by putting an arm behind my hand and a hand holding my other hand.

I nodded before rubbing the back of my head, slightly laughing from embarrassment.

"Sorry," he grins. Landon gets off of the ground before holding a hand towards me, pulling me up swiftly as I feel the blood in my body rush from the quickness of recovery.

"God, Landon," I hissed playfully.

"Woah," he held up his hands defensively, before peering behind my shoulder.

"What?" I asked, turning around. Seeing no one or anything important in sight, I turned my attention back to Landon who's mouth was wide open.

"Landon, what?" I asked again.

He brought the back of his hand to cover his lips, hiding his laughter as his free hand holds my shoulder and turns me around.

Then he laughed louder, leaning his head against my shoulder from behind.

"What?" I asked, laughing along without knowing the context.

"You got a little something," he choked, "behind you."

My eyes widened as my lips released a loud gasp. I turned around slightly, looking down at my behind seeing the white paint mark covering half of my pants, and trailing down my leg.

"Landon!" I screamed, turning around and hit his chest.

He didn't budge. All he did was laugh and loosely bouncing around from death.

- - -

I took a deep breath as I stood in front of the closed door. With the check in my hand, I stared down at my feet. Working up the nerves to stand up straight, I lifted my head straight ahead at the gold-plated door. I knocked.

"Come in," his voice called out.

Slowly, I opened the door and peaked my head in.

"Landon," I whispered.

Almost as if he was surprised, Landon spun over in his rolling chair with an Xbox controller in his hand.

He had his headset on, pushing his hair into his face as his legs were sprawled out towards the floor.

Landon's office consisted of a huge television that was hung on top of his fireplace, and a pool table that casually rested in the corner of the big room. He had a couple bean bag chairs and a large coffee table. However, he did have a desk and chair; but I would be confused as to what he uses his office for besides hanging out and throwing mini get together.

"Aubrey?" he asks, lifting up one side of his headset, "What are you doing here?"

I smiled sheepishly at him before closing the floor behind me. Then I held up the check, waving it in the air as I mumbled, "I'm going to pay off the debt."

Landon lifts his eyebrows, jumping to his feet as he tosses his controller onto his seat. He dashes towards me and rips the check out of my hand, before grinning at the paper in front of him.

I heard Landon muttering to himself, but I couldn't quite catch the drift of his words. Before I was able to question it, he passes the check back to me and quickly grabs my shoulder and turns me towards the door.

"You have something to do," I can feel him smiling behind me.

I hesitated to inch closer towards the door. After all, I was afraid of Charles.

Landon cleared his throat.

Suddenly I felt his arms wrapping about my waist from behind, pulling me back as his chin casually rested on my shoulder. Almost immediately, I felt my body calming down against his. For some reason, his touch made me feel powerful and unbeatable.

"Trust me," he says casually, his chin vibrating against my shoulder as he speaks, "If you need me, I'll be right outside of the door."

My body suddenly didn't bother hesitating as I walked out the door. Landon unlocked his grip off me and follows me towards Charles's office. If I wouldn't been here myself, who knows how long it would take me to enter his office.

Without even knocking, I opened the door to Charles's chamber and welcomed myself in. Landon hid behind the wall as I continued.

"Aubrey," Charles smirks, "What brings a beautiful lady like you here?"

My fists clenched, and so did my jaws. I stood in front of his desk and stared down at him. He didn't seem to be bothered by my glare.

"The debt," I spoke up.

There was a pause between us, before he holds his hands up, shaking his head, "Look, there's no way for me to lower the debt. Either you pay it back or—"

A loud slam was heard from my hand impacting the table. With the check underneath my fingers, I leaned towards Charles and hissed.

He seemed to be surprised by my sudden outburst, his body slightly jumping from his seat but remained still after. His eyes trailed from my face, down to the check clutched in my hands.

"I'm paying back now," I stated bluntly.

Charles sat up and reached out for the check, pushing my hand out of the way. I sneaked my hand away before he was able to touch any parts of my body.

I watched him as he nods in slight amusement, "Alright," he says.

I ran my fingers through my dark curls, watching him as he slips the check into this brown leathered wallet, "I'll remove the debt by tonight."

With that finalization, I turned my back towards him and quickly made my way towards the door.

"It was fun working with you, Aubrey," he says. I could feel him smiling at me deviously behind my back.

I turned the upper half of my body slightly to look at him. I shook my head and continued walking out of the cold room.

Chapter 45

A week passes by and everything that I've wished for in the beginning of the season seemed to fulfill itself. The debt was quickly removed from our family's history, and my dad received a promotion at work. Our family was still as happy as we were when things had hit rock bottom.

"Little," Austin spoke up, shoving me slightly as I was sitting at the kitchen table.

I looked up at his call, glancing from my cereal bowl; milk slightly dripping down my chin as I reached for the napkin to quickly wipe it.

He chuckled and played around with his breakfast, before continuing, "Why didn't you tell us before you got it dropped?"

Knowing that Austin was referring to the debt, I looked back down my bowl and smiled slightly, "I just wanted to handle it by myself."

He passes me a smile, "All grown up now, I see."

I rolled my eyes playfully before pulling out my phone.

"Thank you," Austin says, catching me by surprise, "Dad said thank you too."

A warm feeling took over my body. I was proud of myself for what I've managed to have done, but it didn't feel like I did anything at all. I've made the decision to pay off the debt, but the reason I've gained that amount of money was because of Mrs. Winthrop in the first place.

I smiled back at him, "We're family."

After breakfast, I dragged my tired body back up the stairs and towards all of my art supplies. I stretched out my arms, leaving a loud groan while picking up the big empty canvas and bucket of art supplies. I turned back around and exited my room, making my way down towards the garage.

Austin watches me from the kitchen as I struggled to open the door that leads to the garage. After a long minute of struggling, I could hear Austin laughing as I finally was able to open the door with a life supply of survival kits in my arms. I turned my head towards the kitchen and toss him a smug before stumbling into the garage.

The garage was now empty. All the cars were parked outside, while my dad took his car to work. I took a deep breath and set down the large canvas against the wooden wall, the bucket right next to it. I plugged my phone into the large speakers and pressed the button that opens the front of the garage, revealing a quiet and clean neighborhood.

I walked over to the large pile of art supplies that was stacked in the corner of the garage, and grabbed a large table cloth. Dragging the cloth across the garage, I laid it down as I taped the edges before returning to my position in front of the canvas.

I was dressed in a big white t-shirt that was covered in previous paint stains. I remember the first time I wore Austin's shirt and painted, he was mad at me for nearly a week. After that, Austin's favorite shirt started to become my favorite t-shirt dress to paint in. I was wearing spandex that was long enough just to peak out about an inch below the t-shirt. I loosely grabbed all of my dark curls and toss it into a bun.

Then I grabbed the top of the canvas, and dropped it onto the floor, on top of the table cloth. I grabbed a face mask and hooked the strand behind my ear before grabbing a hold of the spray paint bottle, placing my index finger on the spray and shaking the bottle. The clicking sound of the bottle matched along with the beat of the music.

Soon enough I found myself playing with colors of the warm toned, spraying with much delicacy and precise.

"Aubrey," I heard Austin calling me.

I stopped and finally looked up to him, blinking at him innocently as I watched him standing at the door frame.

"It's about time," Austin grins, "I've been calling you for a while now."

I set down the can and pulled my mask below my chin, smiling at my older brother, "What's up?"

Austin furrows his eyebrows at his – now my shirt. All the colors that were beautifully spread onto the canvas, was also beautifully spread across my body. Austin shakes his head at me, before speaking up again, "I'm going to go to the grocery store, want anything?"

I stared off into space, thinking about my cravings as I figured that nothing had popped into my head. I shook my head as him and turned my attention back to the canvas.

"Alright, you're in charge," Austin hollers as he walks towards his car that was parked in front of the garage.

"I'm the only one in this house," I laughed at him.

"Exactly."

I watched him as he slipped into his car, speeding off as he blasts music that could probably break the windows of our neighbor's houses.

I rolled my eyes at my brother's humor before pulling the mask back onto my face, and continued with my masterpiece.

- - -

After about an hour, I was nearly finished with the painting as all that occurred into my mind was how hungry I was and how much I wanted to finish off the artwork. I groaned loudly to myself, as I heard the car engine pulling up in the driveway.

The car engine turns off, as the door opens, "Took you long enough," I called out, eyes kept onto the board in front of me. I stood up, pulling the mask underneath my chin, and slipped off my gloves, tossing it to the side.

I rested my hands on both sides of my waist, observing my finished artwork in astonishment before finally turning my attention to Austin.

"What did you bu—"

My words have cut off as my eyes caught attention of Landon wearing his white polo shirt, khaki pants with a gold chain around his neck. He had his hands stuck in the pocket of his pants, his hair was slicked back as he has added a new accessory to his face. He had a pair of Ray Ban glasses that perfectly fit the frame of his face, as his white Vans casually matches his shirt.

"Hi," I greeted awkwardly, tugging on the hem of my shirt.

I looked down at my attire, paint was smudged all over my legs and arms. My shirt looked extremely dirty as all of the past paint was still stained on the shirt from a century ago. My hair was messy and probably had some paint in it due to the reflection of the paint. I flashed him a straight smile, without curving my lips to form a full smile.

A chuckle escaped his lips, as he shows his pearly white teeth along with his flashy light blue eyes that peered through the transparent glass.

"I wanted to stop by," he cheers, walking towards me as he looks at the painting on the floor.

As his attention was on the painting, I brought up my shirt and sniffed it. I smelled like chemicals and paint. I was smelling so bad that my nostrils were slightly burning from the strong formula of the spray paints.

Landon seemed to catch me in my act. He gave me an amused smile before stepping closer to me. Since I was bare foot, it felt like Landon was a little taller than I'm normally used to. I took a step back and smiled brightly at him, "I smell."

He shook his head and reached out, grabbing both of my wrists in his hand and pulls me closer towards him, "I know."

My face flushed red as the horrid scent of the spray paint washed past us and was dancing around our bodies.

"I was painting," I smiled awkwardly.

"I know," he cracked out a chuckle again.

Although we were both standing there, observing each other's faces awkwardly in my garage, I couldn't help but feel like he was meant to be here. Even though this is my house, and he probably wasn't supposed to be here; there was something in my heart that longed him to stay by my side.

"Austin's out buying groceries," I started to blurt out. My mind was at the point of slurring, where I didn't know what to say. All that was in my mind was how much I wanted this guy to possibly be mine.

"Yes, Aubrey," he concluded, a big smile was plastered on his face.

My heart started fluttering as I watched him blink. His lashes complimenting the color of his eyes, as I couldn't find myself to look away from him.

One of our hands suddenly intertwined, as our free hand started to fiddle around with each other's fingers.

"I like you," I muttered.

Silence suddenly swept through the garage as my phone coincidentally stopped playing its music. The whole world had suddenly stopped.

Both of our expressions had changed viciously, the moment I confessed. Our fingers had stopped fiddling with each other, and our hands had separated from each other's grasp. We stood there with both shocking expressions, our body making no contact except for our eyes.

I swallowed nervously as I felt like I've spoken up at the wrong time. Landon's expression was unreadable. My heart seemed to have stopped beating the moment both of us had let go. Something about this situation made me want to run away from Landon, although the other half of me wants to stay and have him hold me in his arms.

Then I took a step back.

Our eyes were still locked as I slowly rubbed my palm against my thigh, feeling my skin rub up against each other uncomfortably as my gaze soon shifted towards my feet. I closed my eyes tightly, mentally swearing myself for confessing without a notice.

That's when I felt wind brushing against my skin.

An arm was wrapped around my waist, the other hand was caressing my cheeks. I opened my eyes the moment I felt his hand tilting my face upwards.

"I know," he answered.

Chapter Epilogue

We were sitting facing each other on the floor of my garage. His body was sat in the middle of my legs, as they were propped up against his sides. One of his hand was holding on to my ankle, while the other was holding the rest of his body up. His legs were sprawled out for me to sit in between.

A smile had crept onto Landon's face. My lips tugged upwards as I uncontrollably smile at his attractiveness.

He removed his hand from my ankle and started fiddling with his gold necklace, grabbing the cross and tugging it in a semi-circle. I watched him as my hands were casually resting in front of me. It had been about five minutes since we were in this position.

"Thank you," Landon whispers.

I furrowed my eyebrows in confusion, tilting my head to the side as he reads my emotions effortlessly.

He releases a chuckle and returns his hold on my ankle, "For just being you," he mutters.

My face flushed red from his kind words. I couldn't think of anything to say, instead I sat there and smiled shyly like an idiot.

"You really inspired me," he continued, rubbing my ankle up and down, "You're strong, bold, and independent. You could face any obstacles without any help."

He was quiet for a second, "And you have a big heart."

My heart suddenly fluttered in response. My smile soon disappeared, however it didn't hide how happy I was feeling to be able to spend this moment with him. We looked at each other passionately, eyes as if they were dancing with each other.

His hand was removed from my ankle again, inching towards my hands. He started fiddling with my right hand, rubbing his finger up and down the side of my colorful index finger.

I kept my eyes locked on him as he removes his eye contact, staring down at my hands. It was quiet for a quick minute, before he lifts his head up again.

"Never in my life, have I ever thought that I would've fallen in love with such a strong woman," he trailed off, observing my emotions. I watched as his eyes drifted from my eyes to my nose, nose to my lips; then quickly back up to my eyes. It was silent against between us, but the silence was something we both cherished and didn't find any tension in.

Then it hit me.

Fallen in love?

As if he read my mind, he interrupted my thoughts with an answer, "Yes, I love you," he says, almost whispering. All we could hear after that is the soft wind hitting against the leaves right above my garage.

My heart fluttered in so many different ways that I didn't know was possibly. My back felt like it was heating up in excitement, the back of my neck was tickling itself as my stomach felt like it was getting feathered by butterfly wings. Needless to say, I was nervous and happy.

"So?" he chuckles, noticing how incredibly quiet I was being.

It didn't occur to me that I haven't said one word until now, "So," I trailed off awkwardly, tapping my finger against the floor between us.

"Will you?" he smiles.

"Will I what?" I answered almost innocently.

Just then, I realized that he was going to ask.

"Be my girlfriend?" he finished the question, leaning towards me. My eyes slightly widened. I knew it was coming but it still caught me by surprise. It didn't feel real. My eyebrows lifted up in surprise, my body leaning back a bit from the closeness between us and I was just left speechless.

My mind is such a blur.

"I," I stuttered, many times. My hands were now supporting me from behind, unable to hide the fact that I was extremely shaking out of anxiety. My body started heating up, and I started to blink many times uncontrollably.

Landon's face suddenly switched emotions. The romance that was on his features soon was replaced with worries. He furrows his eyebrows as he leans even closer, looking into my eyes side to side as if he was wondering if I was acting normal.

"Are you okay?" he asks, waving his hand in front of my face.

I froze.

He then reaches both arms around me, and grabs a hold of my wrist and started pulling them towards him. Since all of my body's weight was leaning against my arms, I could feel myself losing balance quickly after his actions.

A small yelp escaped my lips as I felt my back hit the floor a second time this month. The fall knocked the air out of my chest, but also some sense into my head.

So much sense that I noticed how extremely close the pair of light blue eyes were to mine. Then I felt the rest of his body tumbling on top of mine. I blinked in confusion as I glanced down at our feet. He had stumbled onto my body when I fell.

I heard a slight groan from him, "You're heavy," he complains as he uses his elbows to push the upper half of his body off of mine. I laid there and took a deep breath as his weight was lifted off of my chest.

With my arms to my side, I tugged the bottom of my large shirt down, pulling it past my spandex that was already too short to be seen in public with.

"Aubrey Watson," he calls, finally gathering all of my attention again. I blinked up at him, locking eyes indicating that I was listening to him.

"Hm?"

He releases a nervous chuckle, smiling at me slightly as he repeated the question again, "Will you be my girlfriend?"

His nervousness suddenly made me calm down. Even though we were in a skeptical position, it felt like it was just the perfect time. I released a smile, and nodded.

Yes.

His short cut smile suddenly turns into a huge grin. A grin that showed nothing but genuine happiness. After a short minute of us staying in that position, my hands made its way up to his chest, slightly pushing him off.

He quickly got the hint and pushed himself off of me, holding a hand out for me to grab it. I let his strength pull me back up from the floor as I fixed my over sized t-shirt.

Before I was able to fix the back of my shirt, Landon caught me by surprise against and slipped his arm around my waist. The feeling of his arm warmed up my body.

When his hand had made it way up to my chin, I already know the next move he was going for. I released a slight giggle, tilting my head upwards and he tilts his head down. Big smiles were plastered on both of our lips.

I quickly pecked his upper lip with him still smiling. He pulled me even closer and pressed his lips against mine. Our kiss didn't even last longer than a second, since I was able to feel his lips forming back into a smile. I couldn't help but laugh at his cuteness.

Turns out we were standing there half kissing and half laughing.

But that's what made that moment cute.

Until.

"So," a voice speaks up.

I could hear that raspy old voice from anywhere. As strong as possible, and with much panic, I shoved Landon away with all my might. I kept my eyes on my dad as I can still see Landon tripping over the buckets of art supplies in the corner of my eyes.

Loud clashing and banging was heard until there was a loud thud. A groan escaped from Landon's lips, followed by a whispering 'ow'.

"Dad!" I greeted nervously, my hands interlocked with another behind my back, "Why are you home so early?"

"Should I be relieved that you hurt him before I did?" my dad says speechlessly, staring at Landon's body that was laying flat on the floor. Even though he did trip over my art supplies, he was lucky that no paint had stained any of his expensive clothing. He had a random rag laying across his face, clean paint brushes that were scattered around him and a small canvas directly sitting on one of his legs.

"I guess I don't have to worry if he breaks your heart," he chuckles, "since you're capable of doing that."

I looked over at Landon then looked back at my dad, smiling nervously.

My dad puts down his lunch bag, and rested his work uniform onto the floor. He took off his baseball cap and tossed it on top of his dirty uniform before clicking his tongue.

"Well are you just going to let him be like that?" he scolded, waddling his way over to Landon.

I watched in amusement, as my dad takes all the art items off of Landon's body. Landon sat up shortly, the rag falling off his face. His jaws has dropped the moment he noticed that my father and his face were only a few inches apart.

"Dad?" he panicked, quickly clearing his throat, "I mean, Mr. Watson?"

My father chuckled, reaching a hand out to Landon, "Dad is good enough for me." Father turns towards me, sending me a wink.