The Right Kind of Wrong

Fathy Light

STORYPDF

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Introduction

"What if the right person is also your Mr. So Wrong?"

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Her lips touched and teased and coaxed him and he felt her touch in every cell and every bone. Soft and supple, her body was around him. Everywhere. She was everywhere. He was hungry for more, but he couldn't break this sweetness.

Shy and timid, she kissed like herself. All so innocent, but incredibly passionate. The kiss was gentle, yet also fire.

And he couldn't help anymore. He wanted more.

He pushed her back gently and her back hit the wall and he pressed himself to her amazing body.

"Ah." He thought. "Can I really stay away after this?"

"I can't." She thought.

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A guy, a girl, a contract and sizzling sexual tension brewing between them. Is it possible for them to come out of it with zero casualties?

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"I'll give you a place to stay and I'll pay you, all you have to do is to pretend to be my wife for an year, in return. It is that easy."

Or is it?

With a contract, their deal is filed, signed and sealed with a kiss.

Finally, Alexandra will have a home, have someone to back her up in the fight of getting back what is legally hers. Logan will have the revenge he wants against his ex-girlfriend, Stacy.

Gambling with the matters of heart is just dangerous. You might hit the jackpot or you will be neck deep in heartbreak. It all depends on the cards that have been dealt to you.

And they will both realize it soon enough, when their heart take over their brain.

THE RIGHT KIND OF WRONG

BY

FATHY LIGHT

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"Life is all about comfort. Relax and live a little." - Alex

"I can't just relax, man. I have to run and run until I am finally there. Where I want to be." - Logan

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Chapter 1

Prologue: Ups and downs.

Life is not really something any one can guess before it actually happens. It is full of unwanted turns and unknown twists.

Life sometimes throw things we can not catch up with. It'd happen. With every one. For everyone.

Imagine a giant wheel, and Alexandra was at the very top of it and Logan was somewhere in the middle.

And then it happened. Someone said, *spin.* The switch was on and the giant wheel started with a loud screech.

It started to spin and spin and spin. Round and round and round and round, it went.

Head spinning, stomach twisting, they both came to a stop.

She looked down. She was at the very bottom. He looked up and the sky was closer to his hand.

And their life changed at that moment.

***

(Logan - seven years ago)

Sweaty bodies. ✔

One too many people in a small dorm room. ✔

Cheap coffee. ✔

Mattress the texture of rock. And ✔

He stared at the laptop in front of him, the one that he had borrowed from Daniel. It was old, troublesome, and was on the verge of extinction. But it was the only one he could afford. For free.

As he typed an essay about cost effective ways to build a monument, he looked around himself and promised himself that one day or the other, he would live *the* life. The one Matt Evans and Daniel Anderson and Finley Collins lived.

Except Daniel, the other two always had a snooty look on their faces as if they were above Logan and Logan hated it, hated that look of superiority. He hated to be looked down.

One day... He wanted to look down. Not at people, but at the world.

And maybe, at Finley and Matt. He would give anything to do that. To be in that place.

°°°

(Logan - four years ago)

"You are a newbie. How can we trust you to build our home with the same precision and quality as the other already established builders would do?" The man was tall, his voice stern.

Logan had heard these lines more than enough time to say it in his sleep. But he knew the answer to it, as well, one he sincerely believed in. Once he hoped this man would believe, too.

"Because I want to grow, to go far. They are already in a place they can't go up. Me, I want to go up and so I will work harder than anyone, to show you, to show everyone that I can. That I am good enough to be here. That I deserve to be here." Logan's voice was sincere.

"Hmm." The man looked at him, his eyes narrowed. "You will do. Go on, impress me." He said with a small nod.

Logan smiled at him. This here was his first opportunity and he wanted to put everything he have in it. This here was the starting point to all his dreams.

"Thank you." Logan said.

"Don't thank me yet. Thank me when I am completely amazed by what you did for me. I am only paying you if I am satisfied with the house, young man." The man said with a wink. "If you do impress me --and let me warn you, I am hard to impress-- I can promise you a place in this world."

"Yes sir." Logan said.

***

(Alexandra - 3 years ago)

Foam mattress. ✔

Air conditioning. ✔

Her very own coffee maker. ✔

And a brand new laptop. ✔

Alexandra Annie Steele was ready for her college years, in a small apartment her dad had rented for her near her college. She was studying interior decorations and she was ready to take up the world of decorations in a storm. She had big and bold ideas and she believed in that and herself.

"But dad, I want a new car." She said as she looked at her dad.

"No, Allie girl. This has to do. You see, you can't get everything you want." Her dad said, his voice stern and unmoving.

"But you can afford it, dad... " She said. She almost wanted to stomp, but she didn't want to be immature.

"And it is mine." He winked at her. "You have to earn what you want. You see this office, I was planning to hand it over to some of our usual contractors, but then a young man came to me and he was still so young, only a couple years more on you. And you should have listened to him talk. It was impressive. He was so confident and he told me that he wanted to go up and so he would do it better than those who were already on the top and he did it with such drive that this came out better than all our other... "

"Beep, beep, beep. Dad, I have heard this story before, a million time and some more. Remember it?" She poked her tongue out and he shook his head.

"Brat. Go on. It is getting late for your classes." He gave her a gentle push and she chuckled at him before she walked. No car for now thanks to the young man, whoever he was.

"Love you, dad."

"Love you more, Allie girl."

°°°

(Alexandra - three months ago)

"But why did you, dad? Why did you leave me here all alone? I am so afraid of this world. They want everything you have worked for. So long. So hard. The vultures. Dad, come back, I am scared to be here, alone." She cried, heart breaking for the man who had been her constant support and her only family. He had been everything for her, for so long. He had been her home and hearth and Haven. Her mom and dad. Without him, she was lost, directionless.

But her dad was gone. Gone in an instant, before she could understand what was happening.

There was no forewarning. One day he was here and the next day, no more.

He wasn't coming back, no matter how hard she cried, or begged. She was truly alone here, in this colossal pit of emptiness and the wolves around her could smell the blood.

The walls of her house started to close in around her until she couldn't breathe properly. She was suffocating inside.

She walked to the small cozy outhouse, the one her dad had hired someone to build for her, and she curled at one corner and fell asleep, tears dried on her cheeks.

Tomorrow she would lose this home, too.

Tomorrow she would truly be homeless.

***

Life is like this. A giant wheel. It goes on its merry way, round and round. And we are supposed to go along. We have to. Nobody have any other option.

Everyone would have their turn at the top. And of course, the bottom. It is fair, too, in its own twisted sense of fairness.

Logan and Alexandra was in that giant wheel. As it went around...

Logan was finally here. The top. The one he had worked so hard for, for so long. He was ready to fly and touch new heights. He was ready to mark his name on the world that had once looked down on him.

And Alexandra, she was here at the very bottom. The ground was so close to her feet. Even though she wanted to fly away, far, far away, she couldn't. The shackles tethering her to the ground, it was so strong. So hard. She couldn't break free from the hard pinch of it. She was lost.

And there, their story began.

It is fate. It is destiny.

One day, they would meet. It was written.

They wouldn't learn about the thread that connect them together, until later. But they would meet and their meeting would change them both.

They would meet and it would be all wrong, but still so right.

It is all pre-planned. It is inevitable, their story.

"*You give me a look and it feels like you are looking right through me. But I have become good at showing only what I want to show." - Alexandra.*

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Chapter 2

1. Strange men and stranger Proposals

(Alexandra)

Feeling really tired, Alexandra closed her eyes as she rested her pounding head on the bench she was sitting. She gently rubbed small circles over her temple to ease the raising headache, but it looked like the headache was inevitable.

A wistful sigh left her lips as she imagined herself in her foamy mattress, inside her air-conditioned room, but that room was now only a faraway memory. How she wished she hadn't taken it all for granted when she lived in the safe cocoon of her daddy's protection. Now... Here she was, wandering and lost. Sitting in the street, wishing for at least a bowl of soup.

As if her stomach heard her thoughts, it let out a groan and she could feel it, hundred hungry monsters groaning from inside her stomach.

I really need to find another job. She thought as tears slid down her red cheeks. Sunburn could do that to you, so could hunger.

She remembered what had happened in the morning. It was her second time getting fired from the job. All her life, she had lived a well secluded life, away from the outside world that could eat someone like her in a single gulp.

"But... I didn't." Her boss looked at her as if she was a common thief. She wasn't. Yes, she was hungry, but she could never steal from another person's hard work.

"So what is this? I thought you are a good girl and how wrong I was!" He said as he threw her bag down. "Get lost. If I ever see you here again, I will call the cops."

Humiliated and embarrassed, she looked up at the tall girl standing in front of her, hands on her hips, looking not even a bit guilty.

Alex knew she was the one who did it.

"It is Arie... "

"Ssh, not a word. I was going to promote you to kitchen duty and you... "

So now Alex knew why the woman she had thought as a friend had done it. Alex was new, but she was also perfect in doing what she did. It was jealousy. God, kitchen duty includes helping the cook, and it was nothing sort of glamorous, when compared to doing dishes, but...

"I know you did it, Arielle. But, I am woman enough to walk away and not take your next day meal off your table." She said to her when she walked away, and for a moment, Arielle looked guilty, but then she shrugged and walked in as Alex walked out, head held high.

Alex spilled a wry smile. What a funny life. Just months ago, she had lived in a mansion, a sort-of princess, and as she wished, everything appeared in front of her. And then one day, when she was comfortable in the knowledge that her dad would always be here for her, always giving and loving, always protecting, he was gone.

And gone, was her safety net, too.

With his death, came thousand lies that had been buried. Thousand masks peeled out to show true faces. The kind smile they had given to her now became fake and filled with bloodlust. They wanted what was hers.

At that point, Alex had lost everything. It was nothing but a wicked play of fate.

Her dad's partners and shareholders came up with some outlandish lies. Debts. Accounts payable. Loss statement. Bankruptcy.

She knew it was all a lie, but she was helpless as she watched them liquidate every property owned for the business and add them in their bank balance and after a month, they re-started her dad's pet projects under different name, without her.

This past one month was a wild marathon for her, she ran and ran, but she couldn't find her destination. She was staying in a small motel, but every day, it was becoming difficult with the looks she was receiving from the clientele of the dingy motel. It made her neck hair stood straight. And the motel receptionist, a middle aged man warned her one day with a look of concern on his face. "This really isn't a place to live, alone, and you look like a nice girl. You need to find somewhere else to stay. This place is not a good place."

He had then given her an extra lock and told her to lock safely before she went to bed.

God. She just wanted a way out from all of this. She wanted somewhere safe to stay even if it didn't have a foamy mattress.

She opened her eyes and realized it was nearing mid noon and she had dozed off in the bench. Her stomach was now screaming at her and she clutched her stomach with a grimace.

It hurt.

She opened her purse, and came up with a 50 dollar bill her boss had given before he threw her out. At least he didn't let her go empty handed.

Was this 50 enough for her to live her whole life?

She entered a small eatery at the side of the road, wondering how to stop the helicopter in her stomach with finger fries. But it had to be done.

"Cafe mocha, a French toast and a burger, please."

More. More. Her stomach pleaded. She refused to give into that.

*** *(Logan)*

Logan stared at the woman sitting in front of him, completely speechless for the first time in his life. Did she just... Just said no?

He couldn't even believe his ears. "What? Did you?"

"Yes, I did."

Her blue eyes shone like that of a snake's and her smile was vicious.

"Stacy, come on. Think about it."

"I thought about it, Logan and the obvious answer is No." She shrugged and her fluffy blonde hair fell to her shoulder in a wave. He liked her hair. It was the only soft thing about Stacy.

"You're being bull-headed and senseless." He told her, for what seemed like more than the hundredth time. Her lips twitched in pure irritation.

"I am not."

It wasn't the rejection that made him angry, it was that he had wasted a year of his precious life with this woman and here she was, rejecting him. The ring in his hand felt like a hot rod of iron.

And what irked more was... She had thrown a wrench in his plans and he hated anyone messing with that. As per his nearly drafted life plan, this was the right time to get married. He was 27, not too young to be clouded by poor judgement --though this woman in front of him was beginning to look more and more like a very bad judgement -- and not too old to properly enjoy a wife and children --two children, that would come later in the plan.

But here she was, looking coolly at him with those cold blue eyes and Logan wanted her to be sorry for doing this to him. She would be.

"Logan, stop that nonsense, I didn't want myself to be tied in a relationship, I want to move to Paris and I want to live my dream, I can't give it up. I'm going to Paris in two months and that's my final decision. Now we should break up and act like we're friends. Holding grudges is not the best idea." She stood up. Her heels made a loud click as she stood up. Paris? Paris. Logan grumbled as she pushed her hands forward.

He took it, just as coolly.

"You won't be back, right?" He asked as she let his hand go.

"Absolutely not." She replied with a small smirk. "I know you will miss me, but try not to miss me so much that you forget you have a life."

It wasn't his heart that took the brunt of her words, it was his pride. And Logan was much more sensitive about his pride.

"Yeah? As if I am going to pine for a woman? Not in this lifetime, Stacy. Or the other. But when you want to come back, just know... I will tell, I told you so."

She laughed. A merry sound. "I love that about you. Your arrogance. Your over confidence. But this time you are so wrong." And then she left.

Logan sat there in the place looking at the cake she hadn't eaten. If she wasn't going to eat, why the hell did she order them? He picked up a cake and pushed his fork inside it. He imagined it was Stacy's stupidly sexy face.

God. Never in a day did he imagine an outcome like this. He was so sure she was going to agree to his plans and then they would start a family. But here he was, with a ring in his hand and the woman was gone.

How was he going to face his associates and acquaintances after this humiliation? How could he face Collins, the mean faced bastard, who had prophesied that Stacy would dump him? They would sneer at him... And the thought was like a slow burn in his stomach.

Oh, you will pay for this Stacy. But before that... I need to pay for my stupidity.

A plan. He needed another plan. ASAP. A believable lie. He had to come out of this with his reputation unharmed. He didn't like people making a joke out of him. He was nobody's joke.

What? What?

His thoughts were interrupted by someone's very angry voice. He looked up to see a woman arguing with the waitress.

"What? Are you trying to rip me off? My French toast and burger cannot be more that 10 bucks, you know. This isn't my bill." She pointed to the bill in front of her. Her face was set in a frown and she narrowed her eyes at the woman who shrugged.

Her thick brown hair cascaded down her back like a waterfall. Soft and silky. Her green eyes were screaming, if eyes could scream.

"You ordered two plates of chicken nuggets, veggie rolls, a cup of hot chocolate and one coffee. One lava cake. Don't order so many if you don't have money, girl." The bulky waitress shouted and everyone in the eatery turned to look at the girl. She shrunk back in embarrassment and her lips trembled for a moment before she looked up with steel in her grass green eyes.

"Look here, ma'am, do I look like I can eat all those? Where is the guy who served me? You can call him and ask him. I am not lying."

"You tell me I am lying?" The waitress put her hand in her waist. She was scary. Even Logan was afraid of her right at that moment.

He looked at the woman, and then at the other girl, and her chin was raised defiantly and she refused to back down. Logan admired her for that. *Looks like our girl has got some spine.*

He went back to his lava cake that Stacy ordered and didn't even touch.

What. Wait. Back up.

Lava cake. Nuggets.

Oh oh. The waitress woman was so going to be sorry!

***

(Alexandra)

Alex wanted to bury her head inside the Earth and never come back out. The woman in front of her was loud and very, very rude.

No matter how much Alex tried to convince her, she always came back to the same thing. "Don't lie."

For God's sake, she wasn't lying.

She was already tired and it looked like whatever she ate would be digested before she left this damn eatery. The argument wasn't stopping anytime soon. That much was evident by the look in the woman's face. She looked like a boiled red lobster, ready to eat Alex alive.

"No, ma'am. Like I said, I am not lying. Can I talk to your manager?"

"Err, don't throw posh words at ma face, girl. I have seen people like you. Stealing."

What posh word? Manager?

And thief? God. This was the second time she was called a thief in the same day and the patience she had been holding on to snapped.

She glared at the woman. "Who are you calling a thief? I am not a thief."

"You dare raise your voice... " The waitress was cut off by another voice.

"Ma'am, may I cut in?" The waitress whirled around and her face completely changed. It was such a transformation that Alex was stuck by her skill. Whoa!

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you?" Her voice was sweet as honey.

Alexandra scrunched her nose. She looked at him and he looked like he had just walked out from a business magazine. Polished shoes. White shirt and black suit. A tie. Rich. He looked rich. And ok, handsome. His grey eyes were beautiful and Alex couldn't help but take a second look before she looked away.

Why was he here, now? As if she hadn't enough embarrassment to last a lifetime, here was a rich stranger coming in to... To what? To humiliate her further?

"It is just that you're at the wrong table." Logan said to the woman and Alex's eyes widened. So he was here to save her. Hmm. *A knight in shining shoes, look at that.* Alex thought sarcastically.

"What do you mean, sir?" The waitress asked, now subtly trying to cover her irritation. He pointed his fingers at his table, just left to hers.

"This bill's for that one." His voice was sweet, but his eyes, his eyes held irritation.

Alex looked at him with relief. She wanted to slump into her chair as her body felt weightless from it.

"Thanks." Alex muttered and he shook his head. As if he was summoned, the waiter who first served Alex came from whatever rut he was hiding in, with a cup of coffee and her bill. Alex wanted to punch him in the nose, instead she just jerked her head and looked at the woman, who now looked distressed.

"Oh, now give me that, ma'am." He almost pried the receipt away from the waitress' hand and paid the money. And then he turned to the waiter who had Alex's and paid for it, as well.

Everyone who was staring at Alex now returned to mind their own business, but they didn't forget to reprimand the waitress. Alex shook her head as she finally sat in her chair with a heavy sigh and took a sip of her coffee, before she opened her bag.

"Here's the bill you paid." She handed him the money back, but he refused to accept it with a shake of his head.

"Never mind. You were humiliated and it's ok, it isn't a big deal." He told her and shrugged and she looked at him with disbelief clear in her eyes.

The feeling of gratefulness became irritation as she watched him sitting there in her table, as if he owned it now, because he paid freaking eight bucks. What arrogance!

"And you think 8 bucks can balance out my humiliation?" She gave him a ridiculous look and then shook her head again. "Oh yes, it is not a big deal for you, but it is for me. And I don't like to be in anybody's debt." She pushed the money to his side and his eyes widened in disbelief.

"I didn't say that... You are mistaken."

She shrugged. "Whatever."

His eyes, grey eyes, stayed on her face as if he wanted to know every one of her secrets. He gave her a look that made her feel like he was reading all her thoughts, but she had become good at hiding her thoughts and showing people only what she wanted them to see. So she stared back at him with cool green eyes that refused to back down.

He blinked first. "Okay." He took the money and put it inside his wallet. "Okay."

She finished her coffee and gave him a small smile.

***

(Logan)

He stared at her eyes wide with befuddled wonder. What was with him getting rejected by women today?

One rejected his ring. Another rejected his money.

But this rejection didn't feel so sore. It didn't make him angry. It made him curious.

He pushed his fingers through his hair and sighed.

"Okay." He said as he took her money and pushed it inside his wallet. "Okay." He said again and she smiled.

And her smile... Oh God, that smile. It was like a miracle happening after a long time. She transformed in front of his eyes. The smile made her face bright and her eyes shimmered in the innocence of it all. It took his breath away.

Something about her made his curiosity burn, was it going to kill him?

"How old are you?"

"What now?" She gave him a tired look.

"How old are--"

"I heard you alright. I am 23. Okay?"

"You look much younger."

"What do I say to that?" She chuckled.

"Thank you?"

"Ok. Thank you. See you or may be not?! Bye." She walked out and he stared at her back. After two minutes, he got up and walked out and stopped when he saw her sitting in the bench on the side of the pavement with her eyes closed.

She looked tired. She looked like one of his newly formed plan. Yes. He knew what exactly he wanted to do, but what would she say?

Yes, yes, she will do very well. She isn't greedy and she has some steel in her spine. She needs that to survive in his world.

She was exactly what he needed right now. His only solution to all the problems staring at his face. So what, another year of his life would be wasted, but his reputation, that was worth more than a year.

She looked at her watch and then stood up.

"Hey... You..." God, why didn't he ask her name? She stopped and turned back.

"Yes?"

"You look like you need some money and food."

"You look like you need a slap?" She rolled her eyes.

"I have loads of it."

"What? Slaps?"

"Money."

"So?"

"Can we talk?" He asked as she looked at her watch with impatience.

"Must we?"

"I have a business proposal."

"Umm? Okay. Go on."

"And it has many finer points, but the main point is..." He stopped and looked at her. What if she said no? He didn't have time to find someone else. It had to be done. She was the perfect candidate and he wouldn't find anyone like her.

Yes, any woman would say yes, --*except Stacy,* a little voice annoyingly added, -- but he wouldn't know whether they would be selfish or greedy.

This one looked like a safer bet.

"Go on. I would like to hear what you are going to come up with this time?" She glared at him. "And remember, if it is anything I dislike, I will punch you. I am broke but not broken."

"Will you marry me?" He asked and added, "Please don't punch me."

Her mouth hung open.

Alex: Author, did that really happen? Is he going to kill me?

Me: Run. Run.

Logan: Hey you, I am not a psychopath.

Alex: Sure, you are not and I am not a vampire.

Me: Come with me Alex, let us run.

Logan: Author, you are annoying.

Somewhere along calling you a psycho and saying yes to your insane plans, I have learnt to appreciate you and your strangeness. - Alex.

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Chapter 3

2. Psychos, deals and wives

(Alexandra)

"Will you marry me?"

Did she hear that right? Or was her ears not working properly because of her hunger?

"What?"

"Be my wife."

Okay, so she heard him alright. There was no problem with her ears. But there was surely a problem with his brain.

She narrowed her eyes as she looked at him. He was supermodel handsome, tall and there wasn't an ounce of unwanted muscle in him. Lean, lithe and as he walked, he walked like a predator. He was all male, all sexy and correct her if she was wrong, all psycho.

Her cheeks were red. Fire red. Her eyes, if they had the power to incinerate human, would have burnt him down to his polished loafers, but alas, she had no such super power.

Her fingers, pointing at his face shook as she tried, tried to form a response to what he had just asked, but she just couldn't.

She just gaped and gaped. Opened her mouth and closed as he stood there, in her superiority, with a smile.

Smiling? He was smiling. Damn it.

She was so angry. And hungry. And hunger always made her violence reach a whole new level.

"Tell me where the hell is that hidden camera?" She asked once she gathered her thoughts. She looked around suspiciously, but as far as she could see, there seemed to be no trace of any camera. But then, if it was hidden, how could she see? "Oh, you think this is funny? Haha. I am not foolish enough to fall for that. So, is everything that went on inside is also an effing show?"

"This is not a tv show and there is no hidden camera." He sounded exasperated.

"Dude, come on. Don't mess with me. I am so hungry and I will kill you if you keep messing with me." She said as she glared at him.

"Don't you understand what I am saying?" He sighed a weary sigh.

"I do and that is why I want to know whether this is some effing reality show!" She looked at the man in front of her. The joker, who had just threw a curve ball of a question at her without

even blinking an eye. What kind of an idiot would do that? Could do that? He paid for her and she paid back and they shared two words and she didn't even know his damn name.

Now, he wanted to marry her and wanted her to be his damn wife?

"No. No. Listen carefully, I don't have time to waste. So... as I have already told you, this isn't any tv show."

"Ok then." Her eyes sharpened as she looked at him up and down. "Are you insane or really, incredibly stupid?

"I am not either and I hope we can talk about this a little more. Like adults." He said in his most patient voice. He didn't look insane, but looks were often deceiving. She had been deceived by them in the past.

"No, dude, you sure are. You should go see a shrink or something. I mean, who in their right mind would ask a stranger to be his wife? Wife. Haha." She chuckled at him and stopped when she saw his eyes. Uh-oh, angry.

He looked dangerous with that glint in his stormy grey eyes. He looked kind of sexy and all Alpha Male type, but... Yes, there must be some screw loose in his brain.

"What is the problem? I mean, you are broke, yes? You look hungry. And from what I gathered, you are drifting. You don't have a place to stay, right?"

How did he know all that? Did he get it just by looking at her.

Oh. So, dangerous. She thought.

"And I have a place that is much bigger for just me. So you can stay there for an year. So why can't you be my wife?" His eyebrows shot up as if she was the ridiculous one here.

"Man, I'm not going to live with you in your house, alone. I am sure you are not really normal. What if you are a psychopath? What if you marry girls and kill them later for the heck of it?" He waved a hand at her with a frown.

"I am no psycho. I am a well known businessman. And it is strange you don't know me. You are from around here, right?"

"Yes, yes. So you are Mr. Popular. Why do you need me, then?"

"You fit my checklist. Ok, to sweeten the deal, I'll pay you for your help a lot more than I originally planned to so that you can live quite comfortably after the term is up. It is only a year." He shrugged. "And then you can be free, single and rich and eat whenever you want to eat."

That sounded like a brilliant plan. She didn't have a house to stay and the seedy motel was getting dangerous by each passing moment and she had tried to work, but it didn't work out

very well for her, --and she didn't even want to work in hotels--what with her naivety and not knowing who to trust and not.

"So, why do you want a wife that bad, that you, Mr. Popularity, will go as far as begging a stranger?" She stared at him with eyes that were dripping with exhaustion and derision.

"I am not begging you. We are talking business here..." He was cut off by her snort. He gave her a glare. "And to answer your question, I want my ex-girlfriend to realize how wrong she was." He answered and his eyes, God, they were totally solemn.

"That so? Man, she must be some girl."

"She is so and so. But I am not... "

"Not the type to take no for an answer? God!"

"Now, will you stop being annoying and come inside? And let us talk this out."

"Why not? But I want to eat whatever I want. As a payment to listen to your totally mental plans. But I am not saying yes."

"Finally."

"Yep."

***

(Logan)

Logan sighed. She was one stubborn woman for someone who was so broke.

She was very annoying with all the questions and as she asked each one, her eyes were filled with puzzle and mockery. And he was beginning to doubt himself.

She finally stopped talking and they both walked inside the eatery.

When they sat down, the same woman came to them and eyed them with disappointment.

She looked at the waitress, whose name badge said Martha, and gave her a sweet smile that was all so sugar.

The waitress, Martha grunted. "Your order please, sir?"

"Hi Martha. Nice to see you again." She answered and leaned against her chair. "Umm, a plate of chicken nuggets, a club sandwich with a side of curly fries, a slice of pumpkin pie, and a cup of extra strong coffee. And the right receipt this time. That is all. Thank you."

Logan wanted to laugh, but he held it in. *So she is not as forgiving as she looked to be. Sassy. He liked it.*

"Yes." She said grudgingly as she walked away.

"That is precious. Her face!" He said.

"I am usually not that bad. But today was such a bad day and to add salt to the wounds, she made it worse." She said and immediately he felt bad for whatever it was that made her look that tired.

"Oh, it must be so bad." He said. "You okay?"

"Me? As okay as a girl could be when strangers came and ask her to marry them! What life. So, you go on... Tell me." She looked at him. "God, I still don't know your name and you don't know mine."

"Names are pretty inconsequential." He said and then smiled. "But yes, calling you 'hey you' is not becoming."

"You are a weird one and believe me, I have known many weird people." She said as she started at him. "I am Alexandra."

"Logan."

"Good. We seem to be running backwards. I mean, who asked someone to be their wife without knowing their name. What if I was named something grotesque?"

"Oh, that is what we are worried about right now?" He shook his head.

"So tell me your story. Even though I know I am never going to say yes to you, I really want to know that story of yours. It seems intriguing."

"Story?" He huffed. "So, you see, I have pretty clear plans and goals about my life and this is the right time for me to get married. And we were together for a year now, and I thought why not? I mean, I wouldn't want to waste an year of courtship just like that."

She snorted. "Courtship? Really? And plans and goals? No wonder she bailed on you. God, where is love in this plan of yours? Where is your romance?"

"Love and romance are not for realists. It was all just a touch of magical nonsense to confuse people and make everything complex. I don't believe in it."

"Now, I know why she said no. You can't blame her. Did you say all that nonsense to her?"

"What, no. Do I look stupid?"

"Yes, but that is for another time. Now go on." She said and stopped him with a hand when Martha came back with a tray filled with food. "You didn't order anything." She said as if she had just noticed that.

"I don't need anything. Go on, eat until you can't eat anymore." He said with a smile and looked at her with what felt like fondness, as she took a bite of her sandwich.

"So... It is not a big deal. Her saying no. But you see..."

"Your ego is hurt. Poor baby."

"It is more than my ego. It is my reputation. I have this business rival and we hate each other and he dated Stacy first and he was always bitter. We had shared some words and he promised that Stacy would walk away from me too and I being..."

"...a smug, arrogant fool you are challenged him. Am I right?"

"You eat your food and stop cutting me off. But yes, you are almost right. I am not smug or arrogant or a fool. But yes, he challenged me and I agreed."

"You are in a deep shit, dude. A pit full of shit." She stopped and then smiled like a little kid. "Hey, that rhymed."

"Yeah, you can become next Robert Frost." He said, and continued on with his story. "And I need to make it look like it was all because I found something with someone. Love at first sight or some other shit like that. You know, or nobody will believe me."

"But you know... Marriage is such a big thing and it is..."

"And it is not just that. Stacy, she needs a lesson, too."

"For saying no."

"No. For being smug about that. I know she will come back, and then I can teach her how rejection feels like."

"Wow, you are one scary guy. May God help me if I ever make you that angry."

"So what do you say? You are desperate and I need something from you. So why not make the best out of it?" He looked at her. He really wanted her to say yes. And it felt like desperation.

Yes. If he tried hard enough, he will find someone else. It wouldn't be hard. Someone who was like her, desperate and not greedy. But...

He didn't know why, but he wanted her to be the part of his plan. Her.

"Dude, I know how desperation smells and you stink of it right now. More than me."

"Okay. So?"

"You need to prove your peers that you are the one who walked away from her. But do you think Stacy is going to stay silent? "

"Oh, she won't. And that is why I need a solid proof."

"A solid proof. A wife? Wife? Oh God, this is so freaking hilarious. That is so going the extra mile." She laughed and her eyes... His heart skipped a beat when he saw her eyes too close to his. Those green eyes were nothing like he had ever seen. She had the strangest set of eyes, green

with sprinkles of gold in them, like a dessert sprinkled with brown sugar. They twinkled in merriment as she laughed at him, and oddly so, he wanted to laugh along.

"Yet you are the only one who is laughing."

"Oh, everyone will laugh if I tell them your story."

"Don't you dare."

"Okay, okay, but I think you should check your brain. I don't think it is working properly."

"Be serious for a moment." He looked at her with exhaustion. As she continued to talk, he was getting more and more doubtful about his plans, but he couldn't afford to doubt them.

"I am. I am being 200 percent serious. Logan, no one gets married to save face or get revenge. I can't let you throw away a chance at something true because you are all angry and bothered. It will go away. And Marriage is..."

"Save your preaching, okay. I have heard it a thousand time from my friend. Marriage is...two hearts in true love, blah blah blah. I am not interested."

"At least your friend has some brain cells left in him. Yours, I can clearly see, is sold somewhere for all these things you are wearing and all your money."

"It is kind of a profitable situation for you, but here you are trying to put me off from it. Why?"

"I can't let you waste your time for some silly revenge. Is there no way I can talk you out of this?"

"No. And this is why it has to be you." He muttered to himself as he looked at her with a new found admiration. It had to be her.

No one else could do.

"Ok, yes. But just for your information, you seems to think I am all this... Cool and sophistication, but let me tell you something. I am not."

"It is okay. I can take a little bit of adventure."

"Sure you can?" Her eyes glinted as she looked up at him in challenge and Logan was never the one to back away from challenge.

"Yes." He said with a smile.

Chapter 4

3. Kisses, motels and adventures

"I look into your green eyes with a hint of golden stardust in them and somehow I know this is such a big mistake. But I want to do this mistake. With you." - Logan

(Alexandra)

"Yes?" She couldn't believe herself. Was she really saying yes. Yes, it seemed so.

He was stubborn and if she said no, he would go and find someone else. Why miss an opportunity just because she wanted to be morally strong. Her bankruptcy wasn't going to go away just because she was all that.

People had always been selfish to her so that they would get what they want and it was okay if she wanted to be a little selfish. She had to be.

It was dangerous living alone in the motel and she was afraid of staying and being hungry. She had never in her life felt that. Hunger.

Now she knew how cruel it was, to not have anything to eat when your stomach was tearing itself from the inside out.

In the past, for her every birthday she had gone to Soup Kitchens with her dad to feed the homeless people, but she did it because she was kind. But now that she understood what it was like to feel hunger, and if she ever get to do it again, she would do it because she knew how much it hurt.

After Logan paid, they walked outside and Logan had a big smile on his face. He was really cute when he smiled.

"Stop smiling like that." She grumbled.

"I am just happy."

"Oh, the whole world can see that." She said as she looked up.

It was almost dark. It was that time when the light and darkness would meet at the edges and create a truly magical experience.

"Look at the sky. I love twilight hours. They always feel like they carry magic and that all good things will just be at this hour. It is the mix of hope and dejection, with a promise of more hope to come."

"Beautiful."

"Huh?"

"The sky." He said.

And it was. It was so beautiful and he was just as beautiful, too, and he looked like magic.

Tall. Dark. Handsome. Like a prince. If she wasn't so jaded these days, if she was the Alex of the past, she would have thought he was her own prince coming in charging in his Audi --or BMW or whatever car he had--, to save her.

She closed her eyes and smiled wistfully. How she wanted to be that Alex, who wore a rose tinted glasses to see the world.

But right now, this world, the whole world was naked to her, without any mask and it was so real. It was sad that this was real.

With men trying to live the next day without dying of hunger or cold, praying they get some money for another day and men trying to get married for they had a plan and could pay an insane amount for revenge to a stranger.

What a world! So full of contrasts!

"You look so sad." He whispered closer to her and she blinked up at him as he kissed her. "Don't be. You can not save the whole world."

How could he read her like that?

"I know and what is that?" She huffed and tried not to touch the place he just kissed. It tingled and she was feeling strange feelings. "Keep your lips to yourself." She gave him a glare.

"It is just an innocent kiss. The most bland one I have ever given anyone that young. I kiss my grandma like that all the time. No need to get all huffy and puffy." He said with irritation.

"First you kiss me without any preamble and now you are calling me an old lady?"

"When did I call you that?"

"You just hinted at that."

"I didn't."

"You sure did. I mean, you told me you kissed me like you kiss your grandma. What did that mean?"

"It just meant... Don't get your panties in a twist. God, you find the most annoying things to say. Is that your superpower or something?"

"You are the most arrogant, smug, vain..."

"Yeah, we get that. So are we going or are we going to stay here and list my rarer qualities?"

"Going where?"

"My house, of course."

She placed her hands on her hips as she gave him a look. "What now?"

"What about my bags? Who is getting them for me?"

"You have bags?" He looked confused.

"So... Tell me Mr. Brains, how do you suppose I have been living before you so gallantly decide to come charging in your Porsche and save the poor me? Eh?" Her voice was all sugar.

"Ok, no need to be sarcastic. Get in. And where are your bags."

He typed in the address in the GPS as she told him the address. "Can I drive it?"

"What? No, never."

"Boys and their cars. Hmm." She shrugged and got in. But she really wished she could drive it. She had a Porsche Macan, too, a gift for her birthday from her dad and she loved it so much, and she had to give it up, too, because there were so many greedy people in the world.

"It is not a car. It's Porsche."

"I know. Macan. And with panoramic roofs. Oh yes, and all customized. You must be really rich, huh? It is turbo, isn't it? 440 hp? 3604 cc?"

"Color me impressed. So how do you know all this?"

"A woman can't tell all her secrets."

"A woman of mystery, huh?"

"Pretty please, can I drive your car? I promise I will be careful."

"You are not getting your grubby hands on my baby."

"We will see." She said as she leaned against the comfort of the car and closed her eyes with a sigh, as he drove towards their destination.

"Are you kidding me?" His voice shook her awake. He was looking at her with anger and something that looked closer to concern. Oh, he would refuse it with all his heart, but she had seen traces of generosity even if he tried to hide it behind a stony mask. Not all the masks were a lie, then. "You are living here and you dared to ask so many questions? I can't believe you."

"Oh, get out and get going." She opened the door and walked inside. There were eyes on her body, almost as instant as there were mosquitos, and she hurried towards her room, and he followed closely behind her as if he was protecting her. She heard him grumbling as he walked with her.

"Bastard. She is not a piece of meat." He said to one man who kept looking at her. "I will poke your eyes out if you don't turn away right now." The man turned away and Alex chuckled.

"You think this is funny, Alexandra? Why the hell are you living in this-- in this scary, creepy place? God, these men... They are all wolves. How did you survive?" He was angry. And she liked it, she liked that he cared enough to get angry. "Let us get your bags and get the hell out of here."

"Gladly."

"Are there bedbugs in there?" He looked at the single bed pushed against the wall when she opened a rusty lock and walked in.

"No bedbugs. Thankfully."

"Little blessings. That your bags?"

"Yeah. Wait, I have got some Toiletries."

"Umm, don't bother. We will buy it from your payment."

"Hmm, okay." She shrugged as she lifted her bags and he was just standing there, looking. "Hey, a little help here?"

"Uh, yes. It is safe, right?"

"Oh, you won't die. I didn't and I have been living here for weeks."

"Who knows what kind of viruses and bacteria breeds in this place?" When she glared at him, he sighed. "Ok, give it."

She sneaked closer to him and pulled his keys away from his shirt pocket with a naughty wink. "I will hold on to it." She told him and ran away. She could hear him yelling curses, but she wanted to feel the wind in her hair and feel the thrum of the wheels beneath her fingers. She needed that. It had been too long.

"Don't you dare."

***

(Logan)

He was huffing as he reached the narrow parking area and before he could catch that little thief, she drove past him with a squeal. The roofs were open, too.

Okay. Now he knew what she was talking about not being that calm and sophisticated.

"The nerve." He gritted his teeth and waited for her, standing outside the dingy motel, praying nobody would see him standing there with three bags on him. Imagine what he was going to say if someone he knew come to him and asked what he was doing here? What would he say?

Buying myself a wife?

Not a pleasing scenario.

Finally what felt like a decade and some --he must have some grey hair right now -- she was back.

"Are you for real! You can't just do that. " He yelled at her. "That is reckless and stupid and I don't like stupid people. Don't you ever do that."

"I know and I am sorry." Her face fell. "I... I have been in a state of... Limbo... How do I say that, I felt suspended, you know, like everything in my life was on a pause and I wanted so bad to feel it. Feel alive. Just for a moment. But yes, it was really wrong of me to do that. God, I didn't know what came over me. Sorry." She handed him the car keys and turned away from him.

Oh God. Now he was sorry for yelling at her. But, he was still angry.

It was getting darker and what if she, she got into an accident or something.

He shook his head.

"What if you... You had hit something? It is dangerous."

"Yes, sorry. I am sorry. But your car is fine." She sighed. "I promise I won't do that again."

When she told that to him, he realized he wasn't worried about the car when she drove away. Not even a bit. He was worried about her.

And *his Porsche* was not just a car. It was his baby. So why in the hell wasn't he more worried about it?

He shook his head. It annoyed him, the knowledge that something was not right, here.

He had smiled a lot with her than he had ever smiled with Stacy or with anyone else, except his best friend. She made him laugh. She made him kiss her to comfort her when she looked sad and he wasn't the type to comfort anyone. She made him care.

It wasn't right.

She looked glum as she stood there, refused to look at him. And he wanted to push that look away from her face.

And it was all so confusing and irritating and he wanted to punch something. Punch himself. Or Stacy. That would be better. Much better.

She was the reason for all this mess.

"Oh, don't look so alive." Alex grumbled. "I said I am sorry, right. And I warned you. I am not always level headed and cool."

"Warned me, alright!" He grunted. "You didn't warn me you are totally reckless."

"Oh, look at this pot, calling little kettle black. Reckless? Psh!" She scoffed at him.

He glared at her. "Yes."

"Oh, you should have guessed. I mean, I agreed to go on with your moronic plans. If that wasn't reckless, I didn't know what was."

"You see, sometimes, when you talk, I just want to stitch your lips together." He muttered and then he couldn't help but stare at her lips. It was a very nice lips. All pink and soft and he wanted a bite of that.

She was biting her lips, and her eyes were filled with irritation as she looked at him.

What would she do if he kissed her? A proper kiss? Not a kiss on the cheek.

And no, no, don't go there, you stupid brain.

And as he stared at her, his gut twisted and somehow he knew he was making a bigger mistake. But he wanted to. He wanted to make that mistake. With her. Just with her.

"Get in." He spat at her.

"It is not too late. You can still back away, you know." She said with a moody scowl.

"No one is backing away from anything."

"You don't have to look so down. I didn't want this."

"Shut up." *Or I am going to kiss you, damn it.* "Before I grab you and throw you inside, get in." He was angry.

"Ah, I dare you."

He walked towards her and she backed away. "Neanderthal." She muttered as she opened the door and got in.

"That is more like it. Now that wasn't difficult, was it?" He shut the door and got around to his seat.

"Such arrogance. Smug little..."

"Child, stop."

"I am not a damn child. Stop being so condescending, you jerk."

"Oh, you are not? Good. Let us keep that in mind, eh?"

"You are such a smug jerk."

"We have established that, haven't we?"

"Ahh." She screamed. And he smiled. When she stopped, he looked at her and she smiled and shrugged.

"You hungry."

"Yes."

"It is already dinner time. Let's eat before we go back."

"Oh, God, a thousand time yes."

"You didn't say that to my marriage proposal?" He smirked.

"I said yes. That is more than you deserve, you psycho." She teased back and he smiled.

He was smiling a damn lot and his lips were starting to hurt. It was damn near a miracle.

He stopped the car in front of a restaurant that was closer to his house.

The valet picked up his car keys and he walked in, as Alexandra trailer behind him. She didn't look like she was overwhelmed by the size of the restaurant or the shine of the patrons in shining rhinestones. She fit.

Head held high, she walked like she owned the place. She wasn't covering or shy or fumbling.

He pulled her chair for her and she chuckled. "Oh, such gentleman. Don't think you can fool me, though." She poked her tongue out and he chuckled.

"Can you stop being so annoying?"

"Eh, boring, but whatever."

"Champagne?" He asked her.

"Why not?"

When the champagne came, she clicked it with his glass. "To revenge." He said. She smiled at him and shook her head.

"I have one better than that. To a freaky adventure."

He shuddered. "Okay, now I am second guessing all this."

"Good. All you have to do is say no."

"I can't afford that, can I?"

She shrugged. "You can, but you are hardheaded."

He ordered beef bourguignon - beef braised in red wine, beef broth and seasoned with garlic, fresh herbs, pearl onions and mushroom along with *pissaladière* which is topped with anchovies, onions and olives, a French version of thin crusted pizza. He looked at her and noticed she was seriously considering her menu. It looked like she knew what she was doing. Who was his mystery woman?

"Confit de conrad. And what he ordered. Plus, souffle. Thank you." The waiter in red vest smiled at her and she smiled back. He flushed a bright red.

"Stop flirting with him." Logan said as the man walked away.

"I wasn't flirting. I was just being..."

"You are flirting." He said and considered her for a moment.

Even in her floral top and denim, she looked right at home.

"You weren't always poor." He said. She looked up at him through those long lashes and shrugged.

"I am still not ready to open that wound up. Still filled with pus and blood and it hurts."

"If you ever want to, know that I am right here."

"Somehow I know that even before you tell that to me. I don't know why or how, but you feel like a friend. More an enemy, but a friend, too." She said as she looked at with sincerity written across her face.

"Enemy? What did I do?"

"Ask me what you didn't do?" She shrugged and broke the bread in the basket and applied butter with a smile. She sniffed. "God, the smell of butter. Haven't smelled it for so long and God, listen to me. I sound like a spoiled brat."

"Only a little." He chuckled when she glared at him.

"Ah, shut up." She said and when the waiter came back with her food, she attacked them with the vigor and excitement of a little kid. Her smile was so big he wondered if it hurt her beautiful lips. And she was shining in the dim lightning and the candle light flickered in her eyes, making the gold in them stronger. Such beautiful eyes, and they could suck someone inside them, but Logan refused to be sucked.

Some woman was singing in French in the background and it was all so... So... He didn't want to say, but romantic and cozy and private. This was the kind of the place a man should probably propose to his woman. But there he was, proposing in a bustling eatery to Stacy. What was he thinking? Oh, he wasn't thinking about romance and all before this woman next to him opened her mouth and put those ridiculous ideas in his head.

"How do you eat that much and stay like this?" He smiled at her.

"Don't talk to a woman about her calories, her waistline and her age. It is offending." She looked at him with her eyes narrowed. "And yet, you have talked about all of that. You really don't have any boundaries, do you?"

"What is a little honesty between husband and wife?" He grinned as he bit in to his braised beef. It's taste was so familiar, yet also new. It was why this was one of his favorite dishes.

"Don't forget the important word, pal. *Fake. That right there...*"

"Oh, how can I forget when you keep throwing it at my face?" He grumbled. God, couldn't she forget that for a moment? Suddenly his mood was soured.

"Hey man, what are you doing here?"

"Oh shit. I was going to ease you into my life, but now we have got to storm right in."

"What are you talking about?"

"The blonde, my best friend. The other one... "

"Stacy's ex boyfriend."

"Right."

"You are so dead."

She chuckled and continued eating.

You pretend like you are made of granite. But when you are not trying, I can see the velvet in you. - Alex ~~~

Chapter 5

4. Friends, Rivals and Faking its

(Alexandra)

"That blonde, he is my best friend and the other one... " Somehow she knew.

"Your Stacy's ex?"

"Not my Stacy, but yes."

"Oh, you are so dead." She said to him before she ate her ducks.

"And do you even care?"

"Oh, I do. I care very much about my duck."

"God. You are the most irritating creature I have ever come across."

"Thank you."

"That is not a compliment and shit, they are coming this way. Can't they see I am having dinner with a beautiful woman here?" She raised her eyebrows. *Beautiful woman?* He didn't look like he noticed what he had just said and Alex felt a strange tingle in her bones.

It was so weird -- these feelings rippling through her. She had never been attracted to anyone before. She didn't have a relationship more than four months and there were only one who could be remotely come anywhere closer to being called a boyfriend and she had stayed four months because she liked him, as a friend. It wasn't like guys didn't find her attractive, but all those guys who asked her out, they all made her feel like she was somewhat sexless. Asexual. Like she couldn't feel it.

But with this one, it was all so much. Too much. The sensations. The weird feelings. The tingles and somersaulting intestines.

She had to be careful with him or she would soon be nursing a heartbreak. And she couldn't.

"Why are you freaking out? You are going to out yourself if you act like that." She said as she tried to put a stop to her thoughts. They were freaking her out.

"Now you are giving me lectures?"

"Grumpy." She poked her tongue out.

"How old are you? Two?"

"How old are you? Two hundred? Stop looking like you have just been caught smuggling stolen diamonds. Take a deep breath. Relax. Or it will all be over before it has even started."

"I didn't expect this. I was planning a perfect... " He trailed off, irked.

"But it happened. Now, we will see if you have really got game. Just smile and follow my lead."

"Your lead?"

"So you are going to lead?" She quirked her brows and he shook his head. God, he looked really pale. And as she looked at him, she realized how really important it was for him. But why? Why was it that important?

"No."

"Thought so. And now, smile, here they are."

"Logan, hey man, when did you come back from the conference? Why didn't you send me a text?"

"Hi Daniel. Hello Collins."

"Hey Forte."

Forte. Alex's head jerked up and Logan looked at her, his eyes wide. They seemed to be pleading with her.

'Don't mess this up.'

'I won't, but buddy, you have got some explaining to do. Logan Forte?'

'I will. Just not now.'

Ok, how are we doing it? Alex though as she shook her head.

"And who is this?" Daniel looked at her, his eyes suspicious.

"I am Logan's friend."

***

(Logan)

Did they just do that? Talking by eyes? *Weird*, Logan thought before he looked back at his friend, who was now pulling a chair back and was getting himself ready to sit down.

Yeah, why don't you just go on and sit down? As if I am not having a dinner with a woman? Logan thought as Daniel sat down.

He stomped on Daniel's foot and he looked at Logan with a frown, looking totally clueless. Finley Collins stood there, staring at Alexandra. It looked like he was in a conundrum. He wanted to stay, but he didn't want to look like he was interfering.

Danny, though, had no such dilemma. He was now blissfully eating Logan's food, as he studied Alex with a suspicious look.

"And who is this?"

"I am Logan's friend." She smiled with a secret twinkle in her eyes that contradicted her words and she threw him a wink, pretending to be all secretive.

Danny saw that, so did Finley. Their eyes were round as saucers as they continued to stare like they had never seen a woman in their life.

"We met at the conference." Alex said with a smile. "Talked and realized, we are pretty... I don't know how to say it. Compatible? You understand? There is something there. I asked him out, but he had a girlfriend." She looked at Logan, her eyes filled with longing and Logan couldn't breath. "So friends it is, the universal solution. Eh." She joked with a smile and Danny smiled back.

"Finley, you go on man, and join Peter and I will join you two later."

Grimly, Collins nodded and walked away, but Logan was sure he didn't want to. He wanted the gossip. But he wasn't getting any, not today.

"I am Daniel Anderson. And I think we can establish that connection." He smirked. Playboy!

Logan gritted his teeth. "Stop hitting on her."

"You jealous?" Danny smirked. "Oh, look like you are. But you have Stacy and I am single."

"I don't have Stacy. We broke up." Logan said and he felt strangely relieved by that thought. What now?

"Thank God, you finally become smart enough. She is such a... Oh, sorry." He looked at Alex and scratched his chin with a sheepish smile. "She just makes me so angry."

"Oh, go on. Don't stop on my account. I don't mind. I would love to hear what you thought of her. You see, I am not such a fan of her." Alex shrugged as she took a bite of her souffle.

"I like you." Daniel said with an appraising look. "Man, this one is a real prize. You should hold on to her or I will steal her away."

"No one is going to steal anyone. Close your mouth and eat." When Danny opened his mouth, Logan waved a hand. "Stop. Don't say that."

"He can't close his mouth and eat."

"Great minds think alike."

Logan threw them an exasperated look. "Really?! Alex? I just warned him not to say that."

She chuckled. "I know. That's why I said it."

"Very mature." Logan said. "You two will get along famously."

"Because we are both funny and easy going. You should be like that. I mean, you don't have to carry the world in your back, anymore. You are finally in a place where you can relax and enjoy." Danny said and Logan glared at him and whispered, shut up.

Alex looked at him curiously. "So... Logan Forte, who were you before all this glamour and fame?" She asked with a curious look on her pretty eyes.

Why was he using so many adjectives today, to describe her beautiful eyes? There he go, again!

"It is nothing." Logan was quick to answer. She scrunched her nose and shook her head.

"It was not nothing. But if you don't want to say, it is okay." But her eyes said it was not okay. For the added effect, she had a pout. And those lips... Oh. He sighed.

"No big deal. And don't look at me like that." Logan pointed a finger at her.

"Hmm." She widened her eyes with a smirk. "Look how?"

"It is a big deal. Logan here... He is a self made man. His parents are not poor, but they aren't exactly rich, either. You see. All his money, he had to work for it, work hard for it. And he did it, too, at such an young age and people are always looking at him, people like Collins and waiting for him to tumble down from the top. Praying. Wolves. And it made him so cautious." Danny's voice was proud.

There was a smile, one of pure boasting on Danny's face. Logan felt like he wanted to hide his head inside the table. He looked at Alex and she looked like she was contemplating something. She did not say anything to what Danny had just said.

"God Danny, will you stop that?"

"But as I told you, Logan, you are there and you are going to be there. No one is going to change that. You are smart, you got that drive and you fit in."

"So what was it like fir him when he first come into this world?"

"Not easy. I mean, these rich people, they don't like outsiders trudging inside their territory. They were sneering, full of contempt. They were sure it was some first timers luck. They were not ready to accept a man from outside their turf, not accommodate him. But Logan proved them all wrong. He changed their mind about him and he accomplished everything on his own."

"Not alone. You helped." Logan said.

"What? By my constant wisdom? And my witty insights? Eh." Danny waved him off with a dismissal, but Logan knew how much Daniel had helped him by just being there, by having his back.

If it wasn't for Daniel, he would still be a nobody. Still stuck in a single bedroom apartment infested with rats. He would have been working under someone, calling someone else as boss. But because of Daniel, who had pushed him to follow his dreams, --when they were doing architecture and then MBA-- here he was. His own boss. And many other called him boss.

"Don't dismiss it. Having a friend can go a long way in strengthening your backbone." She said as she looked wistfully at her hands. "Oh, I miss my friend. She is in Canada now."

"You talk with her often?" Daniel asked.

"Not recently. But yes, we do. I recently lost my phone and lost the contacts." She replied and then looked at Logan for the first time since Danny told her about him.

He watched, mesmerized, as her eyes touched his with tenderness. And pride. He watched as she gently placed her hands over his and squeezed. And he wanted her to look at him like that, always.

"As Daniel said, you are here, Logan. You have worked a lot for that, but sometimes you have got to relax." She whispered.

When she took her hand away, he instantly missed her warmth. Her touch.

Danny looked at them and whistled.

"I have stretched my stay here. I feel so unwelcome." He stood up. "Ta-ta. See you soon."

"Bye." She said, but her eyes never left Logan. Logan felt trapped. Imprisoned inside her eyes. Lost. And Found, all inside the depth of her eyes.

Daniel chuckled as he walked away. "Friends they say... And... " His voice was a distant memory.

"Okay. It is done. Phew. Good acting. He wouldn't dare second guess us again." She said with a smile and he felt like someone had poured a bucketful of ice cold water over his head.

He jerked upright. Acting? God, what a fool he was. For a moment, he really believed the pride in her eyes, and the warmth, it was all real. It felt real.

"You are a good actor." His voice was filled with disgust and derision.

"What? Why are you complaining, now? I helped you out."

"You did. You did. Hmm, look at that. Let us go. It is already late." He stood up and she followed with a knot in her eyebrows.

***

(Alexandra)

Self made man. No wonder he is so sensitive and arrogant. But she could see that now, behind the mask, his fear. He had been rejected a lot and another one from Stacy, it would have hurt. Though he refused to admit it, it would have.

But he was strong. He survived the wolves. She knew how rich people could be. She was the victim of their greed and selfishness.

She looked at him, pride filling her insides. She melted. Her heart was a gooey mess. As her eyes locked with his, he was staring at her, too. His grey eyes were like stormy skies, like rain clouds. Dark. Dangerous. And equally enthralling.

She felt like she could get lost in there happily.

Her breath stuttered. She watched with wonder as her hand moved over his, as if it had a mind of its own. The touch was all electric.

"As Daniel said, you are here, Logan. You have worked a lot for that, but sometimes you have got to relax." She said and took her hand back. Any more minute and she couldn't take back her hands or her emotions.

"I have stretched my stay here. I feel so unwelcome." Someone was saying. "Ta-ta. See you soon." Oh, Daniel. He was still here.

"Bye." But she couldn't look away from Logan's eyes. Magnetic, his eyes refused to let go.

Daniel chuckled, breaking her from this trance. "Friends... " Daniel's voice faded into a noise.

No. She shook her head. She couldn't do this. She didn't know him. *Don't you dare!* She warned herself. He would laugh at her if he could hear what was running through her mind.

"Okay. It is done. Phew. Good acting. He wouldn't dare second guess us again." She lied through her teeth. His eyes shuttered and he jerked upright.

"You are a good actor." There was a bite in his voice.

"What? Why are you complaining, now? I helped you out." She looked at him with irritation. But she was confused. Why was he acting like this, as if he was hurt when she said it was all just an act?

"You did. You did. Hmm, look at that. Let us go. It is already late." He stood up. She picked her bag and walked out with him.

She watched his back as he walked in front of her, looking strong and she knew why it was so important to save his face, his pride in front of all the people who had mocked and ridiculed him and his passion. Who had refused to believe in him and thought he would fail.

If they knew, people like Collins would surely use it to beat him down and she didn't want to give any of them that chance. She wanted to protect him with everything she had and this feeling was so intense that it shook her to the core.

She wanted to stand in front of him and challenge any and everyone who wanted to chase Logan back to where he came from. It was like an instinct. And it scared her.

This here between them, whatever this was, was transient. Fleeting. He didn't believe in love or marriage. This was all just a ruse to save his pride and it would be over soon.

So losing her head over this man was not a sane idea.

Keep your cool, Alex. Yes, he is super cute and super inspiring. You can watch him from afar and hero worship. Don't get too close. No. No.

She strengthened her resolve.

As they drove away, the car was filled with silence. Suffocating silence.

And she could smell him everywhere around her.

***

(Logan)

Logan looked at her, subtly, through his side eyes. She was leaning against the window, her face pressed to them as she watched the night passing them. There was a small smile playing peek-a-boo in her lips. She looked so content and peaceful. And relaxed.

And the silence, it was like a noose around him. He was never much in to conversations, but somehow it came easier with her.

He had easy time bantering with her and he only ever truly enjoyed talking with Daniel, who had been his friend for almost eight years now.

He opened his mouth and then snapped it shut.

"What?" He was surprised when she asked.

"What what?"

"You look like you are itching to tell me. something. And then keep deciding against it."

"Nothing. I just want to say... I mean, sorry for snapping back there."

"It took you long enough." She complained. "You didn't like it, right? Telling sorry."

"Hmm, let me think. No."

"So Logan Forte? Huh? Shouldn't you have mentioned it before?"

"Would you have agreed sooner if I told you my name?"

"What? No way. I would not have stopped to hear you out in the first place."

"Thought so. You are one strange woman."

"Stranger than you?" She gave him a sneer. "You are the one who asked a stranger to marry you."

"I could feel the goodness in you."

She put a hand to her heart and pretend to swoon.

"Haha. Very funny." He said.

"Eyes on the front, idiot. I don't want to die today, even though I want to kill myself for agreeing to your plans."

"Why do you keep moaning about that?"

"Because I love to remind you how much of a sacrifice this is on my part."

"Oh yeah, you sacrificed your seedy motel and hunger pangs. Pray tell me what else you sacrificed."

"You are an egoistical..."

"...arrogant jerk. I know, I know. I am getting bored hearing the same. Be creative next time."

"Oh, creative. I can be very creative, you..."

Bleep. Bleep. Bleep.

"God, stop. you have such a dirty mouth. Stop, please."

"Next time don't ask me to be creative." She warned him as she pointed a finger at him.

"Lessons learned. Moving on." He said as he pressed the remote to open the compound grill gate. It opened with a groan that was so familiar.

"Welcome to my home."

"Oh wow."

"Better than the motel? Right?" He gave her a cheeky grin. "Are you glad you agreed to go with my insane plans? Huh?"

"Yeah." He gave her a smug smile when she answered. "But there is one problem here. You. Creepier than the men in the motel."

"How the hell you came to that conclusion? I am not creepy. Those men in the motel who looked at you... Now, they were really scary creeps."

"Oh, yet none of them came to me and asked me to marry them." She laughed when she saw his narrowed eyes.

"God, when are you going to let it go, child?"

"When I feel like it."

"Oh God, please save me."

"Um, He already did, didn't He? I am here with you, becoming your fake wifey."

"Yeah, I am still deciding if you are my saving grace or another one of my headache."

"I have already decided. You are a headache."

"Oh God..." He groaned.

"Please save him." She finished.

Chapter 6

5. Mansions, hot guys and almost kisses

"Sometimes, I see you puttering around my kitchen and sometimes, you are sitting in my chair with a book on your hands, and I feel like you belong right here, in my home." - Logan.

(*Alexandra*)

Oh, his house was big. Like mansion big. It stood majestically, proud and unashamed, just like its owner, surrounded by thick trees and neatly trimmed bushes.

Flowers bloomed in the bushes, adding their scent to the night air. She could hear the sound of water from somewhere as she stepped out of his car, and the sound was so calming in the night.

"Where is that sound coming from?"

He stepped out from the car and came to stand beside her. "From the pool house."

"Whoa. You have a pool house. Okay, I am warning you now, if you can't find me in the house, you should know that I will be right there." She said as she walked to the pool house.

The pool house was big, too. Green grass carpeted the lawn before it lead to a massive pool with aqua blue water. It glinted in the moonlight and Alex was mesmerized by the sliver of moon 🌙 reflected in the cool water.

A marble statue of a tall woman stood in the side, gently offering water to the pool from a big bowl in her hands.

"God, this is like the most amazing pool house I have ever seen."

"You have seen your share of pool houses, didn't you?" He asked as he leaned against wall. In the shadows, he looked tall and dangerous.

She stiffened before she turned back to him.

He sighed. "You are not telling me anything, yet. And you know everything about me."

She silently toed her shoes off and sat down outside the pool, dipping her toes inside the cool water and instantly felt her body relax.

What a day! And it was just a day.

It was like a rollercoaster ride and her head was spinning, but as she sat there, she felt pleasantly thrilled.

She could hear him walking towards the pool. He sat down next to her and looked at her with his eyebrows pinched together. "It was that bad." It was not meant to be answered.

She shrugged.

"This is beautiful. It feels like I can finally relax here."

"I always love this place at night. Kind of away from the hustle and bustle of the life. Alone. Secluded. And private. Mine."

"Now I am here to intrude. Do you mind?"

"Strangely, no." He smiled. "I mean, I should mind, but I don't know why I didn't. This is nice. Wait." He stood up and when he was back, he had a glass of lemonade in his hand.

"Lemonade? Really?"

"Just close your eyes and take a sip and you will know why."

She did as he said and she moaned. It was cool on her tongue, it was yummy. Sweet and tangy, the perfect mix. She took another sip and smiled. "Who made this? It is the perfect portion of everything."

"I did."

"You have to teach me how to make that sometimes."

"Not going to happen. A guy can't divulge all his secrets, now can he?"

"I see what you did right there, Logan Forte. I see that."

"Good." He chuckled and the sound was like warm honey pouring through her bones. It warmed her and soothed her.

She looked up to see his grey eyes shining in the dark and they were like a siren song. It was calling to something deep inside her.

Night air gently embraced her with its soft fingers and she could smell the lilies that was planted in the boxes along with Logan. Her hair played to the tune of the wind and she felt liquid.

She felt hot and cold.

He pushed one unruly lock of hair behind her ears and she shuddered from his touch.

She wanted more. But somewhere deep inside, she knew wanting him was only a recipe for disaster.

He didn't believe in anything she did. Love. Romance. Soul mate. Partner. His view about everything was so mechanical. It was all plans and goals and checklists for him.

Though she had been hurt and jaded by the people around her, she still believed in all that. She still believed in magic and true love and hold on to it, for that was the only thing she had to hope and wait for in this cruel, cunning world.

They were closer now, but they were worlds apart. They could never exist in the same star. They were too wild and too different to make it work. They would just explode.

He leaned closer and she could smell a whiff of his Cologne. And it was such a heady scent. All male, all Logan.

And all wrong for her.

She jerked upright and moved away from him as if he was fire.

He cleared his throat and she twitched her cardigan with nervous fingers.

They sat in the silence for another minute, before she stood up.

"It is late." She forced a yawn.

He stood up, too, and he avoided her eyes. He looked at his watch. "Yeah, I have a meeting early in the morning."

"Let's go." She said and he nodded and they walked to the main house, together.

Oh hell, Alexandra Annie Steele, what were you thinking? Did you lost your effing brain?

But the thing was... She wasn't thinking. Whenever he was near, she couldn't think properly.

This is such a big, big mistake. No, I want to run away before I can not run at all.

But she was here. She promised him and she was stuck.

*** *(Logan)*

His body was still buzzing. Her scent, he could still smell it, as if it was inscribed over his skin. It was such an addictive smell. Such a singular one, as if the perfume was mixed with her essence. Her scent. Just hers.

Logan scratched his neck. This was a dangerous territory and he almost crossed it, all because he couldn't control his need.

That wouldn't do.

They had to spend an year together and he couldn't make it awkward or strange.

He liked to think they were becoming friends and he could not mess that up.

His relationship with women was always messy and bothersome. He couldn't do that to her. Him. Them.

"Hey, you want a tour of my home?" He asked as he opened the door. It was an olive branch and he prayed she took it. He couldn't bear the stress of this weird energy between them. Oh, yes, he was very much attracted to her, but more than that, he was attracted to her mind. And he didn't want to spoil this, this start of a beautiful friendship, by being impulsive.

She did take it. And her body visibly relaxed from its previously stiff posture. And he was glad he decided to try repair it. He was never the one who raised olive branches willingly, if anything, he was the one who could bear the silences like a pro, but with her it was all so difficult and impossible.

"Would love it." She said and then stopped.

"Oh I know this." She waved her hands around. "You handed it over to some prissy, stuffy interior decorator, didn't you?" Her voice was full of frustration. "Why would you do that?"

"Because it is easier?" He said and raised his hands. "God, don't kill me with your eyes." He said when he noticed she was glaring at him.

"Everything is so clean, clinical and there is no life in it."

"They are furnitures and light fixtures and... They are lifeless, FYI." He said as he looked at her. Her cheeks were red, and her hair was sticking up in all direction, but she was still the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"FYI... " She mimicked him with a scowl. "They are lifeless only because your decorator made them so."

"You really hate my interior decorator?" He was amused. She looked angry and animated.

"I do. It is a she, isn't it?"

"Yes. And she is hot." He said with a grin. Melissa Meyers. She really was hot, but she was also the most boring woman he had ever met. She talked about patterns almost obsessively on every one of their conversations.

Alex glared and threw a towel at his face. He picked it up with a chuckle.

"Her imagination, not so much." She said.

"Oh, go on." He spread his hands. "Tell me how you will do this?" He was curious to find out how her mind worked.

"That table. Gone. The big, gaudy chandelier, gone. That couch, it can stay. It has some character."

"Daniel's housewarming gift." Logan said.

"That is why it has character. Your woman has no character. For her, it is all about money. Everything here is so expensive but so, so bland."

"Yeah? But how do you know about all this?"

"I know it because... I studied it for three years of my life."

"Oh." He was surprised. He didn't expect it.

His mouth hung open as he stared at her in surprise and she bristled. Her cheeks flushed.

"What, what is that look?" She pointed to his eyes, almost so close to him as if she wished she could poke right inside his eyes and he took a step back.

"Don't poke my eyes out." He said in alarm.

"You looked like you were shocked? Why was it so shocking? Did I look like a high school drop out to you?" She gritted her teeth.

"Hey, I am sorry okay." And then he was irritated. "You... You are making me say too much of that." It was true. He never said so many Sorry in a single day, before he met her.

"What?" She looked confused.

"Sorry. I try not to tell it too often. It will become meaningless."

"Oh, you hate to tell it because it will make you look so wrong. You hate being wrong."

She was right, as well.

"Such a brat." He said with a teasing grin. "Know it all."

She poked her tongue out.

"Childish." He added.

"And what is with that table? Like really? This isn't a Royal banquet hall. That looks so out of place."

"Gone." He ticked with his hand, imitating her earlier actions with a smile and she slapped his finger away with a moody scowl.

"Don't try to be so funny. And your walls, they are so grey. Bleh and so boring."

He laughed. "I am boring." He was. He knew that. He had become boring somewhere along the line of trying to reach the top and managing to fit in with those people who were already at the top.

"Good. You are honest unlike some men I have known, at least. You can still be saved."

"How many men have you known?"What was that in his voice? Jealousy? Logan wanted to redo the sentence, but it was already said and she looked at him with searching eyes. He looked away from them.

They were his damnation. They read too much of his thoughts with just a look.

"Umm. Don't know."

"Countless?" Logan snapped.

"Are you jealous, Logan Forte?"

"What, don't be stupid? Why would I be?" He chuckled and scratched his chin. Uh-oh. Was he? No. No.

"That is a bold faced lie, but I am not calling you out on it." She grinned at him like a cheshire cat as she walked into the kitchen.

"Very kind of you." He grunted as he stared at her back. He didn't know why, but yes, he was jealous. Only a little bit. A very tiny bit.

"Now, this, this is much like it. So much better. What changed miss. Hot's mind?" She pointed the kitchen with granite counters and a big oven and a hot top. Homely yet clean.

"Umm, this is my mom's idea."

"Hah, that is what changed. Your mom is much better. You should have hired her, instead."

"I will tell my mom." He said as he picked a bottled water from the refrigerator and stared at her with wonder. She was amazing. Her mind was amazing.

"I have something else you might like."

"Tell me you have a massive library. Tell me."

"I have a massive library."

She cheered. "Oh God this was fantastic." She said as he opened the door to one of his favorite places in this house.

It was fixed with rows and rows of mahogany shelves, carrying rows and rows of books. So much books. The whole room smelled of wood and paper. Old and new paper. The recliner in the side had a small side table which Logan used to place his saucer of tea.

It also had a huge sofa, beige, big and cushy. There was also a throw and Afghan over a large mattress on one side. That was his sisters' idea. They loved to read lying down. And they only ever read romance novels and fictions. Other books were too much for them, they would tell him.

"This is heaven." She spun around, arms wide open. "Or at least close." She closed her eyes and inhaled. "Oh, i love that smell. The smell of stories and beautiful new world. The smell of people brewing potions at Hogwarts. The smell of blood being sucked by a vampire." She sighed. "You can feel it, in your every bone and cell. And if you hear enough, you can listen them saying, get to know me."

"You have a weird way of making everything feel otherworldly." He said with a small smile. She nodded.

"Don't you have any complaints about this?"

"I know this wasn't Ms. Hot the moment I walked in. This was yours with some accommodation done for maybe someone who came here to your house often. Maybe sister. Or your mom."

"That was impressive. Color me so impressed." He looked at this amazing woman. Where did he find her?

In the streets. Oh yes!

"So, if you are done picking my house apart, want me to show your room?"

"I didn't just pick your house apart. I also appreciated the way you made the library looked beat yet comfortable." She said. "And I have a room?"

"Mm, it is actually the guest room. But I will ask Esther to get the other room ready tomorrow."

"It is okay. I can stay in the guest room?"

"For a year?"

"Oh, a year. Ok."

And then he opened the guest room, put her bags down and stepped back when she squealed.

***

(Alexandra)

"Is that a foam mattress with springs? Say yes. God, say yes."

He looked at her as if she had gone insane, but she didn't care.

God, how she missed this. More than anything.

The cot in the motel was something closer to a rock. Her spine ached every morning when she woke up.

"It is. You look so happy."

"I am. I am."

"I am glad."

"I could kiss you right now. " She said and stopped on her tracks.

Her heart hammered as she turned to look at him. He was frozen. His eyes were wide with hunger. For her?!

For her.

"Umm, off you go. Get going. My bed awaits me." She tried to push him off. He didn't budge.

"Don't stand there like rock, Logan. Move." She chuckled nervously as his eyes froze on her lips. She bit her lips.

He backed out. "Don't do that." He said in a hoarse voice.

"What?" Her voice was a meek whisper.

But he wasn't there. He left. She closed the door and slid down to the floor. It felt like her legs couldn't bear the weight of her feelings.

She pressed a hand against her chest and could feel it still thundering.

"God. I am feeling so hot. And I can't." She murmured to the empty room. "Alexandra, please get it together. From tomorrow, your heart is going on a vacation."

From tomorrow, she was only going to use her brain. Brain meant logic.

"Oh yes, Logan Forte, don't think you can mess with me with your hot face and brooding eyes. No way. I can not fall for you. I will not. You are not my type."

Yes, he is not your type, but you want him, don't you? A pesky voice asked.

No. I don't. It was just adrenaline and I was so tired before and being here was like being home and it made me warm and stupid and impulsive.

Yes. Yes. Keep lying. And when you catch up with your lies, it will be too late. The voice added.

She ignored it, crawled to her bed, pulled the cover up her face and slept.

And she dreamed about kissing him and she kissed her pillow, instead.

Chapter 7

6. Sticky notes, breakfasts and New friends

"I love how my kitchen smells of butter and you in the mornings. It is such a welcoming aroma." - Logan.

(Logan)

Logan woke up with a grunt and a huge yawn. His eyes were burning.

It had taken him so long before he could finally get rid of her from his brain and go to sleep.

And then she haunted him in his dreams. He wondered if this all would go away with a kiss or if it would only grow more with that kiss.

He was not ready to find out. Somehow he knew the answer wouldn't be easier to swallow.

He took a shower before he walked to the kitchen. He rummaged his fridge for something to eat and that was when he noted the post-it note stuck to the right side of the refrigerator door.

He picked it up and smiled when he read it and then he picked up another paper and scribbled a note before he folded her note and put it inside his wallet along with her eight bucks.

hey grumpy.

I must be sleeping now, but breakfast is in the table. eat everything, veggies too. under your plate is the grocery list. Don't forget to buy them. Don't forget to smile, too. Have a nice day! 🤍 *alex*

When did she wake up and made it all for him?

Somehow the thought of her doing it all just for him made him warm all over. He took a sniff and he could smell butter and her in the air. And he loved it.

For the first time in so long, he was going to have a proper breakfast at his home. Yes, whenever he visited mom, he would get this kind of Royal treatment, but today was much more special.

He walked to the table she didn't like very much and opened the tray to find a plate of scrambled eggs with veggies and French toast and a glass of orange juice. There was also a muffin.

His mouth watered. He clapped enthusiastically before he sat and ate everything. Except broccoli. Oh, he hated that.

As he walked inside his office, Tom, his assistant stared at him with wariness.

"What?" Logan asked.

"Am I going to get fired, boss?"

"Why would you ask that?"

"You are like... Smiling."

"And so?"

"I don't know. It is just weird. And I am scared." Tom said as he opened a file and pushed it in front of Logan. "You want coffee?"

"Nah, I am good."

"You are going to work without coffee?"

"Yes?"

"What is it, boss? You can tell me anything. Are you kicking me out? Or are you dying?"

"Dying? Where do you come up with these ridiculous ideas?"

"You are still smiling, boss. Do you want to look at yourself in the mirror? You will see the difference." Tom said as he scanned Logan again.

"Ok, Tom, stop bothering me and get me Aidan Masters file. When is the meeting, again?" He asked as he scanned the papers. "Umm, everything is almost to the proposed cost except the light fittings." He talked to himself as he opened a book and scribbled a reminder to himself to call Lowell Lightings. If they weren't going to agree to the proposed budget, he had to look for a new supplier.

"It is at nine. Oh. I am not fired, then. Thank God. I have a wife and kid to take care of and they are thanking you, as well, boss."

"Have you forgotten your filter at home? The one between your brain and mouth?" Logan asked as he signed the documents Tom had placed in front of him.

"Jokes. Did you just learn that world is going to end tomorrow? I can not bear the suspense." He asked. "And boss, Melissa Meyers called. She was done with the other project and she wanted to know if the offer for M-field project still stands?" Tom asked and Logan tapped his pen against his lips as he thought about that.

"Let me think about that for a day." Logan said and looked up at Tom. "If you don't move now, I am really firing you. I need the file I asked in five minutes."

"Moving. Moving." He walked away and Logan shook his head before he went back to his file.

***

(Alexandra)

She woke up after ten, still groggy, still feeling sleepy. As she walked towards the bathroom, she bumped her head in the door. "Ah." She muttered. "Don't antagonize me. I am not feeling myself today." She said to the door before she pushed it open.

Her eyes burned.

She hadn't had a good sleep, even though the bed was all cuddly and spongy. What's a girl to do when she was constantly tormented by a sexy ghost!

She woke up early in the morning at around five, and it was all Logan's fault.

He was there in her dreams and what the hell was he doing in her dreams, kissing her? It was very disturbing to say the least and she woke up, feeling hot, sweaty and bothered and after that she couldn't sleep at all.

So she went for a jog and decided to make Logan's breakfast. Once she did that, though, she felt sleepy again and so went back to the warm embrace of her bed once again.

And here she was, still feeling so sleepy. She wrapped a towel around her hair before wearing her old sweat shirt and a track pant.

She walked to the kitchen and noticed the broccoli was still there in the plate. Everything else was gone. She smiled to herself as she picked up the dishes and loaded it inside the dishwasher. He had already told her not to do that, because Esther would be there at eleven every morning to do the chores, but she was bored.

And then she walked to the refrigerator to get a carton of milk and that was when she noticed his sticky note.

:

hey sleepy head,

thanks for an amazing breakfast. I hate broccoli, though. Grocery? Really? Do I look like a guy who does groceries!!! I will try, but no promises. Don't get in to trouble when I am gone. Logan.

She laughed as she finished reading it and then safely put it inside the book she left it on the table.

And time dragged on and on and she was very bored. So she decided to bake cookies.

She searched his refrigerator and thankfully there was everything there, including chocolate chips. So she went about making the cookies.

It was eleven when Esther came. She was a round woman with a very sharp nose. Also, she hated Alex at first sight, or it seemed so as she pointed a finger at Alex's face and shook her head with an amazing speed that Alex wondered if her neck was made of something like rubber.

"You did the dishes? I did dishes." She pointed to herself.

She shook her head again, looking disgruntled. Alex tried to placate her with a smile, which didn't work out very well.

"Sorry, I was bored."

"Bored, watch movie. Don't do chores. Mr. Forr-the only like me cleaning."

Uh-oh. Someone is very possessive of Mr. Forte. Alex thought with a small smirk and decided to make fun of Logan with that when he returned home.

She really missed him already. The easy banter. The friendly chatter.

It was all so easy with him and she was so surprised to realize it had only been a day since she met him.

Oh, yes, it was all so easy, except that weird buzz in her skin whenever he was near to her. He was like her very own brand of electric wire, alive and thrumming and she needed a shock proof vest. She needed to stay away or she would get the shock of her lifetime.

And Alex wasn't that stupid to do things that was probably going to hurt her just because they felt so deceptively easy.

She was not in the market for a heartbreak. *No thank you, Logan Forte!*

***

(Logan)

Logan lived for working. He had always been a hardcore workaholic. But today was just too much even for him with his new client constantly questioning everyone of Logan's ideas, which were fail safe.

Logan didn't have a heart to tell that to the man, keeping them satisfied was one of his jobs to do. So he tried to assure Aidan Masters that everything was going to go without a hitch. The man looked assured for a moment and then he would have another doubt and so it went on, like an unending cycle.

The meeting was proving to be more difficult than he anticipated, but Logan lived for the thrill of it. One new client signed was one other victory for his hard work.

Logan's patience was slowly thinning, though, but he still didn't give into his urge to scream at the man in front of him. Instead he did what Alex asked him to do. Smile.

He was a first timer, too, even though he had the cushion of his dad's money, he was hungry to prove to the world that he could be his own person. And it was no wonder he was worrying about everything. That was what you do when you wanted to succeed.

"Mr. Masters. We are now doing it for four years. We didn't have any complaints as of now. I promise I will overlook everything if it can ease your mind."

"It is just... I want to prove myself to my dad. He has always been so criticizing and he didn't want to believe that I can do it all on my own. If you mess it up, it means I fail. I cannot fail. You get me?"

"I do. And I promise your new restaurant would be much better than your dad's. Okay? I give you my word and I am going to stand by them."

"Thank you, Mr. Forte, now I knew why you went to such great heights in such short time."

"Thank you."

The deal was signed and Logan let out a pent up sigh.

Huzzah!

***

(Alexandra)

As Alexandra finished another book from Logan's massive library --which was a perfect place to die. So many books. The fresh smell of paper and cardboards. And words. God, how she loved that-- she placed it back in the rack, right where she took it from and stretched and her bones groaned. Four hours of constant reading could do that to your joints.

She was planning to go to the pool house when she heard the front door opening.

Esther was already gone after berating her not to touch the dishes again and Logan had called to say he would be late. So who the hell was it at this hour?

God, was it an intruder? What was she going to do?

She looked around and picked up a hardbound book in her hand as she sneaked outside and peaked from behind the walls.

It was a man. Only his back was showing and he was so busy looking at the television. Was he going to steal that?

She threw the book right at him at the same time the man turned and he screamed as it hit him in his stomach and Alex screamed along with him.

"God, what are you..."

"Oh God, what are you..."

They both stopped and stared at each other.

"I thought you were an intruder." She explained with a sheepish smile.

"And this book was supposed to save you from him?" He chuckled.

"I didn't have time to think about that."

"So what are you doing here, mystery woman?" Daniel threw her a suspicious look. "I met you in the restaurant and then here you are, again, in your pajama. And Stacy was gone for what, a day? I have never seen Logan moving that fast?" Daniel's eyes narrowed.

She bit her lips. She knew Logan would have her head in a plate if she so much as breathed a word about what she was doing here.

"The room I was staying, it was infested with pests and they have called in pest control. It is a bummer I have to move. Logan said I can stay here till I find another place." *After a year.*

It was almost the truth. The motel was infested with human pests.

"Hmm." He looked at her. "You are not lying, right?"

"No. I am not."

"I like you, but if I find out you are lying and are here to have your claws on Logan, just like that Stacy, you will regret ever meeting me." And for that moment, the sunny, smiling, joking Daniel Anderson was no more. He looked dangerous and Alex prayed he wouldn't blame her when he learnt about Logan's plans and her place in it.

"Umm. Okay. That is just so mob boss, but you can not..."

"Oh, lighten up already, I was just kidding." Daniel said as he gave her a big smile that was just so creepy.

She was sure he was not.

He sniffed the air like a bloodhound. "What is cooking? God, that smells delicious." And he was the sunny, smiling guy again.

"You have one heck of a nose. Nothing is cooking now, but I made cookies at noon."

"Oh, cookies. That must be why I felt like I had to be here right now. My babies, Mama is coming." He cooed as he walked to the kitchen and Alex followed him with a smile.

"Movie?" He asked. "I was going to watch something bloody."

"And you came all the way for that? Why couldn't you watch in your house?"

"Ah, I was around here somewhere and too tired to drive all the way back home."

"Hmm."

"Come on. Let us watch a movie and I will tell you all about Stacy."

And so he did. And it was so filled with expletives that Alex had to close her ears for half of his tirade.

"Stop." She said. "I heard enough."

"I have more to say."

"No thank you. You concentrate on the movie."

He shrugged. "Bossy. You and Logan are a perfect pair."

Chapter 8

7. Cookies, contracts and first fights

"I love it when you look at my cookies like they are the best thing in the whole world and then you smile that contagious smile of yours and I want to bake everything and anything to get another one of your smile." - Alex

(Logan)

Logan was very tired and his head was pounding as he stopped his car. It was a long day, and a very long meeting and Alex was constantly on the front of his brain, messing up with his mind.

He felt like there were a thousand knots on his shoulders and everything in his body ached. He opened the door and his body instantly went loose and light, when he smelled what felt like thousand different aromas suffused in the air.

It smelled warm. Like home. It smelled different and he liked it.

He didn't know how he had lived so long in this big house, all alone, and how he was able to walk inside the dark house after every day of work.

Now the lights were on and there was laughter in the kitchen. Alex's followed by a man's.

Now, his body went rigid again, as he walked to the kitchen trying to maintain his calm. It wouldn't do to kill the man she had in *his* kitchen, but he had to know who that was.

The man was bent under the table. And there was no sign of Alex, as well. "Alex, I am sorry I did this to Logan." A very familiar voice said. Daniel.

What were they doing under the table?

"For God's sake, Daniel, don't worry. It is alright."

"I am so sorry about this. You know."

What were they talking about?

"Just pick it up already. I have another batch in the oven." And then she stood up, her hair flying everywhere and her face was half covered with flour and she jumped up and pressed her hand to her heart when he cleared his throat.

"God, you gave me a heart attack. When did you come? For a moment I thought it was a serial killer or something." She said as she rubbed her hands. "Oh, sorry for this mess. It is your friend."

"Hey, you made some mess, too."

"What are you two doing?"

"I was reading books. And then he came, I thought he was an intruder and he stole the cookies I baked. He wanted me to teach him to make cookies and then he burnt his batch and stole some more from yours. And then he spilled the flour and knocked down a tray of cookies and God, I can go for another hour." She said as she looked up at him. "How was your day? Is your meeting go alright?"

And he melted when she asked that with her eyes filled with eagerness and concern.

"Yes. Of course." He said with a smirk. "They would be lucky to work with me."

"Oh, of course, you smug little jerk." She said with a teasing smile.

He heard a ding. "Oh, it is done." She clapped her hands like a kid. She put on her mitten and took the steaming tray out from the oven. She put it on the counter. "We will let it cool." She said and narrowed her eyes when Daniel was trying to steal a cookie from her tray.

"Daniel, don't you dare touch it. It is for Logan." She slapped his hand away. "You already ate a whole damn batch."

Logan felt his heart swelling when she said that.

"You are so partial, Alex." Danny said with a pout and Logan had to smile. "Man, you are very lucky." He grunted. "I feel so unwanted here."

"Oh, stop being so dramatic." Logan said as he looked at the freshly baked cookies. It was so lush and he could smell its heavenly smell. The chocolate chips were half melted at the perfect top and God, he swear he could feel its taste at the tip of his tongue just by smelling it.

He smiled. "God, this is amazing. You are amazing."

"Can I get that in the record?"

"Don't push your luck." He said as he tried to grab a cookie and she slapped his hand away, too, with a head shake.

"Logan Forte. You didn't wash your hands."

"Sorry mom," He mocked as he washed his hands and finally, finally he could taste her cookie. And it was amazing. World's best cookie. His mom would have his hide if he ever admitted it out loud, but it was the truth.

It was luscious and crunchy and the chocolates just melted in his mouth. He closed his eyes and groaned.

"This is heavenly."

"Thank you." She bowed with a smile and he couldn't take his eyes off her. She was unkempt. Messy. And beautiful. How could she do that? Being that effortlessly beautiful?

There was a bit of a batter on her lips and he stared. "There. You have something there in your lips." He wanted to lick it off, but he couldn't.

He had already made his mind about having her in his life even after the year was over. As a friend. And so he couldn't do anything he really wanted to do to her.

"What?"

"Looks like the batter you stole from my cookies."

"Ah." She smiled and wiped it off.

"Gah. You guys, you are so adorable it hurt my eyes."

"What?"

"I could see hearts winking in your eyes."

"Oh, stop talking nonsense." Logan said and waved his friend off. To which, Danny simply threw a very annoying wink at his direction.

After that, the three of them sat there and talked about Logan's meeting and the disaster that was the kitchen and then Logan ordered pizzas for dinner and they ate together.

After a while, Danny left as Logan did the dishes.

"I can't move." Alex complained as she slouched lazily in the couch. "I feel like I am going to burst."He laughed at her before he walked into his home office. He picked a bunch of documents and his brows wrinkled.

He wondered what she would do if he gave her that and he knew... He knew it would make her angry, but some things are better done than not.

He sighed and put it back down.

There was still time for that.

***

(Tuesday)

Hey again,

Breakfast in the damn table. One of these days, I am going to get rid of that table. It is such an eye sore. & don't forget the groceries, today. Yawn, my bed is begging me to go back. Tata. Smile, a little. - Lex. .

Hey Lex,

Good morning back at ya! I don't know why you hate my table so much. It is alright. I will get your groceries today if I have some free time. But I need an incentive, say, more of your incredible cookies?

Stay out of trouble. - L

***

(Wednesday)

Hey Logan,

Good morning. You know the drill. Breakfast up and grumpy, didn't I tell you not to put your shirts with mine for doing the laundry? Proof: One pink shirt by the side. Esther is blaming me for that, as well. That woman hates me. She so wants me gone. 😐 *She thinks I'm leeching off her precious Mr. Forr-the. Bah! Angrily, Lex. .*

Hey Lex,

Good morning. Thank you for the waffles. Yum. Your hands have some kind of magic. And if I eat like this everyday, I am sure my pants wouldn't fit me anymore.

Pink shirt?! Oh my God. What blasphemy.

And Esther! What are you talking about? She is the most meek and kindhearted woman I have seen. She doesn't hate you. Now, don't be a drama queen. - L.

***

(Thursday)

(Alexandra)

She lay on the couch and watched a movie, as she waited for Logan to come back home. It was an old classic and had always been her favorite one, but she was distracted. Her ears and eyes we're at the door so often. She missed him whenever he was not home. And she was often bored cooped up inside the house and bantering back and forth with him was her only entertainment.

She thought about the sticky notes and smiled to herself. It was fun. It felt like it had become kind of their routine and it was stupid, but she kept all his notes. Inside a small box for safekeeping.

And then the door opened. He looked weary, but smiled when he saw her and slumped on the couch with a huff.

"What is wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. Just another day haggling with the contractors --God those people will rip you off if you are not careful-- and dealing with clients who need constant babying." He said with a yawn.

She watched as he tried to remove his tie and then let it go as if his fingers were too tired to unknot the tie. She scooted closer to him and removed his tie for him as he watched her with hooded eyes that seemed to hold so many secrets. Secrets she so badly wanted to know.

"Did you finally buy the grocery, Logan? Three days. It has been three days." She sighed as she leaned away from him. Sitting closer to him any longer than the acceptable five minute was not good for her health!

"The grocery. Oh, Tom did it for you and he wanted your cookies, too. Ugh. I forgot it in the car." He said. "I will bring it in a second. Or maybe several years later." He groaned as he stretched his lean body and Alex felt like a village kid in the city for the first time, staring.

Oh, she had seen her share of handsomeness, but this here, it was one of a kind. Strength and confidence and a mix of arrogance - she loved watching him just being himself.

He got up from the couch before he looked back at her. "What about the cookies?"

"Oh, I made sugar cookies today. Go on, it is in the side shelf in the cookie jar."

"When do we have a cookie jar?" He asked amused and she swatted at him.

"Since today. Go on and let me watch this in peace."

He came back with a plate of cookies and gave her one. One!

"How generous!" He laughed at that. After that they stayed in peaceful silence and watched the movie. When it ended, Logan went back to his room and Alex continued surfing channels and looked up when she heard him coming back.

She waited for him to say something, but he didn't. She looked up to find him looking rather twitchy. He was scratching his chin and she had learnt that he did that whenever he was nervous. His tell.

And that was when she noticed the papers in his hands.

"What is that?" She asked as she sat straight. Something in her gut told her that she was not going to like his answer. And she was right.

"It is the contract. For our coming nuptials."

And it was like someone had thrown extremely freezing water at her face. She was wide awake from her dream.

A contract!

She smiled wryly. "Ah. I thought we were almost becoming friends and then there you go, a contract!" She laughed, though her laughter was bitter. "Only you can come up with these ridiculously amazing plans."

"Hey. It is for your peace of mind." He said and she glared at him and hoped that he would get the hint and not talk at all. She just wanted to punch him so bad, and she would have, if her legs hadn't been shaking so hard. She couldn't stand now, she couldn't stand now and show him how his one word had destroyed her.

She wouldn't show him that and gave him the power over her.

"Ah. Very concerned for me, I see. But I am not the one who had trust issues here. I didn't ask you to prepare a damn contract." She said as she fisted her palms on her laps.

He looked down the floor. He looked guilty, but he didn't back off. He shrugged and then handed the papers to her.

"This has to be done, Alexandra. It is better be safe than sorry. It is for both of us. I mean, what would you do when I try to cheat you out of your money?"

"Stop, okay. Stop trying to make this about me. I didn't ask you to prepare a damn contract. I didn't. And I understand where you are coming from. So don't try to make excuses."

What a jerk!

"This is a business deal and you know that."

"Yeah. I see that now. So, what did you think? That I would go and fall in love with you and then would refuse to be gone when the time comes? Don't worry, I can never fall in love with someone like you."

His body went rigid. His jaws worked, and his eyes brewed storm in its depth. He looked menacing, but she just didn't care.

"What did that mean?" He sounded dangerous. As if he was at the verge snapping. He took a step in her direction and stopped halfway. "What the hell do you mean? What is so wrong with me?"

What now? She thought. He just gave her a contract and he dare ask what was wrong with him. Smug jerk!

"Oh, go and look at yourself in the mirror and you will know." She snapped. "I mean, you don't have to worry. I will be gone when the time is up and you can not do or say anything to make me stay. But by all means, let us be safe than sorry. Okay?" She scanned the document and snorted. "This is one of the most romantic proposals I have ever seen, Party A." She said with a sarcastic smile and he looked at her, frustration clear in his eyes.

He looked so ready to pounce, and she wanted him to. Maybe then she could hit him back.

The document read like one of those long privacy agreement you never read and clicked I agree without bothering with it. But she got the gist of the document.

Point 1. The contract must be over after a year. Exactly a year from which they were married. Party A and party B must never back out from that.

Point 2. Party A will then pay Party B the agreed amount of a million dollars, deposited in the bank and invested as the shares so that Party B can get the profit from it.

Point 3. Party B has no other legal claims to party A's other financial income and assets.

Point 4. The termination of the contract should be easy and hassle free. No party has the right to appeal for a longer stay and both party must agree not to dispute/contest the terms of the contract.

And then there was another non disclosure agreement (NDA), to never disclose their agreement to a third party under any circumstances. She signed under it, too.

It was all so clear about what he thought of her. He could give thousand reasons about why it was for her benefit, as well, but she would not accept them. He was afraid that she would turn into a leech, after a year and that stung.

As she finished signing it, she felt like a dirty hooker, a very expensive escort. But she needed the money, didn't she, and if it made her feel all dirty and disgusting, she should learn to make peace with that.

She needed that money to fight for what was legally hers, what was stolen from under her: her dad's blood and sweat. His lifetime work. She also needed it to live comfortably and work in peace.

She handed the papers back to him with a cold smile. "Done and done. I thought you wanted me to be your appointed wife because you believed I am not greedy. So what changed?" She sneered.

"Nothing changed, okay. I know you are not greedy, but sometimes it is important to have everything in words."

"Yeah, I can see how very important, Party A."

She stood up. He handed a small box. Ring. Oh, God, she wanted to throw it back at his face, but she refused to give into her temper. She accepted the box with a smile. "The final nail in the coffin." She muttered. "Should I thank you for this?"

"Don't be like that." He said as she stood up. Switched off the TV. She felt like a machine.

"Hey." His voice was hesitant. She pretended she didn't hear it as she walked upstairs and closed her room door.

She felt like someone had so cruelly taken a knife to all her dreams and thoughts. She wanted to cry, but she refused to. She wouldn't waste her tears on a man like him.

What did she expect? She knew this was a business deal, and this was going to stay just that. This wasn't a friend helping out a friend.

But somewhere deep inside her, she was happy he did that.

What he did was an eye opener for her stupid heart. She was this close to falling for him, but now she could safely say that she would never...

She could never fall for someone like that. All cold and calculating. With zero compassion and zero heart.

Even as she thought that, a part of her denied that.

He wasn't cold. She had seen him being all warm. And she had seen his compassion, too, his concern for her when he first saw where she lived and then when she drove his car.

But...

She rubbed her face and sighed.

Hear that stupid heart, it is reality crashing down on your head. Listen to it and don't you dare. Promise me you will never fall for him.

"I promise. Alright." She whispered as a thick black cloud surrounded her sunny skies.

~~~

(Logan)

He couldn't sleep no matter how much he thrashed and turned. And exercised and ran in his treadmill. The look on her face when he handed her the contract haunted him.

She looked like he had kicked her in the gut. And he was sorry for that, sorry he was the reason for hurting her. But he had known deals gone wrong, even amid friends. Friends turning their back against something after the words were given. Promises broken after so loyally made.

He had been so trusting back when he had started his company. He had put his faith on some opportunists and when everything was done, they had shown him their true colors. He had to bear the brunt of their greed and selfishness and what he lost wasn't just money, then--though it was a lot of money and he had almost lost everything he had built from the ground. It was his ability to trust, as well. It made him cold, calculating and always cautious of where he was stepping on.

She wouldn't understand that, understand that how undecided and sorry he was to do that. But he had to. He had no choice.

He trusted her. But he doubted and second guessed himself for trusting her. He didn't want to be wrong and lose her in the process. So he made sure it would always be right.

But it looks like you have already lost her.

"No, this will go away and we will be okay. But I can not bear it when she turned out to be anyone other that who I thought she was..." He whispered to himself as he pulled his blanket high and covered his face with it.
~~~

The next morning, there was no sticky note. No breakfast. He felt empty. Alone.

But breakfast wasn't the part of the contract, a small pesky voice reminded him.

"I have survived without her breakfast for so long. I can survive it now, as well." He whispered to himself as he picked up a carton of milk and took one gulp and put it back inside. It tasted gross on his tongue. He felt angry and sad as he drove away.

"Good morning, boss." Tom greeted him and then gulped, a nervous look flitting across his face. "Oh, looks like it was a very bad morning. Want some coffee?"

"Yes. Extra strong. No sugar." Logan grunted in reply.

"You are back, boss. Will be right back with your coffee."

Tom walked away and Logan glared at his PA's back with irritation.

Why was everyone in his life so, so annoying?!

"*I sometimes pretend that I am listening to people, when I am actually not hearing anything. But here I am, listening to your silence, everyday, hoping you would break it soon." - Logan*

Chapter 9

8. Lonely nights, ugly tables and job offers

(Logan)

The next morning, Logan woke up to the emptiness. Again. The silence clawed on him until he couldn't bear the sound of it. God, the sound of this empty silence was so loud against the lonely looking walls and he hated himself for being weak.

How could he? He wasn't supposed to be.

God, he had lived in the emptiness for so long. He had thrived in it and to be honest, he had enjoyed it. It was the only reprieve he has had amid constant bustle and chaos in his life. With a book and a cup of coffee, with a swim in the pool, he had loved his solitude.

Now, oh so suddenly he didn't like the idea of waking up to an empty house and walking in back to the dark hallways. It twisted his stomach when he thought of going back to that.

What did she do to him? Was she a witch or something? Did she put a spell on him with her misty green-gold eyes?

He rubbed his face with a sigh. He had so much work to do, so much to plan and here he was, again, thinking of her. It had been a bad habit.

She has become his bad habit.

The first phase of Aiden's restaurant had started and he had to oversee so many things and having an angry Alex was such a distraction. She was always at the forefront whatever he did and wherever he was. He didn't like it, but he couldn't avoid it.

At night, she was already in her room before he came back home. He knew she wasn't sleeping. He had even knocked at her door yesterday, feeling like a creep, but she hadn't opened or responded to him.

He sighed and opened the damn refrigerator.

He drank some milk, ate a dry loaf of bread, but after Alex's breakfast, everything else was just so bland. So so ordinary. He hated her for getting him addicted to good food, homemade food and then pulling the rug from under him when he least expected it.

Should have though that before handing her a bunch of stupid papers. Eh? That voice, the same irritating voice added.

He wanted it all back. The smell of butter, the warmth in the kitchen that would tell him she was there before him, making something for him, her lingering smell in the air. But even then, he wouldn't take back the contract.

Oh, God, two days, two terrible days. It had been 48 hours and she was still so stubbornly holding onto her anger. He wanted to punch something.

She sure knows how to twist a man from inside out. Or at least him!

He stared at the ugly table she hated so much and sighed. It's emptiness made it uglier still.

Sometimes, before when they were not fighting, as he ate, he would think of her in the kitchen, working her way around and it would always put a small smile on his grumpy face. Now everything was missing.

That woman was tying him in a knot and it had to stop.

Unable to bear it any longer, he tore a paper from the stack of sticky notes they had used to banter back and forth and started writing.

Hi, Lex.

Please stop being a child. We can talk it out like adults. And you can't keep hiding whenever I was in here. It doesn't work like that. We need to convince everyone before we get married. So how do you suppose we do that without seeing eye to eye? Without talking?

Alexandra, I know you think I am wrong, but I had to do that no matter what. I had to. Shall we move past it? Stop being so stubborn. Two days of silent treatment is enough for poor me. Impatiently, Logan.

He knew she would get angry again after she saw it, but he could take her anger if she just talked with him. However this silence, it was making him nervous and he was feeling weird without talking to her.

He would be surprised if anyone told him that he had met Alexandra just days ago and he had picked her out from the side of the road. It felt like a lifetime and some more.

He grabbed his coat and brief case before closing the door.

His phone rang. "Yes?"

"Are you and Alex fighting?"

"Why do you ask?" Logan pulled the car door open with unnecessary force.

"She called me to drive her somewhere."

"Where?" Logan wanted to punch something. The feeling was growing faster with each passing minute.

"I don't know." Daniel was silent for a moment. "Did she get socked from work? I think she want to look for another job?"

"Why would she?"

"Why wouldn't she?" Daniel asked, shaking him from the reverie.

"What?"

"I said she was looking for the job and you said why would she? I mean, why can't she look for a job? Why did you say that?"

"I am just distracted. I was just thinking about something else. So did you agree?"

"I did."

Logan grunted his response.

"Speak up, Logan. Do you have anything to say to me?"

"You don't have to come. I will drive her."

"What about the meeting you had with Lowell's lightings? You said you are gonna talk to them about the cost of light fixtures."

"Ah, that I can push forward."

"Are you sure she is just a friend?"

"I am sure, Dan. Now, please don't psychoanalyze me. I am not in the mood for that."

"You are doing a hell of a lot of rescheduling for a friend." Daniel laughed at the other end as if he was really amused and Logan glared at the phone. His friend wasn't funny, but the poor guy had a strange idea that he was and once he got an idea, it was hard to change that.

"Have you stopped amusing yourself, child? I would love to go now."

"Hey Logan, remember that girl from the college? Is that Kristy or Krista? How you had always said you didn't have anything for her and she was just a friend and then one day, you were finally being honest to yourself and you decided to ask her for the homecoming game. But she went with Matt. And you were left licking your wounds. Just a friendly reminder: wake up. If there is something there, you have gotta admit it before it is too late."

"Yeah? And it turned out Kristy used Matt to get to Finley and then she married Finley and divorced him and she now owns half of his assets? What did that tell you? Moral: look deeper before you leap. So thanks. I will keep sleeping." Logan got inside his car.

Feelings we're messy and he would be fine without that. That was why he was so eager to marry Stacy, wasn't it? She was cool. He was cool. They would have been cool.

"You are so-so... Whatever." Danny huffed as he hung up.

Logan laughed as he started the car. And he finally felt like it would be alright.

He knew what he had to do. A plan slowly formed in his head and he knew she had to talk to him after that.

Oh, yes. It would be officially called bribing. But, he was desperate enough to do just that.

~~~

(Alexandra)

Okay. She missed him. No matter how angry it made her to think about those damned documents, she still missed him.

Missed talking with him. Sharing stories that weren't a least bit important. Laughing and making fun of each other.

The large house felt like a tomb without their laugher echoing off its walls. It was so silent. She wanted to scream. At least, then, it wouldn't be silent anymore.

She stomped to the bathroom when she saw him driving away.

Yes. She felt like a crazy stalker staring at him through the windows, but it was only because she wanted to avoid him. Not because she wanted to look at his stupidly handsome face because she missed him.

Tell that to yourself, again and again and maybe you will eventually believe it.

Alex hated that stupidly honest voice. If she could just press a pause button and make it stop. It was like she was carrying her own enemy with her.

She dressed in a floral dress and swirled. It looked good on her. She ran a comb through her brown hair and walked downstairs.

She stopped when she noticed the familiar looking note on the refrigerator.

Her smile turned into an angry scowl when she read it.

"Logan Forte. I am gonna to kick you in that face when I see you next time. And I won't be sorry." She said as she took a packet of bread from the refrigerator, and a jar of peanut butter. This had to do. She didn't have the heart to cook and eat it all by herself.

When she finished it, Esther came, with her air of disdain.

"You separated laundry?"

"Yes. I did. Mine in this bucket."

"You sure? Everything right in place."

Yes, commander. Alex had this urge to salute the woman like they do in military camp, but she refrained.

"Yes. Esther. I did. Did you eat anything?"

"Good. You are a good girl. And I ate."
~~~

Alex was startled. That was the first ever praise she had heard from Esther. She looked at the woman with eyes wide with bewilderment and Esther shook her small head with a smile.

"Go. Let me work here."

Alex was so gone. She didn't want to wait another second to give Esther a chance to change her mind.

Later that noon, when Alex was relaxing in the pool house, her phone rang.

"Delivery. Can you please open the door?" A man asked.

She dressed before she walked outside and stopped when she saw two men standing outside the gate waving hands at her.

"Ma'am, can you please open the gate. We have a delivery." One man in red cap said.

Alex looked at them and wondered whether it was okay to open the door. What if they we're here to kidnap her in that big truck?

"For who?"

"Mr. Forte sent it. For Alexandra?"

She narrowed her eyes. It was a truck. What could he have possibly sent now in that massive truck?

With suspicion clear in her eyes, she opened the door and the truck stopped in front of the house.

"Where do you want me to put it?" One man asked as they lifted a big lump covered in papers.

Where did she want to put It? How would she know without knowing what that *it* was?

"What the hell is that?" She pointed a shaking finger at the lump that now sat on the center of the stone pathway.

The man in red cap looked at her before he smiled in understanding. "Oh, it is a surprise, uh? Ma'am, your husband just ordered for a new table to be delivered here. Now, he also wanted us to take the old table back. Can you show us inside."

Alex gaped at them as the two men shared an amused look.

"He-he is not my husband." She muttered as she walked, or more like stormed inside and the two men with the lump that was a table followed her.

~~~

(Logan)
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He knew it was done, and he had expected a call from Alexandra. But no, the stubborn woman was still not calling him.

One of the delivery men had called him to give that news when it was done.

"You two are fighting, Mr. Forte?" He had asked. "Mrs. Forte was surprised, yes, but she was still angry, I think."

How did everyone knew they we're fighting, dammit? It wasn't like he wanted to announce it to the whole world.

But he was curious enough to ask, "why do you think that she is still angry?"

"She said you are not her husband." The man had chuckled then, as if it was all so amusing.

It wasn't. Not even a little bit.

He stared at the phone, again. It had been an hour and some.

She wasn't going to call him, was she? No matter how long and hard he stared at the phone, it stayed silent. The useless thing.

Damn you.

"Boss? You want some iced tea?" It was Tom. The man was like a constant pain in his ass, next to Alexandra. "You are kinda overheated. It will cool you!" He continued, a look of amusement in his face.

"I want you to stitch your mouth shut."

"Umm? I would, but then who would read you all your meeting schedules?"

"You can sign it." Logan grunted. "Better yet, I will hire a new assistant."

"Oh, boss. You are so naive. Nobody will last a day with you."

"What do you mean? I am not a horrible boss." Logan narrowed his eyes at the now smirking man.

"No? You sure, boss?"

Maybe, just this time, he wanted to give in to his need and throw the paper weight at his PA's face, but because Logan had some semblance of sanity still left -- even though everyone around him were testing its limits-- he restrained.

Professionalism. He thought.

"Tom. One day or the other, I will tell myself it is okay to be unprofessional."

"Boss, that paper weight is Ms. Fortes' gift to you. You break it, they are going to break your head." Tom said with his all-knowing smirk.

"How do you know?" Logan looked at him with doubt.

"You keep looking at it and I can almost understand. My wife does that all the time, looking at her rolling pin."

"Did she ever throw it?"

"Plenty of times. Woman is a wicked witch. I love her, so much."

"I am really proud of Alice for doing that." He said as he closed his files. "Now, I am going home."

"Hope no rolling pin is waiting for you there." Tom said with a chuckle. "Since your new friend moved in, you have become an enigma to me." Tom said as he walked out and this time, Logan almost reached for the paper weight.

He sighed as he stood up. It was all his fault. His fault was showing all his emotions like an amateur.

He had never been stupid enough to wear his feelings in his face. He had always been closed off. Private. And now, here he was.

Since Alex... Since Alex, everything was changing. And he hated that, but he couldn't hate her, now, could he?

"When Mathilda calls, tell her I have found someone she would like."

"The mystery woman." Tom said.

"Yes. You know her name is Alexandra."

"And still I know nothing else about her."

"I am not inviting you to my home, no matter how much you want me to. Get it?"

"Have some pity, boss. My head is going to burst if you keep up with it."

"I would want to see that day. See you tomorrow, unfortunately. " Logan said as he walked out. Tom chuckled.

"Oh, you won't admit it, but you can not live without me." Tom laughed as Logan stepped inside the elevator. And then his PA threw him a kiss and Logan swatted it away.

The man was such a pest.

He opened the car door when Amelia, one of his workers came running.

"Mr. Forte. Wait, sir."

"Yes, Amelia?" He looked at the petite woman in front of him.

"Ms. Rose from Lowell lightings called. She said it wasn't possible for them to lower the proposed rate. What should we do?"

"Ms. Rose." He sighed. That woman was a boulder to move. Stubborn like his Alex. "I would have preferred to talk with Jack. But okay, if that is the case, find me another supplier. With proposed budget and equal quality."

"Yes sir, I will do that." Amelia walked away and Logan started his car.

If he waited any longer, he was going to burst, too. He needed to see her right this instant and bring back their banter and friendship.

Yeah, that is why you are working so hard. For your friend.

"Shut up, mind. No one is asking your opinion."

When he reached his home, he opened the door and sneaked it.

How did it come to this? Sneaking inside his own house like a thief?

Since Alex.

Most of his questions had only one answer these days.

"And stop. Don't disappear." He said when she stood up from the couch when he walked in. "We are talking."

"I don't want to talk with you." She sounded like a disgruntled child.

"You have no other option, Lex. Sit or I am making you sit."

"Jerk." She muttered as she sat down. "Arrogant moron."

"That is my girl."

"I am not your damn girl. Don't patronize me."

"Do you need a spanking?"

And her cheeks reddened. Her eyes shot bullets as she bristled. And he really wanted to do all the bad things that sprung up in his mind when he looked at her red stained cheeks, to her.

He felt hot. His body was tensed, and he was so ready to break his vow.

But... *Shut up, stupid imagination. Stop torturing me.*

Her lips were so pink and it was now in a moody pout and would they taste just as sweet as they looked?

No. No. Don't you dare go there.

"Smug little..."

"Stop being so difficult, Lex."

"I am bring difficult? The nerve. You are... Are- ugh!"

"Can we talk like adults now that you have finished with your tantrums?"

"Why waste time talking? You can go type a long document and we can save both our time. And then I can sign with my fist. In your face."

"Can we move past that, Alex?"

"Oh, why? Because you bought me this damn table? You think you can buy me with a table? Bribe me into talking with you for this? I won't talk with you even if you give me hundred tables."

He laughed. He couldn't help himself. She was just so cute when she was angry. *Oh so cute.* And at that moment, he realized he had never thought of an adult woman as *cute,* never in his life.

"Jerk." She spat. "Smug jerk. Moron."

"I know you are this close to giving in to my charm. But I have something else. A bribe, if you may. And then you will talk with me."

"No, I won't. I won't talk with you even if you are the last man in this universe." She rolled her eyes. "And what charm? You have a charm as much as a fire breathing dragon has. Not T*oothless.* But the monstrous one."

He laughed. "You watched how to train a dragon? Are you sure you are 23."

"I am almost 24 and how did you know *Toothless* is from that movie if you haven't watched it." He gave her a sheepish look.

Caught red-handed.

"It was Daniel. And stop changing the subject. As I said, I have something that will make you talk with me. I am so sure of that."

"Ego. Your ego is amazingly big. God has wasted all these attractive features on your stupid self. You open your mouth and I, I just want to- strangle you." She gritted her teeth.

"So you think I am attractive?" He smirked as he looked at her green eyes, which was now wide and startled as she stared at his face. She blinked twice and shook her head.

"I have seen better and that is not the damn point."

"Have you?" He joked and she blushed and he stared at her with wonder.

She was so beautiful when she did that: blushing. The red stain in her cheeks always made him think thoughts he shouldn't. God, she always made him think of things he shouldn't.

And he wanted her. It was like a burn deep in his gut. The urge to kiss her was so strong and... Would it be so bad to do that?

No. He shouldn't want her. He couldn't. He couldn't mess this up.

"Shut up." She crossed her arms across her chest and angrily stared at him, a frown lifting her lips.

"There is this big house that needs an interior decorator." He said and watched her with a small gloating smile.

She instantly perked up. And her green eyes, like magic, altered. The gold in them intensified as they reflected her eagerness. Excitement.

She stared at him. He stared back at her.

The minutes passed. The clock ticked. His breathing was wayward, so was his thoughts.

Could he just pull her and kiss her and then give some excuses? It was physically hurting to stand there and watch her, without kissing her. Without touching her. Without having her.

"Are you not going to say anything?" She huffed as she uncrossed her arms.

"What? You wanted me to shut up." He stifled a chuckle when she glared.

"You think you are very funny, do you?"

"Don't you? I think I am totally amusing."

"Haha. You can do your own circus act when the circus come to the city. Now speak."

"Your wish is my command."

"When did you turn this annoying?"

"Since you walked into my life." He said. *Since you.*

You changed every dynamics in my life. Strangely enough, I don't abhor most of it.

"Dan called and he said many annoying things, but he also said that you are looking for a job?"

"Yeah, I thought why not. I have time now and means to actually try. I mean I am not hungry anymore and living in the motel..."

"Yeah. That is why I said *no* to Ms. Hot."

"Your interior decorator? What?" She looked at him, confused. Oh, he so wanted to see the look on her face when he breaks the news. God. His eyes were intense on her and he didn't want to look away or blink. He wanted to see everyone of her expressions.

"You will be perfect for Mathilda Shine. She bought this new/old house. She needs a interior designer."

Her mouth hung open. Oh, she was so expressive. Her eyes were as big as saucers.

She gasped. She opened her mouth. She closed it. She looked like an adorable gold fish. Her hands flailed, but...

She was speechless. His firecracker was speechless. He did that!

He smiled.

"The Mathilda Shine?" Finally, it seemed like she had got herself together.

"Yes."

"The Hollywood celebrity? That Mathilda?"

"Yes."

"Oh, oh, God, God, Logan, I love you."

And she was hanging off his neck and kissing him.

I kiss you and it is not just a kiss. It is like nothing I have ever experienced in all of my 27 years. Maybe it is really special, because it is you. - Logan. ~

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Chapter 10

9. Lips, Cold showers and rock stars

(Logan)

She was kissing him. Kissing him.

She is kissing me.

Got the drift the first time around. You Catch up, already. Don't stand there like a rock.kiss her back. Dammit.

God. God. God. He was blown away. Bits and pieces of him, hung in the air, around them. She smelled of heaven and Earth. Of morning sunshine and thunderstorm.

The kiss. Remember that?

What was he doing waxing poetry of her when she was kissing him?

This kiss was everything he had hoped it would be and still amazingly more. So much more. His imagination was all grayscale in comparison to the technicolor reality.

Her lips touched and teased and coaxed him and he felt her touch in every cell and every bone. Soft and supple, her body was around him. Everywhere. She was everywhere. He was hungry for more, but he couldn't break this sweetness. This gentleness. So he let her kiss in her own pace.

But slowly, slowly, her kiss was breaking him. His cool.

Shy and timid, she kissed like herself. All so innocent, but incredibly passionate. The kiss was gentle, yet also fire.

And he couldn't help anymore. He wanted more.

He pushed her back gently and her back hit the wall and he pressed himself to her amazing body. It felt so good, so good to finally have her in his arms. The back of his mind, the sensible part, it was warning him to back off now, before it was too late, but he couldn't. Just couldn't.

One time. This one time.

He wasn't made of sterner stuff to refuse her when she was in his arms, willingly. And he needed this.

I need this to stop obsessing over her lips. It was sad as an excuse, of course, he knew.

Her lips were like liquid honey, flowing through his bones. Leaving trails of fire in his blood. She moaned when he licked her lips and then she opened it for him and breathed him inside. Her tongue hesitantly touched him and then it grew bolder, teasing, nipping, sucking. Killing.

Ah. He thought. *Can I really stay away after this?*

Her fingers were tangled in his hair and his hands were trying its best to do everything at once. Touching. Stroking. Grabbing. Feeling. Oh God, he was going to explode soon if she continued with this, but he couldn't stop her.

God. It was like a sensory overload. She filled his senses, mind, heart, body. He couldn't think properly or breathe. But oxygen seemed like a secondary concern when she was there with him, finally, finally kissing him.

Her lips were warm and sweet on him. He hardened and groaned. The pain was too much. If she continued this, he was going to lose it right then and there. Like a school boy.

He pulled her flush against his body, and trailed kisses down her jaws and then suckled on her neck as his hands caressed her cheeks and shit!

It was totally a wrong move, because she jerked away away from him and she looked at him like a deer caught in the headlights. She was breathing hard and her whole body was a tinge of pink. She looked bedraggled and sexy, flushed and ravaged. She looked scrumptious. He wanted another bite of that.

"That- th-at is not what I intended." Her voice was a breathy whisper. She stared at his lips with eyes wide with puzzle as if it was an alien. As if she hadn't just memorized every print on his lips, every slope and every curve.

Oh, but he knew her lips in amazing details. Every curve and line. The way the Cupid bow dipped down in the top lip, the way it tasted slightly of Alex and slightly of strawberries. The way they move, slow and fast, all at once.

He sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. Words... Yeah, he had to answer her, but his brain was too muddled to form a response.

When it formed one, though, it was not the right one. But it was what he needed to hear. What they both needed to hear.

"It is just a kiss, Alex, don't sweat it. You were happy. I was available. We celebrated. No need overthink it, okay?"

"Yes. Yes." She sounded so eager, as if she was grateful for finding a way out. It stung. It made him angry that his response was accepted with such an eager sweetness.

Was he that impossible to like as she had said?

"Don't sound too eager." He grunted as he tried to bring his breathing back to normal. His heart was still rattling.

"I..." She looked down and her eyes widened. He saw where she was looking at and his cheeks flushed as he took a step back.

"What? You never saw someone so aroused?" He bit the words out as he turned away from her. "It happens."

She didn't say anything. Instead she turned into a shade of mind boggling red. Redder than before. And cleared her throat.

Then she said something he would have never dreamed in all his wildest dream.

"Looks like your *thing* is overthinking it."

She looked guileless, but he saw that glint in her eyes. *Innocent my ass.*

He would bet his right lungs that she was making fun of him.

He choked on his own spit and almost ran away. And he thought he could hear her taunting chuckle following him and it put a smile on his face.

She always did things he least expected.

The woman was going to be the death of him.

***

(Alexandra)

She kissed him. She kissed Logan Forte. *God. God.* And it was every one of her dreams and nightmares. Mixed together.

And she didn't regret it, but she had to stop let it matter too much. So when he gave an easy way out, she was too eager to welcome it, but then he looked angry.

Why was he angry, then?

She tried to avoid his eyes and inadvertently stumbled across something else.

The front of his pants...

Whoa! That is kinda scary and arousing.

She thought and wondered when she had turn into this, this *hormone* loaded, lustful and dirty person.

It wasn't her.

She had dated three guys in all of her 23 years and she had gone as far as kissing, but nothing ever made her lose control.

After all, she was still a virgin and that had to mean something.

But with him, she wanted to do everything she had never wanted to do with anyone.

She looked away when he caught her looking. Shit.

"What? You never saw someone so aroused?" He sounded agitated. "It happens." And aroused.

It was clear.

She had this urge to do something to shake his cool. He was always cool and collected. Perfectly in control of what he did, of who he was and she yearned to do something to twist it. To twist him. She wanted him to feel uncool, like she had felt with him.

A mischievous smirk replaced her lips as she pointed at him.

"Looks like your *thing* is overthinking it."

And he turned pink. He did. He looked at her or more like gaped at her, and he looked properly shaken. Not Mr. Cool anymore. Ha!

He looked as awkward as a nerdy teen with braces, having his first kiss.

Oh, I did that to him. It was almost gloating, but she couldn't help it.

She watched with amusement as he rushed past her as if she had a contagious disease or something.

Her whole body tingled as she stood there, eyes knowing in the realization that she did that to him. It was an exhilarating feeling. To make someone feel all that. Feel everything.

She felt that, too.

She walked -- floated-- to her room in a haze, her lips swollen and smiling.

She gasped when she saw herself in the mirror. She watched. Studied herself. A finger gently touched her lips.

She looked gorgeous.

Light roses on her cheeks. Eyes over bright and shining, the gold in them cloudy. Lips red and swollen and smiling dreamily.

Her heart pounded.

And don't overthink it.

"It is a one time thing. Get it? Don't make it into a habit. It will become a difficult habit to break. Addiction is bad. You can't get addicted to him. Remember the contract."

The contract.

Yes. Oh yes.

It made her heart slow down.

***

(Logan)

Logan stood under the shower, still thinking of the kiss. He could almost smell her in his body, if he tried. Even after washing himself.

The pain in his body slowly receded, but the need in his bones, it didn't.

He toweled his hair and pulled out a T-shirt from the neatly arranged closet. He pulled it down his head and sprayed a hefty amount of perfume.

Maybe then her smell wouldn't overpower him.

When he got down, she was in the kitchen, cooking.

"Hey, what are you making?" He asked, trying to bring back some normalcy, but it looked like she didn't need it, because her voice came out without hesitation.

"I called Danny. I told him about *the* Mathilda Shine job. He is coming over and we are having pasta, chicken and desert." She had a big smile on her face.

When did Daniel and Alex became such good friends?

It made him slightly jealous.

She was his friend, first.

"Ah. Ah. Free food is his kryptonite." He said before he walked to where she was standing. "Need a hand?"

She looked startled for a moment and then cleared her throat. "There is spring onion in the fridge. Take it out and cut it. And then grate the cheese."

"Which one is the spring onion?"

"God. The long thin green ones." She shook her head before going back to what she was doing. "Hey, we should grow some herb in our kitchen." He didn't miss that she called it *our* kitchen. It made him feel warm feelings and this had to stop. *Emotions are messy.*

"Write a list. Better yet, we will go tomorrow."

"Ok then." She smiled at him, looking excited and he was amazed by the fact that she was excited for even the littlest of things.

How was she still like that? So happy and eager? Easy to please?

How was she not completely faded, even after going through whatever she went through? She didn't tell him anything yet, but somehow he knew that she was hurt and betrayed by people she had trusted. Sometimes it showed in her eyes and it was kind of scary that he could read it.

But she was color. She was rainbows and kaleidoscope. And he saw it and he knew it would take a lot to steal that color from her.

And God, please don't let anything or anyone steal that from her.

Maybe if he had known what their future held in store for him and her, he would have prayed a little longer for her.

***

(Alexandra)

"Move. Set the table." She said as she drained the pasta inside the white sauce she left bubbling in the pan.

Then she added chopped vegetables and cheese and stirred, and letting it cook, she went back to buttering the chicken.

"Don't just stand and stare, he will be here any minute now."

"It is just Daniel. He is not a guest."

"Logan Forte, do as I say."

"You are so bossy for someone so little." He grumbled. "Why is Daniel coming here, again?" He complained.

Because I can not eat dinner with you alone. And pretend like I don't want to kiss you again. And again.

Oh, she could not say that out loud.

Bad girl, Alex. Naughty, naughty girl. The pesky little inner voice taunted.

"Because I invited him over to celebrate my real first job."

His eyes widened and she remembered what he had said about kissing as a celebration.

"You-" He stopped halfway.

"Don't worry, I don't actually go around kissing people to celebrate my victories. That was just a one time hitch." She giggled when she noticed his ears turning red. He groaned.

"Minx." He pushed his long, lean fingers through his wet hair --he had showered-- mussing it, and she wanted to do the same.

She could still remember the feel of his hair on her fingers, his fingers on her.

Stop. Stop thinking dirty thoughts.

"I am going to set the table, even though I still don't know why Daniel need such special treatments. It is just Dan."

She switched the stove off when the pasta was ready. It looked mouthwatering. *Yummy*. She thought as she took a sample bite.

Not yummier than Logan.

God. This thing was irritating.

The chicken was almost ready.

She looked for the spices to apply over the half roasted chicken and realized it was on the top shelf.

"Logan, I can't reach the spices jar." She called out to him and he chuckled.

"Midget."

"I am not a midget. You are a giant. Who keeps spice jars at the top of the shelf, anyw-"

She trailed off when he came behind her and leaned over her to reach for it. His smell was all over her body. Her body was alive. Sparkling. A touch of electric wire.

What the hell was he doing? If he had asked, she could have moved.

It felt like an eternity before he took the jar and handed it to her.

His fingers brushed hers.

Her fingers itched to grab him by his T-shirt that looked like it was made for him, and then kiss him senseless.

And then he would, maybe, *ovethink* it. Overthink everything.

But no. She-

He moved a little closer or it felt like that to Alexandra.

She wanted to move back, but her legs were totally not heading to her warning.

He should post caution symbol over his head.

⚠ *heartbreak ahead.*

She could smell him. His musky Cologne. Logan. His wet hair.

🚧 *Do Not Cross.*

Okay, the space between them was getting smaller and smaller.

The bell rang. She jumped apart and hissed when her back hit the kitchen slab.

He cursed something unintelligible and walked away.

Saved by the bell.

Haha.

"Hey Dan." *Okay, tune down, girl. You sound too eager.*

He gave her a single white rose. It was beautiful. "Thank you. It is so beautiful." She said.

"You are so beautiful." He smiled and winked and she giggled.

"Stop loitering. I am hungry." Logan sounded moody.

"What crawled up your ass?" Daniel asked as they took a seat at the table. She sat next to Logan. Daniel sat opposite to them.

"So that I can keep seeing your beautiful face." He smiled with a wink.

"You are unusually charming today? Eh?" Alex threw a grape at him and he caught it deftly.

"What!" He looked offended. "I am always charming."

"Yeah, as charming as a toad. Shut up and let me eat peacefully, you two. Keep your flirting away from *my* table."

"Is he always this grumpy?"

"What, no way. You are looking at the guy who had once did some legendary comedy acts without even laughing. Like asking rents off rats!"

"Really? Tell me more." She looked at his flushed face and laughed.

"Shut up, Dan." Logan grunted.

"Really, Alex. So- it was our third year, I suppose, in the university, and he kept shouting at his room mate Rick for stealing his bread and whatnot. One day we realized it wasn't Rick, but a mouse. And what did Logan do? He caught the mouse, and gave it an earful."

"What? He yelled at the poor mouse?"

"More like *strictly* talked. But yeah. He said and I quote, '*you see, little thief, you are here illegally. You can not be here without paying quarter of the rent, at the very least. And not only did you not pay, you have also stolen considerably from me. Now is that an acceptable behavior?*' And the poor thing kept squeaking and squeaking and squeaking, as if saying 'yes sir.' And then with a warning not to come anywhere closer to his dorm, he let it go and the poor baby scurried away."

Alex was laughing by the time Daniel finished.

"God, Logan. You did that?"

"What?" He sounded indignant. "It worked. The little thief never came back. " Logan said as Alex wiped her tears from too much laughing.

She looked at the two men in front of her.

Just days ago, she was hopeless and almost gave up. But now here she was, laughing and being happy.

It felt good.

"You are - that is simply inconceivable. God, you are unbelievable. I thought you only lecture humans and there you go, breaking another one of my misconceptions." She chuckled as he scratched his cheek with an unabashed smile.

"That is not a compliment." She added.

"What? All I heard was, '*Logan, you are so amazing.*'" He mimicked in a poor imitation of Alex and she punched him in the shoulder.

"I don't sound nasally like that."

"Hey."

And they laughed and talked the whole way through the dinner and deserts. And Daniel and Logan did the dishes before Dan left.

She was surfing the TV when he called her.

"Alex?"

"Yes?"

"This Sunday, my mom asked me for a family lunch. I think it is the right time to bring you in. What do you think?"

She thought it was a very wrong idea. But she didn't say so.

"Okay. If you are sure."

"Of course. We have one month to convince everyone and then we have to get married before Stacy left for Paris."

"Oh Stacy." Alex pushed the remote button with a frown, with an unnecessary force. "Yes, whatever. You are the boss."

(Logan)

It was Sunday already and he felt like a nervous school boy introducing his first ever girlfriend to his family.

But she wasn't even his *real* girlfriend. It was okay if his family didn't like her. She would be gone in a year.

And the thought of her not being here anymore was not a pleasant feeling.

As he walked inside their kitchen, he could smell the herbs.

Yesterday, they had gome snd bought the herbs she wanted to grow in the kitchen. Thyme. Rosemarie. Mint. Oregano. Parsley. Dill. Basil.

She had placed the pots painstakingly in order, in the side of the French window. And she had stared at it and changed and stared and finally she was all satisfied with how it looked. As she had stared at the plants, he was staring at her.

And then they sat in the comfort of their kitchen and ate the steak and burger and fries they bought on the way back from the nursery.

It was all so simple, the meal, but still with her laughter ringing and his voice sounding almost too happy, it felt much more wonderful than a dimly lit private table at the back of some fancy restaurant.

After lunch, they sat together in his home office, and they had talked about Mathilda Shine's M-project. Alex was so eager to start that and like a sponge, she had absorbed everything he had said about Mathilda, what she was expecting. He gave Alex many of the business cards he had, from various shop owners to wholesale dealers to furniture firms and he was proud when she put them all in a small card holder and kept it secured.

He was sure she would be the best option for Mathilda. Mathilda was known for her eccentricity and for her uniqueness. Alex would satiate both. She already had so many ideas plotted in his laptop. He made a note to himself to buy her a new laptop.

He grabbed his Porsche keys as she walked down the stairs, looking cute in a denim dress that flared around her knees, wearing a strappy sandal. She looked so young, so radiant.

"Ready?"

She bit her lips and nodded.

"Don't be nervous." He said.

She shook her head. But she still looked nervous. She bounced on her toes and twisted her belt and pulled her dress down.

"Hey, everyone will like you." He was sure of that. She was easily the most friendly, most kind, most likeable person he had met.

"Umm."

She sat in the car, staring at nothing in particular. "Relax." He said as he touched her shoulder.

"I think I am going to puke. I feel exactly how I feel during every exam."

"It is not a test. They like or they don't like, but it will not be your failure. I mean, we can not ask everyone to like us."

"You, Mr. Cool, you can be like that. Totally mature about anything. I can not."

He patted her hands.

"I will be there. Remember that. And I hope you remember that, and not abandon me and turn against me after meeting my sisters and mom."

"Thank you and I will try to remember you."

And then they sat in the silence, and he turned the radio on when she asked him to.

And a song came. She immediately perked up.

"God, his voice is so- it's one of a kind." She said dreamily.

And Logan wanted to grit his teeth. Why the hell did he turned the radio on?

"Leo Shine is an ass." He said. He wasn't, not really, but Logan had never really liked that man and now, he didn't like him, at all, after Alex was looking moony eyes just by hearing his so-called one-of-a-kind voice.

God. It was just a voice. It wasn't like there was anything special in it. Maybe there was something, after all, his songs were off the charts always.

"Oh, a hot ass. I don't mind." She smiled. "Hey you suppose I will meet him when I work at Mathilda's house?"

Now, he didn't want to let her go anywhere near Mathilda's house, but he could not do that. So he just shrugged and pushed the accelerator.

"You are going to work, not play. Keep that in mind." He grunted.

"Ugh. You are no fun at all. But still, I hope I can meet him. I wanna know if he is just as handsome in flesh as he is in the TV."

"Handsome! My hair is more handsome than him." He said with a disgusted frown and she chuckled.

"Sometimes even you can be funny."

Funny? Damn it. He wasn't being funny.

He was 100% serious.

"*I have this yearning in my bones when I look at you with your family. Looking so carefree and eager and young. And I so badly want to belong, right there, in your picture perfect photographs." - Alex*

Chapter 11

10. Twin troubles, families and fun times

(Alexandra)

Alex had expected a big house that was calm and sophisticated. Cool like Logan. Unruffled, no matter what, except maybe that one time she kissed him.

But the house was not big. It was comfy and small. And it was chaos. Mayhem.

As soon as she stepped down from the car, a big dog came bounding towards her, its silky fur flying and behind it was a boy, covered from head to toe in mud and he was screaming at the top of his lungs.

"Bruno, stop. You big lump, stop. Don't bludgeon the nice lady."

Bruno, the big lump, didn't give any heed to the screaming boy.

"Andy, you are a moron. How many times--" This boy looked exactly like Andy, except he was squeaky clean and wearing glasses.

"Not now, Brian. Not now." The messy one said as he ran fast. The dog was the fastest.

She didn't know what to do. Should she move away? It was safer that way.

But before she could, the dog collided with her, God it was heavy, and she stumbled back. She almost fell, but then Logan stepped down, and he whistled. The dog stopped when it heard the sharp order from him. "Stop."

"B, that is not how you greet the guests. Show some class. What did I tell you?" It was that voice- his *lecturing* voice

The dog sat down, its face drooping. *Poor baby.* It looked at her as if pleading. 'Save me from the man.'

"Uncle Logan, he only ever listens to you." The boy, Andy, was maybe 7 and he looked disgruntled and angry and dirty. His twin--he must be, they looked exactly the same-- Brian stood next to him and he smiled at her, all polite and Alex was stuck by the resemblance he had to Logan.

They both looked like Logan, but this one, Brian, with that cool smile, neatly combed back hair, was the exact replica of Logan. It felt like seeing young Logan and it made her feel warm all over. Her heart couldn't take so much of sweetness and sexiness in such short intervals of time.

"Hi, sorry for Bruno. He-" Brian said.

She smiled and waved him off. "No harm.

"Are you alright, Lex?" Logan looked concerned as he touched her face. "Did he hurt you?" Thousand sparks shot through her nerves and she couldn't help but want to lean in to his touch. She didn't.

"I am fine, Logan. I'm not hurt."

"But you almost fell. Bruno is so heavy." He looked her up and down, his hand on her cheek, his eyes crinkled with worry and Alex's heart was a mess. Messy mess. Like a mess that made cleaning up after so very hard.

How could he do that to her with just a look? It was that look that was going to be Alex damnation.

Alexandra, no, girl. Down. Don't kiss him now. There are two little boys here. Watching.

"Who is that girl?" Someone whispered from somewhere in the garden with tall trees and flowering bushes.

"Must be the one Dan called you about?" Other giggled and Alex pulled away from Logan. She stumbled back in the process only to be pulled closer to him.

He grabbed her by her hips and his body was flushed against her. Her skin tingled. Her heart thundered and her body felt like she was in the midst of blazing inferno.

Da-dum-da-dum. Could he hear her heart going crazy? What would he say if he knew that?

She was sure he would tear the contract and run away in the opposite direction.

Even the thought of contract couldn't help her control her body.

It was like he was her magnet and she some wanton metal thing or something.

"What? You said you are okay?" His eyes were intense on her and it was making her harder to breath and his palm on his back, it was making her feel hot and bothered and she shouldn't.

Take a deep breath. But... How do I breathe?

His eyes were still on her. Shit. Those eyes.

🆘 *Someone please save me.*

"Why is he looking at her like--"

"Ssh. He will hear you. Keep quiet and watch."

Alex was again pulled away from the magic of his eyes. God. They had been there for almost five minutes, in each others' arms, just staring? While the two women watched? How on earth did Alex forget them?

It looked like he hadn't heard his family, yet. But how could he not? They were whisper yelling, but it was still so loud. Alex's cheeks were flaming as she took another step back from him.

"Look at them, God, so adorable. Mamma, come here, now. You shouldn't miss that."

Alex groaned as she took another step back and his hands fell away from her body.

He glared at her. "What? It is not like I like touching you, I am just making sure you are okay." He grumbled, looking morose.

His eyes were sullen. She had realized that Logan was always confrontational when things didn't go his way. And he didn't like that she pulled away from his touch, did he? She wanted to giggle.

Alex rolled her eyes at him and pointed to the doorway, but the man was really dense for someone who had achieved so much in so little time. He stood there, still staring at her, annoyance clear in his storm grey eyes.

"Oh yeah? You don't like touching her? We can totally see that." The woman with the blonde hair said in her overtly bright voice.

Alex was mortified. If only the Earth would open up and swallow her. Now.

He turned back, not at all ashamed at being caught. "Oh, it is you two. Still so mature, I see." He said. "Still sneaking around other people."

"We have seen so many things we couldn't have if not for the sneaking around. We caught you with your hands in young Anna's--" The woman with red hair smirked.

"Stop, stop, El." He waved his hands at her. Now his face was getting closer to scarlet.

And Alex was really curious. That kind of reaction from him, would only mean that there was something interesting in that tidbit the red haired woman was about to share.

"Was it the br-" Alex grinned at him as he put his hand over her mouth. She gave him an obnoxious wink.

"You, it is for you, too. Okay? We are not talking about Anna, who was now happily married and have two kids." Logan glared at her and she smirked at his glum face.

"Hmm, now my imagination is getting better of me. You had been a naughty boy, hadn't you, Logan Forte? I was sure Santa never gave you any presents." Alex taunted him and the two women laughed as Logan gave her his most serious look. She wasn't deterred by it. "Oh, don't look at me like that. I wasn't the one who got caught coping a feel." She winked, feeling mischievous with each passing second.

"You are a- you are a-" He stuttered, looking more and more like a fire engine with each passing second.

"For the first time in his life, he is speechless." This was red hair.

"You, come on in. We already like you." Blonde said.

"Shit." Logan groaned as he looked at his sisters. "What did I warn you?" He looked at Alex and quirked his brows. "Don't gang up on me. You remember?"

"What?" She asked with a childlike smile.

"Ah, don't give me that look, brat. I am not fool enough to fall for that." He said as she batted her lashes at him with a sugary sweet smile. "Like you are all harmless. Oh, I know you." He pulled her in and she snuggled against him.

She knew it was for the show, but still she couldn't help but love how warm he was, how strong he was. If it wasn't totally cheesy, she would even say they fit.

"What are you talking about, darling?" She licked her lips and looked right into his eyes.

She could play better. Much better.

It looked like that caught him off guard. The *Darling*.

Logan was such an easy target sometimes.

"I don't know whether I want to kiss you or kill you." His voice was hoarse as his fingers dug into her hips, lighting little embers ready to burn freely and fiercely inside her body.

Now it wasn't a game anymore. Nobody was playing.

"Kiss me?" She whispered and his eyes widened again. She looked at them. They looked dilated. With something akin to lust, but she wasn't sure. She had never been at the receiving end of that look.

It wasn't like men hadn't given her attention, but she was not interested enough to stand there and be looked at by anyone.

But now, she didn't want to move. Not at all.

It was pure chemical reaction. That was what it was. This thing between them. She felt so sexy and new. She felt wanton. Brazen.

Old Alexandra was almost a saint. She really was.

She wondered what was it about him that made her into this lusty, brash creature.

"Little brother, you are doing neither. We are stealing her away." Red hair said. And Alex flushed again. Why was she constantly forgetting this two women?

"You can kiss Bruno." Blonde one said.

"Eww, mom." Brian said as he shrunk his nose.

"Alex, these two are my sisters, who aren't decent enough to introduce themselves. The irritating red head is Eliza and the equally tiresome blonde is Emma. This two here, Emma's.

Eliza has a girl, who is the actual grown up in her family." Logan said as he pulled Brian up and swung him around. He squealed and then his little face became composed.

Aw.

"Uncle Logan, you can't do that. I am a big boy." Brian complained, looking totally adorable.

"Uncle Logan, lift me up, lift me up." Andy squealed and jumped up and down, waving his arms like crazy. Alex laughed at him.

"Let them mess around. Come on in." Emma or is that Eliza, said.

No, the blonde is Emma. She thought as she walked inside.

The house smelled of baked pizzas and warm breads raising. Yeast and butter. Spices and chicken. It smelled like home and a little bit of sunshine.

"I forgot the cake in the car." Alex said as they walked in.

"You baked us a cake? Okay, I am officially becoming your ardent fan." Eliza giggled. "Is that chocolate?"

"It is two tiered, chocolate and butter with nuts."

"Ok, I love you."

"I will go and bring-" Alex turned around to go back to the car and get it..

"Don't bother, love." Emma said. "Log, bring the cake when you come in."

"Yes, yes."

"Now come on, let us show you off."

And that was what they did. There were a girl, a woman, three guys and they were all staring at her as if she was for sale or something.

Her lips twitched at that thought.

She was already *bought* by the man who was just now coming in with two boys flanking him on either side with a box of cake she baked.

And her heart was falling down and down.

And it was so not okay.

For today, she would let it. Tomorrow, it was going to go.

***

(Logan)

Alex looked nervous as she stood there. He wanted to go stand behind her and tell everyone to look away. But she needed this, because when he actually introduced her to his business circle, they would not just looking, they would be preying on her with their eyes.

His family was, at least, not made of wolves.

"Hi." She nervously tittered. It was so unlike herself.

"Guys, come on. Is this how you welcome guests? Do I need to lecture you all just as I did Bruno."

"Hi." His brother-in-law broke the silence. "I am Markus, Mr. Emma." He chuckled and Alex laughed.

"Hi, nice to meet you."

"Now this guy that is looking at you like you have two head is Deke. My brother. And Eliza's."

"Wait? Twins again? Whoa!" She said.

"Yes. Though I am the goodlooking one." Markus said.

"Dude, we are identical." Deke frowned at his brother.

"But some people have that innate radiance that outer beauty can not just fight against."

"Now, let them fight. That is my mom and dad. Mom and dad, Alexandra." He said as he looked as his mom. She had that look in her eyes - the 'you have so much to explain, young man' look.

"Hi. Welcome. I am David. You can call me Dave." His dad said as his mom stood there watching Alex.

"What about me, uncle Logan?"

"Oh this here, it is Camille. Don't call her Cam. She is ten and..."

"She is lady Logan." Eliza said. "Exactly her uncle."

For that, Camille sighed, rolled her eyes and looked proudly looked at her uncle. They both shared a look that was pure exasperation. He loved his niece so much.

His mom was still staring at Alex. Alex didn't back down, but she looked like a deer caught in the headlights.

His mom looked kinda scary, but she was really a cuddly teddy bear.

"I am Bethany." His mom walked closer to her and Alex pushed her hand forward.

"Mrs. Forte, hi. Thanks for having me."

And she gasped when his mom pulled her in a hug and tched. "We don't do handshakes here. And what is that about Mrs. Forte, eh? Call me Beth. You must be special since Logan had never brought a girl home."

"Except Anna and Tiff and Jackie." Emma said with a smirk. He so hated his sisters. They had always been a pain in his ass, but they had always been someone who defended him against all his bullies m, as well, when he was thin and scraggly.

"Oh that was before he was seventeen. After that, he brings girls only to old, abandoned parking lots." Eliza said helpfully.

Alex looked at him and shook her head. "Such a playboy."

"I am not." He defended his honor. He wasn't really a playboy. Maybe a teenage boy at some point, but he had grown up faster.

"Uh huh. It doesn't seem like that." Nervousness long forgotten, his spitfire was back. And he liked her this way.

As everyone walked inside the big kitchen, Alex stood next to him wagging her brows.

"Don't say whatever you are going to say."

"But you don't know what I am going to say." She complained and pouted and he wanted to kiss that pout away.

"Don't I?" He asked and she sighed.

"No fun at all. I present you the killer of human happiness, Mr. Logan Forte." She announced dramatically. "Wait. Your mom said you have never brought anyone home, but what about Stacy?" She asked with confusion.

What about Stacy?

"Umm, no."

"And you were going to marry her? What kind of man never introduces his future wife to his family? God, Logan, I am beginning to think that she is the victim here." She shook her head in annoyance.

"Stacy is no victim."

"Neither are you." She whispered.

"Ok, neither am I." It was the truth. He wasn't heartbroken or anything when Stacy said no. Just extremely annoyed and disgruntled that she had derailed his plans.

"So, why don't you just rethink this farse?" She asked, pointing between them.

"Are you going to lecture me about that again? Don't start now, okay. It has to be done."

But, is it that important, a small voice scratched at his inside.

It was. He couldn't afford to be mocked at.

You are still giving that excuse?

"Logan, I just mean--"

"Will you shut up, Lex." He was angry now. Why was she trying so hard to make him back out of this plan. Was he that unpleasant to live with for a year? More repulsive than the damned motel she was staying days ago?

Something in his heart twisted.

"Okay." She agreed.

"Come on." He snapped at her.

"Logan, I was-"

"I understand you don't want to marry me. But you have signed the agreement. You cannot break it now."

"What are you talking about? It isn't for me." She looked angry, as well. "You think I can afford to say no to all that money?"

"Then why are you pushing me to break it? Do you really want to go back to that seedy motel?"

"Because you are a hard headed fool." She stood on her tip toes, her head thrown back in indignation, her cheeks red with anger.

He stared at her. He couldn't take his eyes off. She was explosive, she took his breath away.

"Calm down. You look like you are going to burst your vein." He said knowing very well that was such a wrong thing to do.

She poked a finger to his chest. "You are abominable. I am glad I signed an agreement for one year. Anymore than that and I would just pop all my blood vessels and die."

"Oh, is that so? You are just as annoying. Like a-a like a... "

"When you find something to fill that retort of yours, give me a call." She said before she walked back inside the kitchen, as if she owned the damn house and then turned back to give him a look. "Better yet, don't call me. I am sure it will be *blah.*" She waved a finger at him. The nerve.

Logan gritted his teeth.

This woman was maddening.

He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to kill her.

He wanted to touch her until she was ready to combust. He was ready to combust.

He rubbed a hand to his face and groaned. He was this close to snapping and he couldn't afford to snap.

Their agreement didn't have anything about sexual intimacy. In fact, it was a big no.

He pushed his fingers through his hair.

"You coming? Or going to stand there like a statue?" It was Deke. "Whoever she is, you have got to be careful, man. You are already teetering. Don't fall just yet."

"Deke..."

"I didn't hear much, dude, but from what I heard, it looked a little complicated."

"It is. And confusing. It is just not like anything I have ever been through."

"Oh." Deke gave him a knowing look.

"What?" He asked in confusion.

"I don't want to spoil any surprises." He smirked and then walked in, leaving Logan more confused than before.

***

(Alexandra)

She was glad she came. The whole family, except that annoying man, was warm and welcoming.

After they finished lunch, pizza, baked chicken, a soup made from fresh veggies and herbs, Eliza opened the cake Alex had baked and sighed.

"This is a masterpiece." Eliza sighed. "God, you can start your own bakery." Alex smiled at her.

They had been surprisingly a good company. They were both funny and not like Logan, who was brooding the whole lunch. At one point, she kicked his shin, and mouthed, 'smile.' And he glared even harder.

"Will you please marry me?" Emma asked as she ate a piece of cake. "This is - God, this is one of God's blessings." She sighed and Alex chuckled.

"She is not marrying you." Logan grumbled.

"Grump." Alex muttered under her breath, but he heard her and his eyes flashed.

Hot.

Why is it so hot in here?

"She going to marry you, Uncle Logan?" Andy asked, his mouth full of cake.

Logan choked on the water he was drinking.

"Don't talk with food in your mouth." His twin brother said with a frown.

"Brother, be careful." Emma teased Logan.

"What?" Logan looked at his nephew, his eyes wide.

"You should marry her. She makes nice cakes."

"Yeah, totally right." Eliza winked and Logan squirmed. "That is a great reason to get married. I mean, I married Deke because he has such nice eyes."

"Mom... Eww." Camille said.

"I asked him. He said no." Alex looked at Andy with a pout and the boy looked at her, his eyes wide with wonder.

"Someone is having their very first crush."

"I think you kind of have that effect over the men in our family." Emma winked.

"Oh, don't be sad. Wait and I will grow up and marry you." Andy said all so seriously and Alex laughed at the cuteness. She all but became a puddle.

"No. I am smarter. You marry me." This was Brian.

"I am funnier." Andy said.

"I am taller."

"You are boring, B."

"You are dumb, A."

"Boys... " Alex said. "You are both wonderful, but I am in a dilemma here." She ruffled Brian's hair.

"What? You are not complaining? She messed up your hair?" Camille looked shocked. Her little brown eyes were wide. "She. Messed. Up. Your. Hair."

"So, I like it." Brian said with a sweet smile.

"Uh, oh." Bethany, Logan's mom, gave Logan a smile. "Looks like you are going to have to fight for her."

He choked on his water, again.

"First come, first serve." Alex said with a haughty shrug.

"Oh, I like her, alright." Logan's dad said.

Everyone was looking at Logan with a look that wasn't so hard to understand. Even Alex could understand that. He flushed red and Alex hid a smile behind her glass of water.

"She is marrying me." He grunted. "You two should go and get your own women."

This time she was the one who was choking on nothing.

You are both my dreams and nightmares. It is bizarre. - Alex

Chapter 12

11. First jobs, meetings and real identities

(Alexandra)

She was stoked to meet her very first client and she was bouncing on her toes as she waited for Logan to get going already. She was full on coffee and nervousness.

She wore her black skirt and a suit she had bought for a presentation back in her college days, which she had worn only once in her life, and braided her hair down her back to make herself look mature and dependable. A little bit of lip gloss and she was done.

She wondered if Mathilda Shine would agree to take on a first-timer to redecorate her house, but Alex was prepared to blow Mathilda's mind off. She had so many plans and ideas buzzing in her head, and if she waited any longer, she was going to explode. Kaboom.

She looked at her watch and then at the stone of a man sitting in the couch, unmoving. His lips were pursed thin as his eyes scanned the paper.

He was reading the newspaper like the whole of the Universe's secret was hidden somewhere inside it.

What if she was late? She pushed a lock of her hair back as she tapped her shoes on the floor. Tap. Tap. Tap.

The man was deaf, as well.

She looked again at her watch. Was this watch made of snail?

He is getting his revenge for yesterday. That must be it. Alex thought with a frown.

It wasn't her fault that he just couldn't take a joke and had to be all so intense and serious, so damn much, all the time.

She still couldn't believe this was the man who had come to her and asked her to be his fake wife. He must have been pretty desperate that day.

Andy and Brian was fighting for her and that was when Logan had said something no one had expected then. It was as if he was really competing against his nephews or something. Alex was still befuddled when she thought about that.

"She is marrying me. You two, go get your own women." He had said as he crossed his arms across his chest and stared at his two nephews.

After that it was chaos. Pure mental.

Everyone was trying to talk over one another and Alex sat there, her mouth half opened in a gasp that she didn't finish. Couldn't. She was so bewildered to properly form a response. Even if she could, what would she say?

"Logan? What?" She stuttered after ten minutes of ensuing madness.

He shrugged. Shrugged. Really?

"Did you kind of blurt it out?" Emma had asked him, then and Eliza threw a towel at his face. "Moron."

"Where is your romance? I am almost ashamed to call you my brother." Emma tched and Logan glared at her.

"Shut up, Em."

"I am sure she is probably saying no." This was Eliza.

"It is for you, as well, Liz." He said in that brooding voice of his that Alex loved so much.

Then everyone stared at her and Logan was looking everywhere but at her. She chuckled like a dying goose, and looked away.

God. That was really awkward.

Andy who had ran outside after Logan blurted that he was marrying her came back with a bunch of wildflowers in his hands, and his cheeks were so red from all the running. He handed it to her with a smile that was so much like his uncle's.

"I have flowers. Girls like flowers. You should marry me." That was the most sweetest thing she had heard.

"Yes." Alex had smiled at him, and he kissed her cheeks, making her feel so full with the love that was so pure, without the dots of doubts and judgements. She almost cried from the sweetness of it all. This was family.

This was something she hadn't had for so long. Even when her dad was alive, it was just the two of them. Against the world.

But now as she looked at the smiling faces, she was almost grateful whatever force that had pushed Logan, the studious, logical guy to do something so illogical.

Because of it, here she was... Feeling overwhelmed with happiness and love. Because of it, she was getting a family. Though it would be temporary.

"Yes, she said yes." Andy jumped.

"But that is not fair." Brian said with a pout and Logan nodded his head in agreement.

"Can you marry both of us?" Andy asked then, and Alex stomach hurt from laughing so hard. Her heart hurt, too.

"You are really falling behind." Deke said as he patted Logan's back as they were finally done with the laughing. "Better luck next time, bro."

"Man, you lost to a little boy." Markus grinned. "My boy is like, really, charming. Like his father."

"Ah, poor baby, Logan. Logan was always getting rejected." Eliza had pinched his cheeks and he slapped her hands away with a grunt. Alex jerked upright. Did they know about Stacy?

She looked at him and almost imperceptibly he nodded. No. So this was another one of those Logan's childhood story.

"Who else rejected him?"

"It was our next door neighbor. She is a year older than Log and he had a crush on her."

"Ooh, older women, Logan." Alex grinned.

Logan glared up at his family and then he turned those hot eyes on her and God, Alex wished they were alone. All alone.

Bad girl Alex. Very bad.

"Guys, can you please shut up now? Lex, get up now. I think, we have overstayed our welcome here." He stood up with a frown.

"Oh, you guys, shut up and Logan, don't go. Sit down, you too Alexandra." His mom said and he grudgingly sat back down. She was glad he hadn't made his mom sad. She loved it about him. He was almost carefree with his family. Not so tightly guarded. His thorns were giving way to the rose in him.

It was so cheesy, but true.

"We were just kidding." Emma said and her mother had gave her a stern look which made her shut up. Logan gave her a victorious look. "Tattletale." She murmured under her breath.

After lunch, the men had walked to the game room and the women had sat in the backyard and talked and joked, but they steered clear of what Logan had said during the Lunch. The twins looked curious, but Alex was sure they kept quiet because of their mom's warning.

They left at mid noon. The way back home was tensed with silence. He didn't try to break it. She wanted to, but she didn't know how to start a small talk with a big elephant sitting in between them.

When they reached home, he asked her to get ready for her first job meeting in a bland voice before he drove back out.

Here they were, now.

She was ready. He was a moron, though not so much.

"You done with that?" She groaned.

"You asked that just a second ago and the answer is still the same. No. Relax, it is only 8 and your meeting starts at nine. Don't pester me, Alex." He said with a snooty look on his face. If only she could wipe that snooty look with an eraser or something...

"Is this some kind of revenge?" She threw her head back with a sigh.

"Do you deserve a revenge?" His voice was so-so full of arrogance. God. He knew all her switches and knew exactly where to push.

She just want to pound his head with a baseball bat.

"Ass." She mutters under her breath. "If your head grows any bigger, you won't fit in inside this house." He looked like he was enjoying it as he leaned back in his seat, more comfortable and quirked his brows. Those gray eyes, they were shining.

"You are really enjoying it, aren't you?" She said and then went back to begging. "Please, please, Logan. What if we got stuck in the traffic? Come on. Get up. Oh, you... Move your lazy ass, Logan."

He groaned as if he was in pain.

"Just two day ago, you were giving me *the* silent treatment and now you are talking like a broken tape recorder. Are you talking now, for all of the two days you hadn't?" He shook his head and his hair fell over his forehead.

This was really not the time to think about how sexy it looked like that, all messy and bedraggled, but the thought sneaked in like a thief. She couldn't help it. Her heart and body were working against her brain.

Traitors. The whole lot of them.

"Oh," She bared her teeth at him in a smile. "So, now you are complaining about talking with me, huh? Have you seen that guy who begged me to talk with him and sent me a new table just to bribe me in to talking, Logan? He is nowhere to be found." She said.

"Please stop smiling like that. It is so creepy. You look like a piranha."

"Are you calling me a creep?"

"I am not calling you a creep. I am calling your smile creepy."

"You are an abomination. You are-you are..." She picked up another cup of coffee. It was probably a bad idea.

"If you ever find anything to finish that retort, give me a call." He smirked and shrugged. "Better yet, don't. It will be blah."

He was saying exactly what she had said when they were fighting at his home.

"Haha. Super cute. Not." She said as she threw a pencil at him and he ducked.

"You are so annoying." He said as he threw his papers down. *Finally. Success.*

"You are annoying. You are the king of annoying." She poked her tongue out.

"God, Alex, I will read the damn paper tomorrow for God's sake. Come on, lets go now before you decide to throw a pan or something." He said with a frown as he stood up with an exasperated look on his face.

She was fast to get his coat and when she handed it to him, his frown became a beautiful smile.

His smile was all magical. Mesmerizing. It would first, erase the brooding look in his eyes --which was getting lesser every passing day, except when he was really angry-- and then the winking dimple would come out on his right side like some well hidden secret and then his grey eyes would join his stretching lips. The slight crinkle at the side of his eyes would make an appearance,then and no one could stop themselves from smiling back.

She smiled back.

It was like a magnificent art. Truly enthralling to look at. Captivating.

But, I am not looking. I can not look.

She took another gulp of the coffee.

Ok, we get it girl. But we are looking. We are feasting. Who the hell was it? Was it her evil, wanton twin who lived inside her?

"You got your files and the laptop?"

He bought her a laptop when he came back later that night. He didn't forgot that even when he was angry. Her laptop was sleek, silver and totally her style.

It was these small things, small totally unexpected deeds and kindness that made Logan who he was.

Rose and thorn.

Granite and velvet.

Hard and soft.

He was a weird combination of the both. And it made her head spin and heart stumble.

"Yep. Done and done. I feel like... Oh, my head is spinning. Really."

This time it wasn't because of Logan. *No shit.*

"How many cups of coffee did you have?" He looked at her with wariness.

"Only three." She rolled her eyes. He didn't need to know it was the largest mug they had in the kitchen and it excluded the one she was drinking now."And it is all good. I am so, so good. Fantastic. I am freat, I mean, gine. I mean, fine. So geeling freat. Feeling great."

"Ugh. Stop talking. Three? God! You don't sound good. You don't look like you are geeling freat." He narrowed his eyes at her. "You sound high. You sound giddy and tipsy. I mean, can you really get drunk on coffee?" He rubbed his cheeks. "Lex. Did you eat anything at all?"

"Umm, the thing is, coffee is amazingly wonderful and I don't get high from them. And I can't eat. My stomach is pregnant, shit, I mean, p-popping-"

"Sure, you are not high." He scoffed. "You are such a child, Lex. Put it away." He grabbed her sleek black leather bag off her hand and put it on the table. Then he grabbed her hands and dragged her like she was a sack of potato to their new table that still made Alex heart ache with tenderness for him.

And it was so wrong, the feeling. But so, so right.

But she couldn't feel like that, could she?

Wrong.

Party A and Party B should never contest the agreement.

And that was almost like the wake-up call she so gravely needed, but then the next moment, she looked into his gray eyes and it felt like all the reasons and justification for not being sucked in by the pools of his eyes were a pale comparison to what she truly wanted.

To be with him. Even if it was just temporary. She wanted that. But could she, even after knowing the heartbreak would be the ultimate destination?

She wasn't that strong.

He grabbed the plate eggs she had put away and a glass of juice and placed it in front of her. She shook her head.

"I really can't, Logan." *I really can't fall for you.* She felt tired. She felt drained. Crashing from sugar high?

"You are strung so tight. You need to eat or you are going to mess it up. You can not run on coffee."

"Please." *Please, don't be like this to me.* "Please, Logan."

If only he could hear her thoughts.

"You are eating or we are not moving away from the table." He warned as he looked at his watch. "And it looked like you only have forty five minutes left." He looked at her pointedly.

"Bossy." She grabbed a fork. "Smug, arrogant little..."

"That again?"

"You going to ask for creativity?"

"No, thank you. Please, just eat. "

"Hah, that is my boy." She said with a cheeky smile, trying to hide whatever mess that was brewing underside her heart. She couldn't give in.

When she finished eating, Logan drove her towards Mathilda Shine's new guest house.

Here I come, Mathilda.

~~~

(Logan)

Alex was twitching in her seat all the way to Mathilda's house and he couldn't help but chuckle. She gave him a glare when she noticed him.

"Shut up."

The skirt and the suit fit her. It was perfection. She was perfection.

It made her look mature and sleek. Sharp. Like she could do it all and some more.

He hoped that Mathilda would see Lex' passion and her talent. Would give her a chance to prove herself.

He stopped the car in front of the tall house and called Mathilda. She buzzed him in and he parked in front of the huge house that looked like it was from Victorian era. It was old, rustic and majestic, a symbol of time and art. A symbol of creative genius.

He sighed. This was not just a building. This was art. And he strived to create art like this.

Building a home is not just about stone and concrete and plans and pillars. It is also about feelings, creativity and imagination.

Logan strongly believed in making every single building he built, a memory of his skill. His creativity. His emotions. His passion.

That was why he was here now, in the top. But he wanted to go farther up. Where not many had gone.

And he was sure he would go there. One day.
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"This is so beautiful." Alex whispered, her voice reverent. Her eyes were wide and her cheeks were flushed as her eyes swivelled around, as she took in everything. "A masterpiece. I don't know whether I can do justice to it."

But she could. Only she would do justice to this masterpiece. He didn't say that. He just said, "you will."

She nodded her head. Bit her lips as she studied the house again.

She looked breathtaking. His hands had mind of their own. He watched with confusion as his fingers made a trail on her red cheeks.

"W-what are you-you d-doing?" Her voice was barely a whisper.

"A good luck kiss?" He said before he pulled her to him. She responded, like how a matchstick would respond to kerosene. Almost immediately. They made fire together. They would burn together.

He touched her tongue with his, gently, softly and she gasped and moaned. His breath mingled with hers and he felt alive. He felt something he had never felt in a long time.

He felt young. And free.

Her hands made a beeline to his back and she pushed it inside his suit jacket. The moment her skin touched his naked skin, he wanted to pull her to him and explode together. It would be so easy. So easy to let emotions overtake him. Control him. To destroy him. Them.

His body went tighter. Her fingers pulled him by his hair. Closer still. And as he let his mouth trail lower, he could hear her muttering.

"What am I doing?" He had asked himself the same, but he just knew he couldn't stop, now. Maybe tomorrow. Tomorrow he wouldn't be so feeble to resist her.

But emotions were always dangerous. Emotions would make you lose your sight. Lose your way.

"You shouldn't do this." She said as she pushed him away. But her hand stayed in his chest.

"It was for luck." He said with a coolness he didn't really feel.

Emotions weaken you.

"Why don't I believe for a moment that you are not a man who believes in luck? You believe in hard work. In talent. In opportunities, Logan Forte. Not in luck and yet here you are, kissing me for luck?"

It was true.

He was also the man who believed in keeping calm no matter what. A man who believed that level-headed decisions and fire for more, could bring you to the top.

"Ok. Maybe I just wanted to remind you about our contract?"

"What the hell does that mean? You are so absurdly random." Her cute nose was all scrunched up like a dried grape. He wanted to kiss it.

"I am not. You see, you may or may not find Leo Shine wandering the..." The thought of Leo Shine was like a prickly heat on his skin.

"Oh God, oh, God, will he really be here?" She gushed.

He gripped the steering wheel tighter and his knuckles turned white. He stared at her, his eyes a narrow slit.

"See. This is why, you have to remember you are supposed to be mine for a year." *Mine.*

"God, how the heck can I forget that, when your grumpy face is so in my face all the time." And then she flushed. "Not in my face like in *my* face. Just.. So, ugh. You make me crazy."

"I get it." He smirked at her. "I make you crazy." She threw a rolled up tissue at him.

"Shut up and get down." He did as she said and she followed him, muttering something.

His phone pinged and he pulled it out and looked at the screen. It was Tom reminding him of his morning schedule.

Logan really have to be in the site, but he wanted to be here for Alex if she needed him. He sent a quick text to Tom, asking him to send Amelia and Rafael to the site.

Tom: Boss, u in a coma?

Logan: Tom, one day or other, I'm going to fire your ass.

Tom: Just checking... U want me 2 send Amelia & Raf to the site. So? U dead? R u a ghost?

Logan: I am not dignifying that with a response. I'm here at Mathilda's house.

Tom: Ah! With that cute new interior decorator? Hah! Now I know. U r not in an ordinary coma 😁*, u r in a love coma.*

Logan: Tom, do me a favor. Please, type a dismissal letter for one Tom Geoffrey. Goodbye.

Tom: how will u live after that?

Logan: Go & find yourself another job.

He pushed his phone back inside his pocket when he saw Mathilda walking towards them.

"She looks so regal. I think I am going to puke."

"Please don't. This one is a new shirt."

"Gee. Thanks so much for your concern, for your dumb shirt."

"Come on, you had already wasted one, you couldn't another."

"That one was your fault. You were the one who was lazy enough to seperate the laundry."

"Uh-huh, I keep you in house for that."

"What? How dare you... You you monster of a man. I am not your slave."

"Ah. You are not?"

"The nerve. I am going to... I want to gouge your eyes out."

"Such cruelty. Violence is bad, Alexandra. *Ahimsa* is the only way to go." He chuckled as he made a peace pose with his hands and she slapped it away, a smile hiding in her lips.

"What? You are suddenly a follower of *Gandhi*? Do I look stupid enough?"

"Uh-uh."

"Logan. I am going to-"

"Hello Logan Forte. And this must be Alexandra? Alexandra...?"

"Umm."

"No last names? It is fine with me, if you don't want to."

"I-I mean, no?" He looked at her. He wished she would say it, but he didn't want to force it out of her.

"It's okay." Mathilda Shine said as she signed them to walk with her. Alex avoided his eyes as they walked.

"Alexandra Steele." She said.

Logan's eyes widened as he came to a halt. Steele. Steele. Robert Steele?

How did he not know that? How could he not?

"What?"

"I-I..."

"You are Rob Steele's daughter?" Mathilda asked with a smile. "You are. Aren't you? You were so young when we met"

"Mom, is your interior decorator already here?" It was unmistakably the nasally voice --ok, maybe not so much-- of Leo.

He came bounding towards them, like an overeager puppy, a big, blinding smile on his face and a halo over his blonde head.

He is disgustingly handsome. Logan narrowed his eyes at the man.

There was another woman standing with him, her black hair in a power ponytail. Her sharp eyes narrowed when she saw him and Alex.

He stopped in front of Logan, looked at him and smirked. "Oh, it is Forte. How is Daniel?"

"I am good, thank you. He is good, too." Logan said with a sarcastic smile.

"It is very amazing how Danny can survive you without popping all his blood vessels. He is like a cockroach, withstanding every situation and weather."

"Yeah, he is amazing like that. You, on the other hand... You are a feeble...puny..."

"Umm?" Alex looked at them. "Logan?" He looked at her puzzled eyes.

"They have always been like that. Don't mind them." Mathilda said to Alex.

Logan's body went rigid as Leo stepped in front of Alex. *His Alex.*

He pushed a hand to her.

She took it.

"You are an interior designer? Are you sure you are not a model? Don't pull my legs."

"No."

Alexandra Steele, giggled. Really giggled.

Dammit.

"You are like an itch in my heart, that I can not scratch away. My hands don't go that deep." - Logan

Chapter 13

12.Crushes, dreams and first loves

(Alexandra)

It was Leo shine. His hair was like a halo over his head and he talked like he was singing. And he...

He is holding my hand. He is shaking my hand. Ooh. God

And Logan was glaring at them. *Oh, he looks so hot when he gets angry.* Oh so handsome. And hot. And sexy. Did she mention hot?

Why was he always looking so effortlessly hot? Why, oh why? Her feeble heart couldn't take so much of that. It was already on the brink of going insane.

She wanted to push that frown off his lips. His lips. Oh, yes. Those lips.

She could still taste his kiss, him, smell his after shave and Cologne, smell his essence, and it made her feel dizzy. It was all so vivid, like it was happening right here and now.

Who was this blonde guy in front of her?

Alex shook her head to disperse the thoughts of Logan. He was like a bad habit. An addiction. If there was something like LA --*Logan Anonymous*-- she would probably be the first member. But she was so sure she wouldn't be the only member.

"No? But you look like... " Leo was saying something. She blinked. Okay. That just didn't happen. She didn't just go away to la-la land, when this gorgeous man was holding her hand, did she?

Oh, you did, alright!

Stella, her best friend -- who was now in Canada, with her new husband-- would kill her, if she ever heard that Alex was woolgathering while she was in the presence of the glorious Leo Shine. Leo Shine had been both their favorite singer when they were in college. Celebrity crush.

Alex and Stella had been one of his ardent fans and they went to his concerts whenever they could and squealed as they saw him, along with all the other girls. Yes, she was a squealer back then.

And here he was, in the flesh, handsome than before. So why was she fantasizing about Logan when she could very well dream about Leo Shine?

"Hah. You are charming, eh? I have always liked your songs. I am Alexandra. My best friend and I, we are your number one fans." Alex said with a smile as he gave her hand one last squeeze.

"Let her hand go already." Logan grunted under his breath.

She looked up at him with a frown. "What?" He gave her a mock fainting pose.

Ahh! Very funny.

"Oh, ignore the grizzly bear, Alex. This is probably his hibernating season and he can't help himself. I mean, he just can't be human, you know, when he don't have to be." Leo rolled his eyes and gave a mock shudder.

"Oh, that makes sense." She said with a cheeky smile and winked at Logan and Logan shook his head with an exasperated sigh.

"Brat." Logan muttered. His voice was raspy. It made her breathing go a little haywire. Everything about him should come with danger signal. ⚠ *Do not touch or look or hear.*

"Badger." She stuck her tongue out and he gave her an indulgent smile.

"Oh, I like you, already. Anyone who can stand up to Logan is someone worth having."

Was there a double entendre in there? Alex stared at Leo with question in her eyes. He just gave her a wink.

"You are not having her." Logan snapped at Leo as he stood behind her, as if protecting her or something. She turned to look back at him and she couldn't help but feel all the blood rushing to her cheeks.

He looked like he would bite Leo's head off if he came any closer to her. His eyes were hostile as he looked at Leo. Possessive.

She wanted to lean a little back against Logan and test him. She would have, but there were too many spectators.

A nerve in his forehead throbbed and his jaw was rigid as he stared.

What would he do if she leaned in and kissed on his stubble. Just below the stubborn press of his lips. Just above the line in his chin.

Naughty girl. Naughty thoughts.

To stop herself from giving into the temptation of hot and grumpy Logan, she turned back to Leo shine and took a step away from Logan

"You really like trouble, don't you?" She smiled at him.

"Yeah. And he also likes being a complete moron." Logan said with a scoff.

"You are very testy today." Leo shook his head. "But ignore him. And You my dear, you are hired."

"You can not hire her. This is not your house. This is your mother's house." The woman who was standing there with them with an iPad in her hand said for the first time. Her brows were wrinkled as she shook her head at him. Leo just smirked.

"Details, details, darling Trish. You know I am not so fond of them." He waved her off.

Trish glared down at her shapely nails before she pounded on her iPad, muttering something to herself.

She was a tall woman and her suit was sharp and it looked like it was tailored just for her. Her ponytail was straight and there wasn't a hair out of place. Her eyeliner was drawn with a best hand and the peach lipstick was applied very lightly to suit her chocolate brown skin. She looked regal and sharp. Her dark brown eyes looked wary and alert. But whenever she looked at Leo, Alex could see it. Regret? Yearning? Sadness? Anger? It was a mix of everything.

It made Alex curious. She was naturally a curious being. It had killed her many times over. Just not that literally.

"Oh, we know. You just blindly barge into situations like the fool you are."

"I am not a fool. You are just so-so..."

"Can't find the words from your extensive vocab? Now we want to know who wrote all your songs. Is that really you?"

"Of course you, numbhead. You know it is me." Leo threw his hands back, looking flushed. "Why can't you just let that go?"

"Yeah? We will see. Next time you have a girlfriend, you call me. I will kiss her and we will call it even."

"What is happening here?" Alex looked at the two women standing with her.

"That is just their routine. Ignore it." Mathilda waved her hands. "Hello guys, whenever you both decide to stop being so childish, and grow up, we are ready here. We have work to do. And come on, get over it already. It had been what, five years? And Leo, you had been a scoundrel, and you know that. Maybe it is about time you apologized."

Mathilda Shine looked at her son with that no-nonsense look of hers that Alex often admired in her movies.

This was a woman who knew what she was talking about. She was so sure of herself, but not so full of herself. The slight difference made Alex feel a whole lot of respect for the woman.

Alex wanted to be like her one day. To have that strength and kindness. To have a backbone that is straight, but not callous. To know what she wanted and how she wanted it. To never doubt herself or her ambition and to always stand up for what she valued.

Alex had to be just exactly that to win her dad's business, his passion back from the wolves. Now that Logan knew about her real identity, maybe she would open up about herself and her dad. She had to. She was sure he wouldn't just let that go.

Yes, it still hurt to think about how the men her father had believed with his business and dream backstabbed her, but she had to grow a thick skin and thicker spine. Soon.

The court battle was going to be nasty and brutal and she had to stay strong and unflinching to face that, to face them before the judges. It was looming ahead of her, a dark shadow, and she couldn't afford to be a weakling.

"But I did. I did ask sorry. He is just so arrogant, mommy, you know." Leo almost whined.

"Are you really complaining now, to your mommy, you cheating ass?" There was no whining for Logan. His voice was pure male.

"I really don't know she came with you. I wouldn't have done that if I had known. She was throwing herself at me, you know."

"Yeah, they can't help it, can they?" The voice that said was sarcastic. It wasn't Logan. It was Trish. "Now, if you are done with your shenanigans here, Samir has called me for the tenth time already. You know. To talk about your tour. Are you coming now or going to waste more of your time and mine? You are just so impossible sometimes. I am just tired of--"

"Whoa, Trish, what did I do?" Leo looked offended.

"Wait. Who are you again?" Logan looked at her with interest in his eyes and now Alex was the one gritting her teeth.

"I am Trish Patel, I am the one managing *this* one man circus. You are Logan Forte. I know a lot about you and respect you for what you have done in such short amount of time." Her voice was all cool, but so sincere.

"Hmm, you must be one amazing woman to manage *him* all by yourself. And I suppose you didn't hear of me from this moron." Logan gave her a faint smile.

"No. I read business journals and magazines, you know. They are kind of my guilty pleasure." When she said that, his lips pulled up in a smile. This one not so faint. This was the dimpled one.

This was supposed to be only for her. He could not just go around bestowing that special, magical, hypnotic smile to strangers.

Alex glared at him, but he was looking at Trish with something close to admiration.

"Wow. How did you get roped into working for this glittering moron?"

"Hey. I am not a moron. Glittering, okay, but not at all a moron." Leo protested with an affronted look on his face.

But the two ignored him. Mathilda was already sitting in her recliner with her eyes closed and as Alex looked at her, she shook her head subtly. "It may take some more time. Wanna sit and relax?"

Alex sat down with a huff.

"My mom is Mathilda's PA and when I was done with MBA, I was doing HR management, and mom said I should come and work for him. The salary is obnoxious. So I said yes. Realized the client is more obnoxious." Trish laughed and Logan chuckled.

Ok, she is all cool and exotic and whatever, but how can he flirt with her in front of me?

"And now you are wiping his name from the muddy gossips. Maybe that was why there were no news of him having any affair with another man's woman." Logan shrugged.

"You didn't even like her that much." Leo looked miffed as he said that.

"Not the point." Logan said.

"Five years and they are still going on about it?" Alex whispered and Mathilda shook her head.

"Five years later and they will still be talking about that."

Trisha's phone rang. She looked at Leo with a pointed glare and he pouted. "Yes, yes, I am coming. But you were the one flirting with him." He sounded indignant. Then he turned to Alex.

Alex stood up. "Nice to have met you. Hope you will be around." She gave him her hands to shake, instead he took it and kissed it with flourish. Then he bowed to her.

"Salut, mademoiselle." He said before he kissed his mom in his cheeks, sent a flying kiss to Logan and strolled away. "See you soon."

She grinned.

"Stop grinning like a fool."

"Yeah? Why should I?" She asked as she walked with Mathilda. He grasped her hand to stop her. "Stay." He said to her.

"We will be right there." He said to Mathilda before he turned to her. "What is that about? The giggling? The flirting?"

"Oh, so you are the only one who can flirt?" She spat it at him as she pulled her hand away from his grip.

"What? What are you babbling about?"

"Oh, don't think I didn't notice how you looked at her. Alright, she is hot. Yes. But you shouldn't--"

"What? Alexandra Steele, are you jealous?" He looked so pleased with himself. Stupid ass. "And Steele... We are talking about that, soon."

"What? I am not jealous. Keep dreaming. But remember the contract? If I can't flirt with Leo, you can't with his assistant."

"She is not his assist-"

She cut him off. "Not the point." She said before she walked off.

She could hear him heaving a sigh before he followed her.

And then Mathilda opened the door and Alex forgot everything except this.

The house was marvelous.

Grand spiral staircase ran along the house, its handrails made of red wood. The floor was granite. The wall was painted a pale peach with watermarked designs of a leafy plant and flowers and it was gilded with wooden edges. The ceiling was carved, swirling vines running along with little flowers.

The fireplace was big, and made of red bricks and stones.

"This is striking. God." Alex sighed as she leaned her head against her palms and watched.

Her stomach was a mess.

She didn't know if she could do justice to this magnificent piece. It wasn't just building. It was practically a poetry.

She looked at Logan and he had that look in his eyes he gets whenever he feels elated. Excited. The architect in him must be salivating, looking at this.

"This looks even more amazing than in the photographs." He said to Mathilda.

"Yes. That is why I have to have it." Mathilda touched the wall like she could hear it whisper stories.

If she strained a little, Alex could hear it, too. The stories in the walls, could see the laughing children sliding down the banisters. She could see the muddy prints on the granites as they come back from the outside, could feel the warmth of the fire lit in the fireplace.

"I don't think--"

Logan pressed a finger to her lips. "Don't think. Just feel." He said and she closed her eyes. His finger was still on her lips. She could feel the house around her, just as much she could feel his heat.

A grunge brown couch with a table made of salvaged wood. A chandelier with crystal drops. Wooden frames and miniature statues.

This place deserved Royal treatment. Modernist and minimalist designs wouldn't work here. It needed elegance and extravagance. And it also needed to be home.

Table crowding with chairs made of teak. Table legs carved. Recliners. Lounges. Kashmir rugs. Dream catchers. African tribal arts.

So many idea popped inside her eyes. She could see it. A montage of pictures and videos of how it would be.

The vines twirling around the banister. The pots of bonsais along the railing. The mirrors with silver frames. Pablo Picasso's period pieces. Grunge art.

"Tell me now." Logan said after what felt like hours. She opened her eyes with a smile.

And she told them. Her face was expressive, her hands were moving around and two pairs of eyes watched her with interest and absolute wonder. They looked enraptured.

"I now know why Logan told me that I needed you. No one would have worked out." Mathilda said. "Melissa Meyer wouldn't have worked out."

"Melissa?"

"Ms. Hot." Logan said with a smile.

"You wanted her?" Alex asked Mathilda.

"I did. But Logan called me and said I had to meet you first. He was adamant about that. I couldn't say no, but I agreed to meet you only for him. Now I am glad I agreed."

"Thanks." She whispered to him as she blinked to stop her tears.

Her heart stopped. Then it started. She looked at Logan, and God, how could he do all this for her and not expect her to fall for him.

If this was just a contract, if he was just another arrogant, boorish, smug, hot as sin, handsome man, she could have persisted. She could have saved herself from falling for him.

But this was Logan. This was not *just* another man.

Arrogant and kind.

Smug and sensitive.

Hot as sin, but also beautiful.

And she fell. She fell and fell, until she couldn't breathe, until she couldn't swim against the pull of him. She was drowning, but she didn't fight it.

He was everything she had *never* wanted. But here he was, handsome and haughty and generous and giving and after seeing him, after looking at him and his weird, bipolar, enigmatic heart, how could she want anyone else? How could she?

Oh Logan, why did you do all this for me?

And so she fell and this time she couldn't give any excuses or stop herself from taking that fall. It would hurt, of course, but she would face it when it came to that.

Everything was still the same. The contract. The one year end.

But she was in love and she didn't care.

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(Logan)

Her eyes were so soft as she looked at him. Her voice was a gasp, a soft touch of velvet against his skin as she said thank you.

She was looking at him as if he was from a distant planet. As if he was the only one she could see right now. And he likes it too much, he liked being at the receiving end of that look.

"You deserve it." He said and she blinked. Her green eyes with golden stardust in them, they looked shiny. Glimmering.

"So tell me more." Mathilda said breaking their look. Alex cleared her throat before she straightened.

"Let us take a walk, shall we?" She asked and Mathilda nodded, looking enthusiastic.

"This isn't just a house. This is one of those statement pieces. Artistic and gloomy. Poetry and peace. Mathilda, it fits you." She said as she looked around. He couldn't take his eyes off her. She was just so beautiful and when she talked like this, he loved her mind a little bit more.

"But this should not just be a statement of your power. This should be a statement of your kindness, your heart, too. And so we are going to mix it up. Hallways, bold and daring. Study rooms and bedrooms with a touch of strength and whimsy. This should be a home, a place you can relax, and also be a place you can host your extravagant parties."

"I love the way your mind works." Mathilda said and Logan was bursting with pride. He couldn't contain his smile when she looked up at him. Her answering smile was just as explosive.

He loved the way her mind worked, too. He loved the way she worked. She walked. She talked. She smiled. She kissed.
~~~

Ok, si. We get it. A voice said with a chuckle. He pressed a hand to his heart, before following the two women.

They looked so different, but same.

The way they stood with confidence. The way they talked with self assured knowledge. The way they walked like they owned the place. The innate strength and inner beauty reflecting in their face.

Queen. One wrinkled beauty.

Princess. One young beauty.

They were both majestic. Both women. Powerful, and poised, and still kind and funny.

He could see her now, Alexandra Steele, Rob Steele's daughter, walking with her steps unfaltering.

She wasn't new to this world. She was born in it. But it was not a wonder he had not seen her before.

He knew Rob had a daughter. He also knew he kept her away from the wolves and the vultures. And seemed like Rob Steele was right, because the wolves and vultures had gotten their claws into this innocent woman, finally.

He wanted to know more of her story, it was like an urgent itch to know that, to know how she ended up in that motel, but it had to wait.

She was living her dream here and he could not interfere.

She was talking with her hands, her eyes, her heart as she said what went where and why. She also had a recorder in her hands to record the notes. Very effective, his Lex.

Her eyes were overbright and her smile was simply breathtaking.

"Whoa. You have a vivid imagination and also words to go along with it. I can almost feel it, the rug under my feet, the smell of crushed lavender potpourri, the fresh leaves. You will go a long way." Mathilda said.

Mathilda was never the one who gave away useless praises. She was straightforward.

So when she said that to Alex, Logan's heart filled and overflowed with happiness. It was a feeling he had felt for very few.

It was the feeling he had when her sister first handed Camille to him and not to anyone else. It was like the feeling when Brian won the science competition they had worked together. It was like the feeling when Andy had bruised his knees while playing, but stood back up to play again, even though he was hurt.

God.

She was becoming more and more his family and he didn't know what to do about that.

It scared him. ~~~

(Alexandra)

Mathilda wanted her. Only her.

"I know you will want to work on more projects, but you have to first finish my home, Alex. I can pay you whatever."

Payment was nothing. The satisfaction of working here was what she needed. And the experience. If Mathilda asked her to work for free, she probably would.

No first timer would get this lucky. It was all Logan.

"Sure, it is not like I have projects queued up."

"But it will come when they hear that you are working for me. Not to sound arrogant or anything, but it is the truth."

"I know. I promise I will finish this before I accept anything else. Okay?"

"That is good. So I will ask my lawyer to draft a contract."

"Oh, Logan is very good at drafting them, aren't you." She asked with a flippant smile.

Alex's mouth twitched as she watched Logan jerking up. She wanted to laugh so hard.

"Uhm, uh..." He stuttered and gave her a peeved look.

"Really? I thought you are an architect. Are you a lawyer too?"

"He is totally overachieving, but I don't think he is a lawyer. He is just very good at making contracts. Party A, party B, I mean, he is good." Alex looked at him with a smirk.

"You-you, you little--"

"Little what?" She asked and gave him a smile. He looked back at her, his gray eyes full of pride and joy. For her.

Her heart hammered.

His eyes were so soft, so bewitching. Why was he looking at her like that?

Like... Like...

"Guys, if you are done staring at each other, can we go? I have an appointment and it looks like you two also need some privacy. Can I go? You can lock the house." Mathilda said with a smile.

"What are you talking ab-"

"We don't need privacy." Alex protested, coming back from the trance.

"Sure, sure, whatever you say. So if you two were just acting before, you guys should get an Oscar for that." She waved a hand as they both flushed a very ugly shade of red.

I want to rewind the time, go back and tell my heart not to fall. But the truth is, I can not not fall for you. Even if I can rewind time and go back knowing it all, I am sure I will still fall for you. Over and over. - Alex.

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Chapter 14

13. Childbearing hips, turn ons and stupid guys

(Alexandra)

"I can not still believe it. Is this a dream?" She was bouncing in her chair. They were in a restaurant, now.

After they had said good bye to Mathilda and After Alex had agreed to meet with her tomorrow to sign a contract --*what is with her and contracts?*-- Logan had decided they should celebrate her first job.

He had called his assistant Tom to say that he wouldn't be coming to work, today. The man had said something for which Logan had given his usual grunt as his response and here they were, sitting in a swanky restaurant. And he had ordered whatever she wanted to eat, that was all cakes. And ice creams.

"Do you want me to bash your head with this candle holder?" He asked.

"Why would you do that?" She shrunk her eyes at him as she searched his face. Sometimes he was such an enigma to her, and other times, she could read him like an open diary.

"To make sure it is not a dream?" He gave her a straight look. Didn't even smirk. How could he maintain that face? Wasn't he joking?

"Really? Anyone else would have asked whether I want a pinch. Not bash. Or kill. Why does your mind work like that? It is so bizarre."

"My mind is something special." He said as he took a sip of his water and gave her an arrogant smile.

"Yah, it is something else, alright." She said as she forked in a huge bite of her cake.

"Haven't you changed your mind, yet? Are you really going to eat all the cakes and ice creams and call it a lunch?" He grabbed her plate and she slapped his hands away.

"Why not?" She said with mouth half full. "And hands off my babies. You are not eating them."

"You are calling me bizarre?" He quirked his brows.

"I am." She said and looked up. *Oh God.* She looked away from the woman strolling inside, just as fast.

"Why are you looking like that? If you open your eyes any wider, your eyeballs would roll down." He commented as he surveyed the restaurant.

"Shit on a sweetcake. Logan, hide me. Please." She pleaded. If the woman saw her... No way.

"Hide you? Where? Can you jump inside my pocket and stay?"

"You idiot, this isn't the time to be funny. I need to hide. Wait. I know what to do. i I will just go under the table." She said as she slid down and crawled under the table and pulled the tablecloth further down to hide herself. Cutleries clinked down and she could hear Logan cursing under his breath.

God. She didn't want to get caught.

Aunt Beatrice would just talk her ears off and there would be no escape from it. She wasn't in the mood to answer all her questions.

Alex looked up and her cheeks heated when she realized she was very closer to Logan's, uhm, uhm, his *thingy.*

Look away. Look away.

But she didn't know why her eyes were not moving.

He shifted in his chair and then he was peeking through the tablecloth and she looked up and their heads bumped. He swore and rubbed his forehead as she tried to put some distance between them.

Too close to those eyes and Alex's brain was like a scrambled code that didn't make any sense. It took too much time to decode it back to the original form.

"What the hell are you doing, Alex? Come on up."

"Ssh, ssh, stop. You don't understand, I can't come."

"Why?"

"It's batty aunt Beatrice." She whispered.

"You have an aunt?"

"Not really. She just insists I call her that. And I can not talk to her. She will go on and on about how I should marry her grandson, because I have this great childbearing hips or something like that. And then she would ask about you and then my father and God, it would be a train wreck."

"You can tell no to marrying her grandson. You are marrying me." He said without a trace of amusement in his voice. In fact, he sounded angry.

"Waste of childbearing hips." She said without thinking and then bit her lips as her cheeks heated. His eyes went round as his mouth hung open. "I mean, it is not like I want to bear your child or-or something like that. I mean, that is just impossible. I mean-- it is not like you are impotent or anything, you are not, right?" *Dear mouth, please close yourself. "*Of course, you are not. What am I saying? I meant, we are not going to have intercourse and--" *Intercourse? Oh,*

God, stuck me with lightning, already. Or thunder."I mean, we are just so, you know-- we have no chemistry and biology. Nothing." *The hell? Why is she suddenly having a verbal diarrhea?* "I just, I was just kidding you know. Kidding. Joking. Funny. Haha." She pushed a hand against her mouth as her cheeks heated in mortification.

That was what she was talking about? The scrambled brain!!! In action.

He gave her a bewildered look, shook his head as if he had just got down from a rollercoaster and pointed above with a finger. He almost looked pale, poor guy.

"I am going up." He said that in a gasp.

"You should. You should."

He nodded and then he was gone.

God. It must be from the lack of all the oxygen. There was no oxygen inside this table when he was here. It was like that with him. Mostly.

Childbearing? Impotent? Intercourse? Really? Alex, really? Her inner voice was very mean.

And then he was back down again and her breathing went crazy. She prayed she wouldn't just blurt out her *love* for him or any of her crazy thoughts.

"When will you be back?" He didn't look her in the eyes, she noticed. He must be scarred for life!

"Is she gone?" Now he looked at her and the gray eyes were a punch in her gut.

"I don't know who she is."

"Oh, she is the one with that crazy feathered hat."

"Oh, she went inside the private section."

Alex sighed. "God. Just seeing her makes me crazy."

"Yeah, I can see that. And Alex, about your long monologue, we should just forget it ever happened, after you come back up."

She sighed, relieved.

"Yes. Yes." She rubbed her flaming cheeks and he chuckled.

"But for your information, I am not impotent. And we do have some chemistry and biology." He grinned, looking so self-satisfied. And smug.

"You said we are forgetting about that."

"Above the table. But you are still down."

"Oh, you think you are cute?"

"I know I am cute. And I know you think that, too." He gave her a cocky smile.

Insolent jerk!

There were times she just couldn't fall in love with him, over every little thing he did. But those weren't always the only feeling and the only times.

And yes, there were times she just wanted to take something really heavy and drop it in his head. Like this one.

"You pompous little--"

"Above the table, now. "

Coward.

He was gone before she could call out tin his cowardice.

"Coming?" He called and she tried to stand, but her legs were full of pins and needles and it twitched and her back hit the floor with a thump. *That hurts.* She almost screamed, but stopped when she realized where her cheek was resting. *Oh shit.*

He jerked and she slid further up his thigh. She rubbed her cheek and wondered if he could feel her heated cheek through his pants.

"Sorry. I-I, my legs were asleep. And I-I am stuck."

"It is okay. Just- umm, just don't move." He sounded pained. "I said don't move."

"I have to get back up, you know." She grumbled. "Or do you want me to stay here forever?"

He said something under his breath. She couldn't hear what it was, though. Then he asked, "is your legs alright now? Can you stand properly without falling on me again? In some other inappropriate places?"

She gritted her teeth.

"Don't be a jerk. It is not like I want to place my cheek in your thigh. This is an accident."

"Yeah, it seems like you are very prone to accident, isn't it?Are you getting up anytime soon?"

"Wait. I am testing my legs."

"You are testing my patience."

"Why do you keep complaining? Just shut up, already. It is not like I have some contagious disease or anything, Logan."

"Ok. Take your damn time. Take however longer you need." He bit the word out like it was a disgusting, moldy cheese or something he didn't want to eat. "You can even stay right there, tonight."

"You are way pricklier today. Is it Leo Shine?"

"Are you really talking about him when you are still in my lap?"

"Seems like it." She said and poked a finger to her legs. "It feels alright."

"Thank God for little blessings."

"Just shut up."

She stood up and her legs were still groaning, but this time she was ready and held on to the table legs. When she was back in her chair, she noticed their waiter was giving her a perplexed look. She gave him a comforting smile, which made him more twitchy. His eyes widened as he avoided her face.

"The floor here is very good. I am just looking what kind of tile is that? Do you know anything about that?"

"No ma'am. Sorry ma'am."

"It is alright." She waved him off with a smile. "Not a problem. I am almost sure this is marbonite."

"Okay ma'am. Do you need anything else?"

"Oh, the walls, now, are they real wood or papered?"

He looked like he wanted to run away from her.

"No. Thanks." Logan said as he threw her a look. What now? "Just the bill."

"You have had too much sugar today."

"Why?"

"He asked about food. Food. That is his job, you know. Not what you need to know about the history, geography and everything else of this hotel."

"Ah. Oh, yeah."

"Yeah." He said as he lightly knocked on her forehead with his knuckles. "You are running high on sugar and adrenaline, I think."

She gave him a sheepish smile before she took another bite of her coffee cake. God. It was delicious. She couldn't stop.

"So who is the grandson? Is that the guy who came in with the feathered hat lady?"

"What? Johan is here? " She looked around.

"They went inside, remember and that is why you came outside." He said. "Looks like aunt Beatrice's request is not so far-fetched, huh? You look very eager to meet this Johan fellow."

"Actually, he is the one who introduced me to aunt Beatrice. He is the grandson I was telling you about and I called her grandmother when we first met, but she insisted I call her aunt. Nice lady, but still..."

"So you and Johan?"

She shrugged. "We dated for a month tops." He was the third guy and the last guy she had dated before she decided it was all a big waste of her time. And theirs.

She now knew why it was all such a waste of time.

Because the right one was the one sitting in front of her right now and no one else would have worked out. For her. No one could have.

He was the one. He had always been the one, even before she met him. That was why no other guy could ever made a dent in her heart or break her walls.

Logan, with just a touch of his fingers, had burnt down her walls and made a monster sized dent in her heart.

Sadly, he wasn't going to work out, either. They weren't going to work out. This was temporary. There was no maybe about their end. It was very definitive.

Our relationship has an expiry date. God. Why am I still so stupidly falling?

But love comes when it comes. No one can do anything about that. She couldn't.

So she sighed and just prayed that she was strong enough to take the heartbreak *when* it came.

She prayed that she wouldn't burn along with her walls, when it happened.

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(Logan)

"We dated for a month tops." She said with a shrug and looked down at her cake, her eyes going round in appreciation. Was this the time to eat?

And?

He was so damn curious. He knew they still had to talk about her, about Rob Steele, but he couldn't help himself.

"So what happened?"

"Mr. Gossip." She snickered as she cut another piece of her cake as if she had all the time in the world."It didn't work out. We parted amicably. That is all." But as she said the last thing, her eyes flicked away from him.

"Is that it?" He gave her a penetrating glare.
~~~

"Ok, maybe not. A week later, he said he wanted to get back together. I said no."

She said no. His frown fell as he felt a smile tugging his lips up.

"Okay, now that we have had some peace and quiet, why don't you tell me about what happened? Steele?"

"Hadn't you guessed, already? Rich girl, weak spine, easy to cheat. That is me."

"You are not weak. And I think you agreed to this for that, huh?" He pointed between them and she nodded.

It made him feel like a scoundrel. Yes, he had thought about the contract, time and again, but knowing she was signing it for getting back her home, and her dad's hard work, it just felt so tactless and inappropriate.

Had he known...

You would still have roped her in to your plans. You would still have made her sign the documents.

The voice was right and it made him guilty all the more. Like he was an opportunist, pointing knife straight at her heart and... conning her into doing something she didn't want.

But she did agree to that.

She did.

It is not like I really threatened her with a gun or anything.

Yes. It wasn't his fault that she had lost her home to flesh-eating vultures.

Their world was made of so many just like them. Alex wouldn't stand a chance against them. They were all trained in the game of manipulation and corruption and exploiting another.

Some people just didn't have any scrupules or moral compass. They just wanted to make money and what if it made some other girl walk the streets, she had never known how to walk alone? None of their business.

"I did. Our textiles and garment factory and everything else was my dad's passion. He started it for my mom, you know, she was a designer. When my mom died, my dad was still in debt. But suddenly it changed and... "

"Your mom name starts in G?"

GS textiles and Garments Ltd. That case Rob Steele's.

"Georgia Steele Textiles and Garments Ltd. GS." She chuckled. "My dad loved my mom so much, you know, it is a kind of love that is so beyond... Uhm, and-" There was something in her eyes. Longing? Accusation? Sadness?

Was she accusing him for lowering her chance of finding a love like that? Something in him frothed and wanted to pour. He kept it in.

"And when dad died, I failed him. I just came out of college and I was all pampered and sheltered. My dad kept me faraway from *his* life. Yes, he would bring me to some parties, but he never wanted me inside his world, not fully." She closed her eyes. "He would say to me, 'baby girl, your world should be full of glitter and unicorns. My world, it also have people who have horns, two horns. They are not unicorns.' But if he showed me how *his* world worked, I could have anticipated this all. I could have fought my way through their deception. But here I was, sitting in front of a man who gave me a contract to pretend to be his fake wife to get my company back. I wonder what my dad would say, now? He must have thought that he would be here forever to defend and shield from people with two horns. The devils."

"It is not my fault that your father didn't teach you how *this* world worked." The anger was untoward, but he didn't know why. "I didn't force you to sign the contract."

"You didn't?" She gave him a look that was so filled with mock innocence and the guilt and self-reproach in him... The contrition. He couldn't take it all. He couldn't take that his head and heart was taking her side. In this inner battle.

"You could have said no. But you wanted the money. You needed it. So don't put it all in my head. You are not exactly a nun here." He regretted saying that the moment the words were out. He wanted to take it all back, but he sat there, his eyes fixed on her.

The small smile in her crinkled lips melted as she pressed her lips together. She looked at him like she had never seen him before. The distance in her posture, the hurt in her eyes... *Shit, why are you doing this? Why are you always spoiling this for yourself?*

He had really started this to know more information and maybe even help her if she wanted his help. But the moment this started, it was all going downhill. The wrong course.

He didn't plan this. Sometimes the anger in him got the better of him. And it was so wrong of him, so tactless to take it out on her. But the knowledge that she wanted true love... That was just so hard. For him.

He couldn't be that, could he? And a year later, she would go on to find a man who could give her everything. And it was like a brand of hot iron on his skin.

After a year, when this was over, she would not be his friend anymore.

Oh, that is what we are all sad about?

"Yes. I am not a nun, and yes with all the kissing and touching going around, I should just very well sleep with you and call myself an exclusive, glorious hooker for a year. But whatever."

The way she said that, like it disgusted her when he kissed and touched her-- he swore under his breath.

"It is not like I need to hire a hooker and pay her an exorbitant sum to have *intercourse*." He snapped and she gasped. Her eyes were round as her cheeks flushed. Her eyes, hot and full of fire, clashed against him.

Shit. His tongue is his first enemy.

Was it so morally wrong that he find it so sexy? That he found her so unbelievably sexy? That he was so turned on right now, just by looking at her flushed face?

"Oh. What did I expect? You are a smug, vain little coward, who can't even take a *no* from a woman like a man, without losing it. Your puny little ego can't take that, can it?"

She just didn't go there. The nerve!

This now, it wasn't a turn on. He wasn't a masochist.

His hand curled around the glass of sparkling water in his hand and he saw red. He glared at her and she glared right back at him. She wasn't backing down. What did he expect? He knew her.

How did it all escalate from their normally easy squabble to this monstrous and ugly battle?

"If I haven't come in, you would have rotted in that motel." He knew she wouldn't have, but anger made him spiteful.

You must take some anger management classes. It was his inner voice. The damn thing was goading him, as if the imp in front of him wasn't enough. He already had his hands full with her.

"Oh, yeah? You think you saved me? Well, here is some news for you. I saved you, right back, Buddy. Saved your puny ego. Remember how you were all so pale when that Collins fellow came in? You were a mess. I saved you from that humiliation."

"Yeah, for a homeless vagrant, you sure had some fine ego. Then and now."

"You-you arrogant jerk. No wonder you have to pay to get married. No woman in her right mind would agree to marry you for free."

"You didn't just go there."

"I went there, alright."

"You are an ungrateful--"

She cut him off with a wave of her hand, looking all so regal. Like she was his Queen and he was her Royal Slave.

"If that is all, I think I have some works to do. You can pay my share of the bill from my payment. Wait, did you even start the bank account as you had promised? I didn't remember signing any bank documents."

"I am not going to trick you out of your money. Not everyone is out to get you. Have some trust." He snapped.

"Yeah? Look at this cute pot, calling kettle black and all that shit." She put her fork and spoon down next to each other, to signal she was finished, grabbed her bag at the side and stood up. "So are you going to stay here or come? I don't have a car." She looked down at him, her eyes stubborn.

And then she smiled. That beautiful smile that could melt down his anger, no matter what.

So she was going to forgive him? He should probably forgive her, too. It was stupid, fighting with her. He just didn't like it, like the feeling of loss and turmoil inside his gut. It felt like someone was knotting and unknotting his insides with fast fingers. It was too unsettling and disturbing.

He couldn't bear another two days of silent treatment.

"Thank Go--" He started, but stopped when he realized with a start that she was turning away from him and waving at someone. It was the lean guy who came in with batty aunt Beatrice.

Looks like that sinfully luscious smile is not for you.

I don't need it. He griped as he took a sip of his cold water. It didn't cool him down. Where was the damn waiter?

As if he was spurred on by Logan's mind voice, he appeared and cleared the table.

"Check please."

"Yes sir." He walked away and Logan took another gulp of water when he saw the man leaning in and kissing, kissing her on her cheeks.

The hell with manners and courtesy.

She didn't have any of it.

He stood up from the table and walked to where they were standing.

The man... Who the hell did he think he was. He couldn't just go around kissing women in front of their men. Just so impolite.

It is not like he is kissing her inappropriately. It is just a kiss in the cheek. His mind dissed him.

Whatever. A kiss is a kiss.

"Lex, darling, you didn't introduce me to your friend here." He said with a sickly sweet smile as he leaned in pressed a quick kiss against her gaping mouth.

I have never dreamed of love the way it is right now. This love, it is full of chaos and kindness. Of heart and head. This love that is you. - Alexandra ~~~

Chapter 15

14. Possessive jerks, mouthwashes and teases

(Alexandra)

What the hell was he doing? Did he forget everything he had just said to her?

The nerve of this man. And as if it wasn't enough, he was kissing her on her mouth. As if-as if they were a *real* couple or something.

She didn't know why she had to go and fall for this annoying man.

He leaned close to her and whispered, "close your mouth, darling or are you asking for another kiss?"

He was laughing at her. Wasn't he?

He is just so-

She stomped his feet surreptitiously and he yelped and jumped back, muttering curses under his breath.

She ignored him and turned to Johan. "Is your grandma gone?"

He laughed. "Don't worry, I was just coming from the restroom. She is still inside."

"That's a relief." She sighed. She was happy she got to talk with Johan, but no, she would never want to talk with Aunt Beatrice. No way.

"I didn't catch you when we came. Wait, oh, come on... Alex, were you hiding from her? You-unbelievable."

"Can you blame me? And I was under the table." She said with a smile, as he pushed his glasses up. He was cute in them, he had always been cute. And he had been her friend, boyfriend for a month and he had only ever been cute to her.

Not handsome. Not sexy. Nothing.

"Hey, how is Stella?" He asked, pulling her out of her thoughts.

"Ah. Stella." Her voice was wistful. "She must be fine. Haven't talked to her in a while. I lost my phone and lost all my contacts and she is in *the* honeymoon phase. So she is not replying to my mails. God, I just miss her." Alex said and she suddenly missed Stella, so damn much.

Alex had never had a secret from Stella and now she was somewhere where Alex couldn't reach. God. What she would give to have Stella by her side right now. Stella would flip out if she

learnt what was happening in Alex' life. She'd maybe go as far as to cut Logan's head off. Okay, that was an exaggeration, but you never knew with Stella.

But Stella was with her husband, new husband and unlike Alex's forthcoming marriage, Stella's was real. And Adam Haines wanted to tour with her for half a year. She would be in Canada this month, if they were right on schedule.

"Yeah? I have never seen you without her. Except when we went on dates." His eyes glinted as he looked at her. Very cute eyes, too. But she had never dreamed of those eyes. "Hey remember the time we went to Spider Man... "

"Oh God, how can I forget?" She laughed. Logan cleared his throat and looked at his watch. If she could just kick him in the gut...

"Alex, honey, we really need to go. We need to buy your dress for the gala." He said, smiling at her that 100 Watts fake smile, before smiling like a wolf at Johan. God. That wasn't a smile. Not at all. "You remember?" He shook his head at her.

"What gala?" She gritted out. Was this all a game to him? With the blink of an eye, he turned from hot to cold and back to hot and she was confused of this. Confused of him, everything.

Her heart was already in a very sticky situation because of him and she just couldn't... She bared her teeth right back at him in a vicious smile and he looked scared for a moment.

"The charity gala we have to go tomorrow? Oh, God, your little head..." He pinched her cheeks like she was a kid or something. Jerk. "Cute."

"I don't remember any gala. You didn't tell me. And don't patronize me, you pompous fool."

"She is so fiesty. That is what I love the most about her." He said to Johan and then turned back to her. "Honey, I wrote you a note."

"What happened to your mouth? You couldn't have said it to me directly? You say everything you don't need to say."

"Ok, I am sorry. I will just go and pick it up for you if you rather sit with him and talk." He growled. Yes. It really sounded like a growl.

"Hey Alex, umm, I should go." Johan looked nervously from her to Logan.

"Yeah, you should."

"Wait, Johan, please stop. Just give me your number. I will call you later when there are no morons around." She said and he scribbled his number in his card and handed it to her. "This is my personal line. That is my business one."

"Hey, so are you working for the same company, the one that makes animations?"

Logan was tapping his shoes. Tap. Tap. Tap. It was a very annoying sound.

Alex glared at him and he stopped to give her an innocent smile, before he resumed. Tap. Tap. Tap.

She looked back at Johan who was twitching. He looked so uncomfortable, poor guy. "So?" She asked him with a comforting smile. He instantly smiled back.

Johan had been her senior for a year and he got selected for the job with some big guns in Viscom field.

"Yeah. I am managing my own team now. It is kind of fun."

"Good for you." She said.

"Are you coming yet? Or do you need another 24 hours?"

"What the hell is your problem? Did you forget to take your hypertension tablet when you woke up this morning?"

"Oh, uh, okay, bye Alex. Grandma will be waiting. Call me." Johan looked nervously at them before he backed away and almost ran back to where his grandmother was.

"What is your problem? Huh? Why are you being so rude to everyone?" She glared at him. He looked at her with those cool eyes and she really wasn't a violent girl, she didn't condone to violence. But right this moment, she wanted to gouge his eyes out. "Are you just this unpleasant always or is this something personal to you? You should really do something about that. It is not attractive. It is very unpleasant for everyone."

"As I said, we really have to go pick out your outfit. So are you coming or are you going to act out your inner Dr. Phil fantasies with me?" He said in a bland tone before walking back to the table.

"What now?"

"I haven't paid yet."

"So why were you wasting our time back there, when you could have finished everything and came back? I could have talked peacefully with Johan."

"Could have, but what can I say? I just wanted to annoy you."

"Your brain is not working right."

"Oh-"

"Just shut up and don't talk to me. Let us make a pact to never talk with each other. I feel like I am going to pop all my veins and arteries when I am talking with you. You are not good for me." She whisper yelled at him and he shook his head with a smile.

He was still smiling?

"So-"

"Don't talk." She said and walked away.

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(Logan)

Ok, I think I have gone a little overboard.

Try 'a lot?'

But why is she kissing him?

He hated seeing that. He hated seeing her with Johan. He hated that Johan had known a part of her life he could never get to know, but that was totally stupid when he thought about it now.

He tipped generously--the man had been waiting for ten minutes-- and muttered a *sorry* before he walked away to his car.

There leaning against his car was Alex, hands crossed across her chest, in her neatly tailored suit and she looked ready to be in one of those chic business magazines. She looked like power.

The anger in her eyes, the flushed cheeks, the locks of hair that was now out of her severe braid, the way she was biting her lips-- God, sometimes she just made him feel irrational, illogical things. Things he had never felt or had time to feel.

He didn't know what to do about all these confusion. She was like a puzzle, and he couldn't solve her or his feelings, no matter how hard he tried.

He had always had a clear path, a clearer mind. No one had shaken him up, not anyone outside his family. And his best friend.

He had never felt a lot of feelings for women. Yes. He liked their company. He likes talking with some and kissing some, but it was all done with amicably, and without any real involvement.

Cold.

Some might even call him cold.

But from the moment he saw her arguing with the waitress in that eatery, he had been anywhere near cold. She made him feel warn, fuzzy feelings.

It was strange, these feeling tumbling inside him and filling him up and overflowing. As he had said a thousand time to his stupid heart, he couldn't afford to lose sight of what he wanted.

He wanted more success. He wanted a family. A marriage. With someone who would fit in his life and his brain, seamlessly. Without causing any disruption or distraction.

And that was why she wouldn't do.
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She is chaos. She is wild and uncontrollable and he didn't even want to control her. He wanted to go along with her, wherever she would take him and that was the problem.

He wasn't made for chaos. He wasn't made for entropy.

"Are you going to stand there and stare or get in and drive to wherever the heck you wanted to go when I was talking with Johan?"

He was startled by the sound of her voice and realized he had been just standing there and staring.

"Yes, yes."

"Thank God." She muttered before she slammed his door shut. He winced, and refused to go back and check the door. It would be fine. Alright.

One of his friends owned a cute boutique and that was where he was going to take her.

He stopped in front of Glam Girls, Pam's cozy boutique and stepped out.

"Uh-oh." He heard her saying.

"What?"

"Pam and I--"

"You know Pam?"

"Uhm. Yes." She nodded before looking away.

"What did you do to her?"

"Why do you simply assume that it is my fault?"

"Because I know Pam and she isn't the one who starts trouble."

"Yeah, right!" She scoffed before she looked at him. "I have many dresses. I can wear one of them. Or we can go somewhere else."

"I already called her to say we were coming. I can't just back out."

"Why would you do that?"

"Because she is my friend."

"Yeah, friend! Alright. That is what we are calling every woman you have ever dated?"

"We dated, yes, but we parted and stayed friends."

"Oh and here I thought amicable breakups are a myth." She had this totally infuriating smile on her lips that he wanted to kiss away. Her lips were always distracting him.

The lilt in her voice, the cool and calm way she looked like she knew she owned this conversation and him... God, it was just so annoying. And he liked it, like the way she carried herself.

"Don't be a child and come in." He said.

"What if I don't want to?" She throw her head back and looked at him with those challenging eyes. The green eyes. With a hint of magical gold in them-- he had never seen such beautiful eyes or maybe he had seen it, but they didn't look as beautiful as her eyes were.

"I can easily carry you. Okay, maybe not as easily I could have other women, but still, I can."

"Take that back." Now she wasn't as calm or cool.

"What?"

"You just-you called me fat."

"Did I?"

"You know you did. You are-" And then she stopped and looked away.

There was something in her eyes that made him feel like he was taking bottles of acid.

Shit.

"Alex, I am just kidding." He muttered.

"It is alright. I know I am not exactly thin. But..."

"God. Shit. I didn't mean it."

"No. It is okay. I had been called ugly, fat and --" Her lips trembled. "You- when you said that, it just dredged up past memories. Dreadful ones."

"Oh my God. You are perfect the way you are. Beautiful. I am sorry. Come on."

And then she was clutching her stomach and laughing. And laughing until she was crying. "Gotcha! God, the look on your face! God, I wish I had taken a photo."

His lips twitched as he shook his head. "Haha. Very amusing. You are such a kid."

She stuck her tongue out.

He walked inside the corridor and pushed the door open. It trilled some piano note and said welcome.

"Hey, Logan." Pam, looking taller than she had ever looked, grabbed him by his lapels and kissed him.

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(Alexandra)

Pam is kissing him. And he is not doing anything to stop it.

Alex's stomach twisted and she felt her heart gave a very unpleasant tug. It was like a vile medicine at the tip of her tongue.

But she wasn't going to back off and be sophisticated and what not. She wasn't sophisticated as she had said to him the first time.

If she couldn't talk to a man and be friendly because of the contract, he couldn't kiss anyone, as well.

Except, may be you? That annoying voice should be eradicated.

That goes without saying, you little pipsqueak. Shut up. I am not talking to you.

But I am you.

Whatever.

"Get you hands off my man, Pam or I will cut it for you if it's too hard to keep them off him." Okay, that wasn't exactly the words she had wanted to say, but they were the ones that came out. Whatever.

He jerked away from Pam and Pam stumbled back and her back hit the carpeted floor with a thud.

"Ooof." Pam said and cursed.

"Oops." Alex twitched her lips as she looked down at the woman sprawled on the floor with a smile. She couldn't help it. She wasn't really this kind of girl, but Pam, she couldn't just stand her.

Their feud was never anything personal. It wasn't like Pam had done anything to her. They were never close enough to betray each other. It was just the clash of personalities. Just looking at Pam offend her sensibilities.

And Logan, he looked pale. Yeah. Like really pale. Like he had just seen a ghost pale. He should be.

"Go wash your mouth." She said and he looked at her like she was mad. Oh, hell yes, she was. So mad.

"W-what?"

"Am I unclear? Did I stutter like you just did? Maybe use some listerine. Um, wait, there is no maybe about it. If you ever want to kiss this..." She pointed to her lips and his eyes were wide as he took in her face.

"What the hell Logan..." They both ignored the woman in the floor. "Help me up. This little--" *Blah. Blah. Blah.*

"If you ever want to lay those lips," she poked his lips and his eyes looked like they would roll out of their sockets and hit the floor where Pam was currently sitting. "On mine, use a bottle of listerine to clean it or you are never kissing me. Never again." *Haha!*

Logan's mouth hung open. He looked at her like he had never seen her before, like she was an alien or something.

She wanted to add an evil laugh at the end, to punctuate her words, she really wanted to, but she couldn't just spoil the fun.

"Are you going to help me up?" The squeaky voice asked. Ugh. The voice.

"Sor-sorry, Pam." He said as he pulled her to her feet.

"Alexandra Steele. I heard you are poor now, so you can't afford me anymore. So sad Daddy is not here to buy you anything." She said, looking haughty as hell and mean. Daddy. God. That was an ugly thing to say.

Alex steeled herself. She wasn't going to give Pam the satisfaction.

It looked like Pam hadn't heard what Logan and Alex were talking and Alex decided to use that. Pam had always been so full of herself that she never had time for anyone else.

"Oh, don't you worry your little brain, Pamela." Alex said with a smile and surreptitiously pulled the box from her bag. The ring box. It had been there since the day he had given her and this was the time. She opened it and realized it hadn't been the one he had given to Stacy.

So...

Not bad.

He had actually taken time to buy something for her instead of handing what he had brought for Stacy. That was thoughtful. Or was it because he couldn't give it away to just anyone, other than Stacy?

Maybe it is special and he ordered it especially for Stacy.

The thought stung. She blinked her eyes before she turned to Pam who was throwing rapid fire questions at Logan.

"Oh, I can afford you, alright. My Fiancé will pay you. He is kinda rich." Alex said as she readjusted Logan's ties with a smirk. "Back off. Keep your distance. Always stand two feet away. Comprendre?"

"The hell..." Pam screamed. Yes.

"Uh, I am sorry. I didn't expect her to just--" Logan started with an apologetic smile.

"Just launched herself at you and attacked you. She is like a missile. Destroying everything. I know. But you still haven't done what I had asked."

"What?"

"Whaaat?" Pam screamed.

"Listerine. Bottles of it. Or no kiss." She talked slowly and Logan stared at her lips with naked desire. So he wanted her.

She knew it. She knew he wanted her. The way his body reacted to her nearness, the way he kissed her...

But could she be okay with just that?

She had to, though.

"Yes. But I don't have listerine right now."

"The hell, Logan! You are really going to do what this bitch is--"

"Don't. Don't call her that." He sounded angry. Really angry.

This here, this was the reason why she fell in love with this man. He could be all smug and arrogant and hard headed wisdom and sometimes he did and said things that made her furious and angry and sad. But he wasn't only that!

"What happened to you?" Pam said before she stomped on her heels. God, it was so high.

"Forget that. Dresses... "

"I am not going to sell anything to her."

"What kind of foolishness is this, Pam?"

"I don't know. You tell me."

"You are being difficult."

"Am I?"

"You wanted him, didn't you? And that is why you stayed friends. Yeah, I know that look, alright."

"Alex, will you shut up?" Logan shot her a glare. "Pam, be reasonable. We need a dress for tomorrow. You both have already wasted lots of time. I just--"

"I can't stand her. She is all so-I can't Logan. Just go away."

"Come on, let's get going. I know better places than hers."

"Yeah. I know you will be going to Leclange and Levitt. Good luck finding anything that fits you." She stomped inside leaving Logan staring at Alex.

"What is that?"

"I don't like her. She doesn't like me."

"I can see that."

"And Logan, she doesn't want to be your friend. Friends don't kiss each other like that."

"She surprised me. I didn't want to kiss her."

"I know. Don't worry."

"How?"

"Because I know you want to kiss me." He sighed and then shook his head.

His gray eyes were stormy. She just wanted to get lost and never come back.

He took a step closer to her and her breathing hitched.

His eyes were on her. Her heart thundered and her legs were weak.

She wanted him.

Oh God, she wanted him right now.

She needed him.

She bit her lips as she likes up at him.

His hands were on her cheeks as he bent down and pressed a kiss against her ear. She shivered.

Her hands had mind if their own. They were on his silky mess of hair, messing them further up.

"I want to kiss you." He whispered against her cheeks, his lips teasing her already heated skin.

She gasped when he pressed his open lips against the side of her neck.

She wanted to beg him to kiss her already.

She closed her eyes when he leaned in closer. Her lips parted in anticipation. She wanted those lips on her. Now. She. Couldn't. Wait.

She could feel his hot breath inside her opened lips.

Kiss me, already, you moron.

His fingers rested over her lips and she felt like she was going to burst open. A million stars and galaxies spilling around her.

Kiss me. Kiss me.

It was like a chant.

His finger pressed against her top lip and then it was gone. She licked her lips.

He bit her ear lobe before he whispered, "but I can't kiss you, now. I haven't washed my mouth with Listerine." He pulled back.

Arrogant, stupid tease...

The moment I see you and my whole world becomes bright. The smile on my lips feels weird. The beats of my heart start skipping. Do you know what this feeling is? - Logan

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Chapter 16

15. Envies, Charity Galas and fictions

(Alexandra)

He stopped in front of the mall Alex had wanted to go.

"Where to?"

"Follow me. They are totally awesome and the people there, not snobby like your friend."

"Yeah. Whatever." He said as they walked inside Leclange and Levitt. When he closed the door, a small bell chimed above them.

She had always liked that sound. It was like the sound of wind chimes, the ting ting, so pleasant on the senses. She smiled. She hadn't been here for so long.

She missed it, almost. The familiarity of this. Since she had lost her house, it was full of unfamiliar, unexpected things in her life and she loved this tinge of ordinary from her past.

The glass panels, the silver framed mirrors stacked against the walls, the mannequins wearing dresses and suits and tuxes, the metallic white shine... Everything gave the boutique that upper-class ambiance, but the prices were not so hurtful in the pockets, too and since Alex didn't want to waste too much of her father's money, she had always came here for her dresses shopping.

They had wonderful collections from up and coming designers, ranging from risky to traditional. And Alex loved their edgy outlook on various designs.

Betty, the manager of the boutique, gave her a welcoming smile before she noticed Logan and her eyes widened as she threw a look at Alex and winked obnoxiously. *Oh, Betty Betty!* Always easily swayed by the handsome men.

"Hey girl." Betty said as Alex walked to her front desk. "Your guy is totally cute." She said and Alex shook her head with a *Shh*. It looked like Logan heard her. He smiled at her and gave Betty a wave.

"Ohh God, that smile is illegal, I say, girlie." Betty said as she fanned herself.

Alex chuckled as she looked at the woman fondly. She had known Betty for years and Betty had always been the one who couldn't stop herself from ogling men, especially not fine men like Logan.

But this time it didn't make her jealous like it did, when Pam had kissed him. This time she just laughed and waved at the woman in front of her, who looked like she wanted to take a bite of his deliciousness.

Sorry Betty. Better luck the next lifetime.

"Oh yes, he is." *When he doesn't open his mouth.* "And Betts, eyes on me. My man is off limits, okay." She meant it, too. She could look, alright, but she couldn't touch.

Oh, so now you are the one who can decide who he can touch and can't.

Yes. For a year, you pesky little voice. If you are me, why are you so annoying?

I am you and that is why!

"Ah, I get you. So how may I help you, milady?" Betty gave her a theatrical bow.

"A dress, madame. Something simple, A-line maybe, and fit for charity gala." Alex counted her fingers before she returned the bow. "If you may."

"Oh darling. I have just the right thing for you. Wait here. Don't move a muscle." Betty said.

"Umm, can I breathe?"

"You Shush. Hey Marie, bring me the new one from Paris. You will look amazing in it. I am sure. Purple or ocean blue? Wait, Marie, bring it both." Alex shook her head as the mousy little assistant, Marie, sighed at Logan before she walked away.

Oh God.

But he looked like he didn't notice the look he was receiving. He was just standing there shuffling his feet, and even then, he looked effortlessly hot. How could anyone look that hot doing nothing, Alex didn't know.

He looked at her and gave her a nervous smile when he saw her narrowing her eyes. Good.

"Hello there handsome, you can sit, you know." Betty pointed to the comfy white chairs and he slumped down with a sigh.

Alex glared at him. He looked down at his shoes.

After they had left Pam's boutique, after the episode of epic teasing, the car ride was silent the whole way, except that time when Logan had tried to put on a song and it was a song about kiss and lust and his cheeks flushed before he changed it to other station and this one was way worse than the previous song. And he turned it off with a curse.

"Hey." He said, looking up at her.

"What?"

"I am sorry, you know for being a jerk back at the restaurant."

"For which time? The time you spat at me when I was talking about my daddy or the time when you poked your pretty nose in when I was talking with Johan?"

He stared at her with a sheepish look. "Both?"

"You are asking me? Huh? Jerk."

"Hey... Okay, really, it was for the time when we were talking about your dad. I mean, I don't think I did anything wrong with the Johan guy. He was kissing you and I didn't like it." He looked grumpier than apologetic.

And somehow the way he said it made Alex's heart feel so weird. The heck!

"Oh, for God's sake, it is just my cheeks. I didn't do anything when Pam was kissing you, you know." She rolled her eyes.

"You didn't? Uh, huh, what about this one. Lets hear it. 'I will cut your hands off for you?' Was it not you? Were you possessed or something?"

"Such an arrogant, pretentious, smug little--"

"Whenever you can't find a retort, you go back to calling me cute names." He shook his head, looking so smug.

"Cute name? Bah!" She threw her head back.

"Alexandra, over here, girlie." Betty called and she walked over to her. "Which one do you think?"

Both were beautiful. Alex tried the first one, the blue, and it looked like it was made for her. The crisscrossed back, the tiny ruffles at the edge and sleeves...

"That one." Logan said and Alex nodded her head. Exactly.

"Yes." it was love at first sight.

"That is that?" He asked with a doubtful look. "You see two dresses and select one? You are not going to..."

"What? I like this one. So what is the need to look around?"

"Ok." He shook his head with a smile. "I like it."

He paid for the dress before they walked out, after Betty kept asking them to come anytime they wanted.

"Do you want shoes? Anything else?" Logan asked as they walked around for a while, just killing time. She didn't want to go back, and it looked like he didn't want to, as well.

"I need shoes. Yes." They walked inside the shop and Alex picked out one with blue straps, with a closed back.

When they walk out, Alex saw Baskin Robbins and she couldn't help it. "Ice cream?" Alex asked with wide, imploring eyes. No one could resist those eyes. But it looked like he could.

"Nah. Don't think so." He shook his head at her, looking stern as her tenth grade math teacher. "You ate that for lunch, remember?"

"Party pooper." She pouted before they walked towards the car. He opened her door for her and she snickered at him.

"What?" He asked.

"I hope you mess up more often."

"What?"

"What?" She imitated him with a mock accent. "I mean, you are being chivalrous, amicable and not being an arrogant jerk for the first time in your life. So..."

"I am always--" She cut him off with a snort and entered inside and closed the door in his gaping face.

He grumbled before he entered in. "So rude."

"Hah. Look who is talking?"

He sat there for a minute, without trying to start the car and drive away.

After another five minutes, he cleared his throat

"The thing I really wanted to say when you were talking about your dad-" He looked at his fingers.

Alex looked up at him and he looked sorry. Really sorry. By this time, she knew he said stupid things he didn't mean when he was angry, but she still didn't know how she made him angry with that talk. He was so confusing at times. Like a big book written in German or something.

"-what?" She looked at him with a small smile. It was just easy this way, to forgive him. She didn't like the feeling in her stomach, whenever they fought.

"Your dad was the first one who believed in me, you know?"

"Umm Logan, what are you talking about?"

"Yes. It was just after I finished MBA and opened my construction company. No one wanted to work with a newbie. You know how they can get, right? So I was looking and looking and heard from rumor mill that GS textiles' owner was going to build a small outhouse in his garden. So I followed your dad, more like stalked-"

She was speechless. The young man her dad had talked so much about. The one he had talked about right before she walked inside her first day of the college. The one who was the reason she didn't get her car because her father had wanted her to work for it. Was it all Logan?

She had heard those stories so many times that she had felt she knew the man without even knowing how he looked.

That man was Logan!

"Until he gave me the job. I built it and he liked it --"

"Loved it." She muttered.

"Yes, he loved it and then he handed over to me a big project. It was everything I needed to find my footing. And I had never forgotten that. He was the only one who chose to take the risk of working with--"

"You built my house."

It was a small guest house at Alex's backyard. Actually it was for Alex. Her dad had built it for her as a surprise, when she graduated from high school. They were on a vacation, when it was built and when she came back, there it was-- an empty house, just the way she had liked and beautiful and waiting for her to decorate it. Her dad had then said, "you wanted to be an interior designer, right. Let us design this one, Allie girl. Let us do this together."

They had both worked on it the remaining summer, shopped for furnishings and lights and arts and filled that house and made it another home. It was a beautiful memory that still put a smile on her face.

It was one of Alex's favorite places in the whole world, it was hers and whenever she'd feel sad or alone or feel like giving up, she would walk to the small house and sit there until all she could feel was the magic of that small space.

She would sometimes lie in the roof and stare at the stars until she was filled with the beauty of them. She would imagine she was in them, jumping from one point to another, until all her sorrows burned down.

When her dad died, she was curled up in one corner of that same house and again, when she found out that she was going to lose her house, it was this place --Logan's place-- that gave her the confidence to stop herself from crying to sleep and get up. To not break down.

She wondered if this was coincidence or destiny.

How could it be a mere coincidence? How could it be?

"Yes. And I owe you, Alex. I owe you everything. So if you want to-" He stopped and pressed a hand to his face. "If you want to void the contract and back off, you can." He looked pale as he said that.

Alex jerked back. She didn't expect this. Not at all.

Yes. She had wanted to back off on many occasions, but as he said that, she realized she despised the idea of it. She didn't want to back off. If one year was all she could get, she was going to get that.

"You can owe me for something else. This- I think you are stuck with me for a year."

He smiled. His smile was full of relief. She looked at him with her heart in her throat and she was this close to blurting out everything she had wanted to say. It was like an itch at the back of her throat. She just wanted to tell him how much she loved him.

God. It was painful to keep it all buried. The feelings were like hot lava, volcanic, and they wanted to explode out of her.

But she knew he didn't love her, he didn't want to love her.

Maybe after this year was over, she would tell him about her feelings. She would tell him how much he had come to mean to her in such a short time.

And she would walk away. From him.

"Okay then. Anything you want." He said, pulling her back from her thoughts. Looking at him made her heart constrict. He was so beautiful. Yes, so annoying, too, but still... He was hers.

For a year. And she wanted to enjoy that year, she wanted to fight with him, kiss him senseless, eat with him, make cookies for him, banter with him, do stupid things with him. She wanted to make every moment with him a memory.

Because that was all she had for a lifetime. Without him.

"Anything?" She gave him a wicked smile. "Remember that."

"Oh God, what have I gotten myself into?!" He said as he started the car.

"Better you don't know that." She said as she turned towards the window and leaned against it with a small smile.

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(Logan)

The gala was on full swing when he walked in with the beautiful woman by his side. She was like the brightest of stars among the candles flickering.

Her ocean blue dress contrasted with her lake green eyes, making them look like magic. Her silky brown hair fell back in lose curls and he wanted to plunge his fingers inside them and put his mouth against her cherry painted lips and get lost.

She smelled like cherry blossoms, and honeysuckle. She smelled like Alex. And he wanted to bottle that scent and keep it with him forever. He could sell it for a fortune, but he didn't want to. He wanted it all for himself.
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Such a selfish thought. The inner voice snickered. He ignored it and took in the woman next to him.

She glittered in the muted setting of the room. She wasn't wearing diamond, except the ring he gave her. And earrings. Must be a gift from her dad. It dangled down her cheeks, teasing it.

She looked magnificent. She took his breath away, by just being herself.

He grabbed her hand in his and she looked up at him with surprise in her eyes.

He wanted to say something like it was for others, that it was just a part of their acting, but he didn't say anything. He couldn't. This was for himself and for once, he was going to accept it and not tell lies about it.

Just this once.

She didn't say anything back, as she squeezed his hands. He let his fingers drew circles on her skin and it felt so nice.

They walked in, talking about the art pieces stacked around. Alex looked like she was enjoying it as she talked and talked about paintings.

"Oh God, this is marvelous. The underlying meaning of life, the deft hand in which the paint is applied... Wow. I can't take my eyes away."

"I can't, too." She looked up at him and blushed and looked away. She was marvelous and he could not take his eyes away from her.

"Stop staring." She muttered under her breath, her voice husky.

"Why, I am allowed to appreciate beauty. It is called Art appreciation."

She shook her head with a gentle smile.

"Want to sneak away and make out with me?" He gave her a gaudy wink and she giggled.

"Now I knew how you seduced young Annie to cop a feel."

"God, it is just her hands. I was just telling her how soft they were. My sisters are known for their exaggeration."

She smiled. "I don't believe you." She said as she grabbed a finger sandwich and took a bite.

"I have always been a courteous gentlem--" He stopped when he saw the familiar blue eyes and blonde hair and she was coming in his direction. *Oh No. Here it comes.*

He didn't want to confront or talk with her. He didn't want to introduce Alex to her. He just wanted a moment alone with Alex. He just wanted to spend every moment alone with Alex.

But she is the reason Alex is here.

Before he could warn Alex, Stacy was there. Her eyes we're calculating as she looked Alex up and down.

"Won't you introduce me to your new friend Logan?" She asked with a smile, but he didn't miss the flash in her eyes.

"I can introduce myself." Alex said. "I am Alexandra. His fiancé."

"Oh God, Logan, you work fast. Play faster." Stacy gave him a smirk as she shook her head. "And I am--"

"Stacy. His Ex-girlfriend. I know."

He looked at her with surprise. How did she knew? She hadn't seen Stacy, at all.

"Hmm. So you must also know he proposed to me just weeks ago." Her voice was shrill and so full of anger. She looked like she wanted to kill them.

"I know. You said no."

"And still you wanted to be his wife? You are obviously his second choice. Or he is rebounding. Because his ego is hurt." Stacy said with malice. Her eyes we're narrowed as she looked at Alex.

"What the--" Logan started, but stopped when Alex placed a palm on his mouth.

"Why don't you let me talk, Logan?"

"Yeah, why don't you? She is not a baby. But then, she still has some baby fat left to lose."

Alex wasn't thin like Stacy. She was exactly the way he wanted her to be. Perfect.

"You clearly look like you are vexed. You said no to him, didn't you? So why are you so angry?"

"I-I-" Stacy sputtered before she gritted her teeth.

Alex smiled as she took a profiterole from the tray and cut it into half before feeding him the half. It was clearly for the show, but he loved it when her eyes stared straight at him as she fed him the piece of sugary sweet chocolate pastry and she licked her lips when she ate hers. "You have something there." She said to him before she leaned in and pressed a kiss on the side of his mouth and leaned back. "Done."

God. She was so sexy when she was being confident. He loved it. He also loved the way her lips felt against his and he wanted more.

He blinked when someone coughed.

Stacy. Uh, yeah! It was all for her and now he was forgetting she was here.

"Hey Stacy, I must thank you for saying no. You know, I owe you one. But don't ask him back. Except that one." Alex said in a cheerful voice.

"I don't want him back."

"Could have fooled me."

"He asked you because I said no, you know? How does that make you feel?"

"You don't know our full story, so why don't I enlighten you?"

What story, Logan thought. But he didn't say anything as he watched his ex-girlfriend and his future appointed wife talk. Stacy looked more like she was ready for a cat-fight, but Alex was still so cool and composed.

That is my girl. He thought with a proud smile.

"What story? As if you have any decent story! You are just a sleazy one who fell for his money and he is just using you. There. Your story. Fairy-tale romance." Stacy laughed as she threw her hair and gave him a look.

"Darling, it is impolite to make assumptions. But I will forgive you of your bad attitude. You are just sorry you let him go, aren't you? I know how it would feel. After all, I had to let him go because he was your boyfriend way before I knew him."

"What are you blabbering about?"

"Easy there, tiger." Alex said and he chuckled. Stacy threw him a glare, her blue eyes freezing him in the middle of his laughter.

"His meeting, you remember. We both met there. We clicked."

Oh. This story.

"We kissed. And it was like magic." It was magic, too.

"He wouldn't do that--" Stacy looked indignant. "He wouldn't cheat on me."

"He didn't. We went out for dinner. As friends. I kissed him. I wanted him. I knew he wanted to kiss me back, but he didn't. You know why, because of you. He had this ring on his pocket and he wanted to ask you, and he could not do that to you, he said. But I knew I saw it, the way he looked at me, the way his eyes would shift away when I noticed him looking. He felt for me whatever I felt for him. It was all..." Alex took a breath. "You won't understand unless you were actually there. But yes. We said goodbye. He asked you and you said no. How awesome is that?" Alex looked really animated as she warmed up to her story.

The way her voice was like a song, the way her eyes glimmered, he almost believed that story, himself. He almost believed that she was really ecstatic that Stacy said that *no.*

He was.

"And then he called me. The moment you left, he called me. You know. He was happy, too. I was angry, yes, of course, but he was more than apologetic. He told me how he felt for me, and tada..." Alex waved her ring in front of Stacy and Stacy blinked.

"This ring- it is, it is... God Logan, how could you? You said you are buying it for someone else. For your dad. To give it to your mom. And it was all a lie. You lied to me." Stacy said with a thoughtful frown.

Alex looked at him and then at Stacy, her eyes full of questions.

Logan looked at his shoes. God.

Logan had bought this ring when he went on a business trip to England. It was platinum and it had a pure cut diamond at the top with two vines curving downside in gold, with small diamonds all over it. It had stolen his heart away and he bought it on impulse.

The next morning Stacy had found it in his baggage and when she had asked him about it, he had lied to her.

"I don't know." He said. Stacy shrugged, and then the cold look on her eyes were back.

"So when is your marriage?" Stacy looked at them as if she knew something they didn't. "Did you set the date?"

"Yes, we will send you an invite."

"When?"

Alex blinked. Once. Twice.

"Or is it all some ruse?" Stacy asked, looking so self-satisfied.

"July 20th. Save the date." Logan said and pressed a kiss to Alex' forehead.

She blinked up at him before looking down.

He couldn't wait to get *fake* married to her.

Looking at the stars with you in the silence feel a thousand times better than anything I have ever done. It is more exhilarating than bungee jumping and paragliding. - Logan.

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Chapter 17

16. Paybacks, save the dates and plans

(Alexandra)

20th of July?

What the hell was he thinking? He wasn't thinking. Again. It seemed like Stacy had a strange effect on him or something.

He leaned closer to her as she stood there gaping and blinking. She couldn't still wrap her mind around the news --more like the bomb-- he had just dropped on her.

"Close your mouth. What happened to your acting skills, huh? On vacation? If you keep blinking, even I am going to start doubting my words." He whispered to her and placed a small kiss on her cheek. "Smile."

"It looked like you surprised her, Logan. I don't believe in any of this. This is all just a way to get back at me. Isn't it?" Stacy looked so smug. Her blonde hair was shiny, but her eyes were shinier. It gave Alex the creeps.

Stacy was a tall woman and she looked sexy in her dress, if Alex was honest to herself. The diamond in her throat glittered, and the deep red lipstick was done deeper. High cheek bone, model body, she was perfect. A perfect match to Logan, too.

Alex didn't think she was ugly or anything. In face, she knew she was beautiful. She loved herself the way she was, but truth be told, she was no Stacy. Stacy was all woman. Tall, sinewy and sexy with those blue eyes, which looked like it could read every one of your deepest and darkest secrets. Whoa!

But Logan, Logan wasn't looking at Stacy the way every other man was looking at her. His eyes were blank. No emotions there.

It made Alex feel a little bit better. Only a little. Because she knew even if he hadn't really loved her, he must have had seen something in her to date her for a year. That was not nothing.

And it made Alex feel... Something.

Jealousy. Envy. Possessiveness.

Thank you, you stupid voice. I know it.

"Everything is not about you, Stacy. You get it, right. It can not be all about you." Alex said as she snuggled closer to Logan. *But it is. It is all about her.* And that thought made her body cold with trepidation even when Logan's body was so warm next to her.

He put his hand on hers as if he could read how hard it was for her. He pressed his fingers to the inside of her palms and smiled at her.

"We will send you a card. Okay? Bye for now."

But Stacy wasn't ready to let them go. She looked determined. Her mouth was set stubbornly and Logan sighed next to Alex.

"You are not letting this go, are you?"

"I need to know the truth, Logan. I am not that easily dispensable. I am not." She looked frustrated. If Alex knew any better, she was sure Stacy was going to make a scene any time now and Alex wasn't ready for that. She didn't want that.

"We are not doing this just to spite you, Stacy. I mean, no one will get married for that." Alex was crossing her fingers behind her back the whole time.

It was kinda hard to keep lying to Stacy, when the woman looked like she was going to breakdown any moment from now, but she didn't have a choice but make Stacy believe it all. She had to believe it, without a nock of doubt.

It was the contract.

"This whole getting married, I think it is a lie too. So?" Stacy shrugged, trying to look nonchalant, but Alex saw that look she threw at Logan. One of desperation. It was the one Alex had seen so many times today in the mirror when she realized she was in love with the man who would never return it back.

"You said no, Stacy. You did."

"I did."

"You said you will not come back." Logan said with a hint of gloating in his face. "What are you doing now, Stacy?"

Shit. Did he have to goad her? It was already done. Stacy was already regretting it all.

Alex subtly punched him in his side. He turned to frown at her and she shook her head.

"What?"

"Nothing. There is Dan. Let us go say hi." Before she could drag Logan away, Daniel was there in front of them. He smirked at Stacy.

"Oh hello there, didn't see you there. How are you doing?"

"Not bow, Daniel." Stacy said, looking exasperated. "I don't have time to engage in your silly games. Not now."

"Still sitting in your mighty horse, I see. But one day you will fall." Dan looked angry.

"We will see, Dannie boy." Stacy smirked at him before she walked away, her dark red dress swishing around her body like a seductive siren.

"Hey Dan, haven't seen you in a long long time."

"Yeah, like I told you, I was on a business merger. My dad is kinda driving me crazy." He smiled as he pulled Alex in a hug.

"Where is my hug?" Logan asked with a grumpy frown.

"Oh, is my wittle Logan is all left out?" Dan cooed.

"Did you just say wittle?" Alex chuckled as he pulled Logan inside a hug.

"Okay. Let go. Dan, you idiot, let go. Everyone is looking."

"Dude. Stop struggling." Dan said as he let Logan go.

"You want another hug, Log?"

"No thanks. I am going to get me something to drink. God. You almost asphyxiated me."

"Big words." Dan shook his head. "Don't know what it means. But I think it is something good." He looked at Logan with a smirk. "Oh get us something to drink, too."

"I am not your server." Logan grunted at his friend.

Alex couldn't help but like how Logan was all so easy going with Daniel. When they talked, joked and bantered, it was evident. Their friendship. Their love for each other. Loyal, unflinching, unwavering love.

That kind of friendship... Alex had it with Stella.

She wished Stella would come back already from wherever she was now.

Stella would have answers to all of Alex's problem.

"You look sad. What?" Logan asked as he touched her cheeks gently. His eyes were wide with concern. And this Logan was also real.

Hot and cold and warm. She lived every dimension of him. He wasn't always snobby or smug or arrogant. He was sometimes the sweetest guy she had ever met and that made her fall deeper for him. Into him.

"Looking at you two... I just missed my best friend."

"Stella. Right?"

She was surprised that he remembered her name.

"What? Why is that such a surprise? I remember everything that guy said."

Alex chuckled. " You don't remember that guy's name?"

"Aren't you going to get a drink?" Daniel grumbled.

"Johan. Alright." Logan grumbled. "So where is Stella."

"Somewhere in Europe, I suppose." Alex said.

"Oh. The honeymoon. Eh?" He said as he stared at her. "She will be back. Don't be sad."

"Okay."

"Good."

"My drink?" Daniel complained again.

"Hey Dan, go and bring champagne. We have something to tell you." Logan said and Alex pressed her hand against his mouth.

Daniel's eyes widened as he gasped. "It is *that* ring."

For a moment nobody talked.

"That ring. What is so special about this ring?" Alex asked as she looked at her finger. Yes. It was a very beautiful ring. But Logan had told her it wasn't all real. So what was the big deal.

"Nothing. So Danny, we are getting married." Logan said as he looked at Daniel.

Alex felt like he was hiding something about this ring. Stacy was surprised to see the ring and now Daniel.

"Am I the last to know. Not fair man."

"You are the second to know."

"The first one, is that Stacy?" He looked belligerent. Alex giggled.

"Come on, Dan. She came to us and saw the ring and one thing lead to another."

"Whatever. I will go bring the champagne. But you have to make it up to me or I will not be your best man."

"Oh. Okay. I will." Logan smiled at him as he walked away.

"This isn't fake. You lied."

"Because you were stubborn. You know Alex, everyone in my --wait, our-- circle will know if it is fake. I can't keep worrying if they found out or not."

"Is this costly?"

"It is. But don't worry about it."

"What if I lost it Logan?"

"It is yours. If you lost it, you are the only one you have to answer. Not to me. Alright?"

"It is not mine, Logan. It is all part of this lie."

"But I gave it to you for real, okay. Please." He put a finger to her mouth. "I know I can be all frustrating or something and I know you hate this. You hate being a part of this lie. I know, Alex and I am sorry, okay, sorry I dragged you into this. If you want to get out of it, you still can. But that ring, it is yours, even if you break our *fake engagement."*

"You know it will spoil your reputation more than it would have when Stacy said no."

"I know."

"So? You don't want to marry anymore? You are doubting this, aren't you?"

"No. I am not doubting this. But I can see you are and I don't know, Alex, I don't know."

"Come with me."

"Where?"

"Just come."

She pushed open a door and it opened to a terrace. The wind was cool on her heated cheeks. She knew what she was about to do was totally reckless.

She should just take the offer and walk away when her heart was not too deeply embroiled. If she did walk away now, the heartbreak would be bearable. Maybe she could even forget him as time passed.

No, you can't.

But she could learn to live without him.

Maybe.

But she didn't want to do it. She wanted to hold on longer.

She grabbed his hands in hers as his gray eyes stared into hers. It was like magic.

She looked above. There were so many stars in the sky today, it looked like there was a festival happening up in the sky. The moon was a thin crescent and so beautiful.

"I am not doubting this. Okay? I want to marry you. Even if it is only fake and temporary. You get that inside your thick skull. Don't talk about this anymore. We have started this and we are going to end this story. Got it?"

He looked at her with a small smile and chuckled. It was raspy and throaty, when he called her name. "Lex."

She loved it when he said it like that.

His stubble was darker against the shadows and she felt like she was made of fire.

She grabbed his tie and pulled him closer and pressed her lips against his stubble. Her whole body tingled at the slight touch.

"Deal?" She whispered.

"Deal. Can we seal it with a kiss."

"No can't do."

"But I even used Listerine."

"Um. I don't care. Bye."

He stood there gaping as she turned back and walked away.

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(Logan)

It took him ten minutes to get his head back. He could still feel her around his body, still smell her in his skin

He shook his head with a smile and walked out.

"You looked like you had a rendezvous with someone." Daniel said as he gave him a glass of champagne. "You need a bucket of ice."

"I do."

"Where is Alex?" He asked.

"What, you couldn't get enough of her?"

"Yes." And it wasn't a lie. It wasn't an act. It was how he felt, how he was feeling these days. But those feelings were wrong and he knew it.

"Shit, man." Daniel said looking at something and Logan turned back to look at Alex standing there, unmoving and Stacy was in front of her with a malicious smile on her face. Alex' eyes were wide and shiny, and everyone was looking at them.

Her beautiful blue dress, the one he loved on her was now stained a deep red in the front.

Logan wanted to go to her, this instant, but there were people around them. He pushed through throngs of people and heard Stacy say an oops.

"My bad." Stacy snickered.
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He was almost sure Alex was going to cry or walk away. She was shaking. But when had she ever done anything he expected?

She was made for unexpected happenings and that was what he loved about her.

She looked up at Stacy, who was snickering at her like it was all a joke. Her blue eyes were mocking and Logan wanted to cut in, but he knew Alex could handle it, handle Stacy. But he would be right here if Alex needed him.

"If you can not walk straight in your high heels, don't wear them, Stacy. And you look drunk. Do you have a chauffeur who can take you home?"

The people who were chuckling and pointing at Alex now looked at her with wonder.

Yeah, take that. That is my girl.

She then turned to him with the same placid smile. " Logan, honey, can we drive her home?"

It made Stacy look like a mean simpleton. Stacy bristled, and tried to say something, but it looked like she couldn't.

Logan wanted to pull Alex to him and kiss her then and there.

Stacy looked red as she gritted her teeth.

"I am not some charity case. I have my car and don't act like you are from heaven. You are no angel, bitch and I can see it."

"Ma'am. Please," It was the Hotel manager. "Don't make a scene."

"Don't tell me what to do? Don't you know who I am?"

People started to whisper as Stacy glared at the manager.

"You need to leave, mam." He said to her.

"I don't need to do anything you tell me to do. Okay? What is your name, huh? You tell me... I can... "

Logan walked to Alex and grabbed her hands.

"Let us go." He said to her and she nodded as they walked away, leaving Stacy screaming at the poor manager.

"I liked this dress." She said with a sad smile. "I really liked it."

"I am sorry, baby."

"What?" She squeaked.

"What what?" He looked at her bewildered.

"You-you called me-"

"What did I call?" He was confused. What did he call her that made her look all befuddled and flushed?

"You don't even remember it? It was just seconds ago?"

"I don't know. Tell me, then."

"Nah. Let us go. And I am hungry."

"What do you want?"

"Pizza."

"Pizza it is."

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(Alexandra)

His whole family was here. He called them after the gala to tell them he was getting married --he just didn't mention them that one important detail-- and the next day, here they were, all congregated in the living room.

"Logan, why can't I be your best man? Daniel is so boring." Emma said as Daniel grumbled next to her.

"No way. I am not risking anything. You and your twin are trouble and that is that."

"And I am not boring, Emma." Daniel said with a pout. "I am all kind of amazing."

"Who wants a pot roast?" Logan's mom asked as she put a tray in front of them. Alex was fast to grab a piece. She was hungry. Yes.

"I can be your best man, uncle Logan. We can invite a clown, you know. It will be fun." Andy said as he looked imploringly at Logan.

"I am sure it will be, buddy." Logan ruffled his hair and he giggled.

"I can be aunt Alex's best man." Brian said as he came sat next to Alex. Alex laughed at him.

"Oh, you can be. I have a handsome best man."

"Then I want to be your best man" too." Andy pouted and pulled away from Logan. Then he came and sat on the other side of Alex as Alex grinned at Logan victoriously. "Poor Logan." She said and he smiled at her.

"Traitors." Logan said looking at his nephews.

"Honey, you can wear your dad's suit. You know. " His mom said as she sat down in the couch. "This couch is made for sin."
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"I love sinning, then." Dave, Logan's dad, said as he sat down next to his wife and took her hand in his. She snuggled close and he kissed her on her forehead. It was like he didn't even realize he was doing it. It was like reflex. But the smile on his face, it was one of contentment.

And Alex' heart hurt seeing that.

It was the kind of love that could withstand years and hardships and trials.

And Alex wouldn't find it with anyone except this man who was now chuckling with his sisters and their husbands.

But this man had stamped an end date over their relationship.

Maybe he will fall in love with you too, you know. Don't be so pessimistic.

Oh, how I wish! But would he?

Let us hope, then.

"Mom, you know, I will look like a clown if I wear that. The clown Andy wanted." Logan said with a wave of his hand. "What are you thinking, mom?" He shook his head. His mom gave him a sheepish smile.

"She isn't thinking. Nah." Emma said.

"Ssh, don't hurt her feelings. You should wear that, you know. If she really wants that." Alex said and he glared at her.

"No, it is alright honey." Bethany said with a smile.

"Lex, look. You know, my dad is shorter than me and wider, as well." He pushed his hands apart with a smirk. His sisters laughed and Dave pouted.

"Logan. Ssh. That is just rude."

"I heard it. I am not wide. I am just growing in the opposite direction. It is the new trend. And Logan, I wasn't this wide before marriage, you know. So don't be too smug about it." He winked at his son.

"Oh, yeah, dad. We all love how chubby you are. Camille is always saying that you look like a giant teddy bear." Eliza said as Camille whined at her mom.

"Mom... Ssh."

"Teddy bears are cute."

"Yes, they are, gramps. But you are not. You are just big and cuddly." Camille said as she snuggled next to him. "So cuddly."

"Baby girl, you are too hard to please. Now my boys here, they will vouch for my cuteness. Eh, Andy? Brian?"

"Yes, sure, what will I get grampa? Cookies? Candies?"

"I will vouch for it, Dave. For free." Alex said as she poked Andy in the stomach and he giggled and thrashed in the floor as she tickled him.

"Surrender, aunt Alex. Surrender."

"Good boy." She said as he sat up.

"Not fair."

"I have some ideas." Eliza said as she pushed her iPad in front of Alex. "You are getting married here, right?"

"Yes." Logan said.

"When?"

"I am thinking evening." Alex said.

"Perfect. And the reception will be at twilight hour. It will look beautiful. We can open the pool house and string fairy lights around. Here. Look at this setting."

"This is awesome."

"Classy." Logan said. "Neat. I like it. You can do that, right?"

"I do too. So we can go with white theme. You know. Simple, and beautiful."

"I can, of course." Eliza said. "We are hiring the best wedding planner."

"No. No wedding planner would agree to do it in such short amount of time, you know." Alex said.

"We will see." Logan shrugged.

"My friend makes bouquets, you know. We can go see her next monday."

"Oh. Thank you, Eliza."

"It is my pleasure. I am the maid of honor, so..."

"You asked her and not me?"

Alex stared at Emma who looked like she was going to wrestle someone. Oh God.

"I mean... I-you- you wanted to be his best man, no?"

"Not fair. We are contesting for that. The winner get the position."

"No Em, she asked me first."

"Shut up, you too. Don't pester her." Logan said. "She looked scared."

"I- I am sorry Em. I didn't... "

"God. Alex, I am just kidding. Don't worry." Emma said. "I will be the best bride's maid ever."

"Thank you."

"Do you have an idea about the wedding dress you want.

"Umm no."

"What kind of girl don't have her dream wedding dress."

"I- it is all so sudden, you know." She looked at Logan and they giggled.

"Brother dearest can't wait any longer, eh?" Eliza winked as Alex blushed.

"Oh my God, you two haven't done it yet." Emma shrieked. Everyone turned to look at her and Alex felt like she was going to burst.

"That is totally inappropriate, young lady." Logan's mom sternly looked at her daughter. "Apologize, Emma."

"I-I am sorry."

"It-it is okay, Em." Alex stuttered.

All through it, her eyes were on Logan and he didn't look away for a moment. He was staring at her as if he wanted to take her to somewhere private and have his way with her.

It made her body tremble deliciously.

And then he stood up and walked inside the kitchen.

"Alex, can you come here for a moment? I don't know where the cookies are."

She knew he knew where they were.

"A moment,"

"It is okay." Eliza said. "Take your time." She whispered. "Hey, I want something cold to drink." She announced in a loud voice.

"Will be right back." She stood on shaking legs and walked inside the kitchen. He was leaning against the kitchen island, his eyes intense on hers.

"What?" She said.

"Kiss me. Please." He said it like he was in pain. "I want you to kiss me, now."

And she did.

For a moment, it all felt so real.

I do. I really do. But do you, really? I will always be here for you, no matter what. Will you? - Alex.

Chapter 18

17. Friends? Lovers? Friends with benefits?

(Alexandra)

"Kiss me." He said and she didn't know why she was very fast to do as he asked, but she did. Maybe it was because she had already started counting the day that this would come to an end. But she was not going to waste it away by pretending that her feelings were not there. She couldn't afford to waste her time with him, so she was going to take as much of him as she could.

And when you walk away, you know it will hurt more. This will hurt more.

I know, but I can't do anything about that.

"Alex." He groaned her name as her lips fanned over his. Touching. Teasing. And giving in.

He grabbed her to him as if they weren't already close enough. She knotted her hand inside his hair and her fingers were lost in them, and so was she, lost in him. So lost. So lost she couldn't find herself no matter how hard she looked for.

Is it really a good idea?

No, it wasn't, but this was the only idea.

When he pulled away, she was breathless. And hot. He looked like he was too.

"This isn't in the contract, you know." She said, her voice husky. He nodded as he leaned back and took a deep breath.

"I know. I drafted it." His voice was hoarse and his eyes were fastened on hers. He made her feel like that she was the only woman in the universe for him, but she knew it wasn't the truth. She knew it was all in her mind, it was all her wistful thinking.

Because all she was to him was a byline in a lumpy documents full of legal words. That was all.

"So why are you always kissing me, you jerk?"

"What, don't act like you don't like kissing me. I know you do."

"Whatever."

"We are both adults and if we want to kiss each other, it is totally okay. We don't have to make a big deal out of it." There he was, always cool and collected. Never for a second doubting himself or his feelings. Never for a second thinking that this might be something.

"I am not, but I don't know, maybe we should stop with all the kissing. I don't think this is making it any easier. I don't want a mess."

"This is not going to be messy, Alex. You are my friend."

"As I said before, friends don't kiss each other like this." She pointed between them. "Friends don't kiss. At all. Period."

"Okay. I am attracted to you and I know you know that. So why can't we enjoy it for an year. Totally casual. Friends with benefits if you can. No strings attached."

"I understand what you are saying. I get it, okay. You don't have to keep using different words to drive the nail deep inside." She rolled her eyes. "And friends with benefits? What are we? In high school?"

"High school is not bad." He smiled. "And I am just- you know, I am just testing it out. Casual. It doesn't sound so bad."

"I have never been in a casual relationship and I don't think it is for me."

To be honest, she had never been in a relationship much longer than five months. But he didn't have to know that. She couldn't just show him all her hands and hope to win, either way.

The only way to keep playing was to pretend that she had pretty good cards. She knew she didn't. The game, as far as she was concerned, was already lost. But here she was, still so stringently playing along.

So... That was that.

"To be honest, I have never been in such a serious relationship. After all, this is going to be my first marriage."

"It is *fake*."

"So, let us make the best of it." He shrugged as he ran his fingers through the hair she had already mussed.

In his dark jeans and tee, he looked equally casual and sexy. Appealing. Whatever he did do or didn't do, she found him attractive and arousing. And that was almost disturbing.

"Are you listening to yourself right now? Everything that comes out of your mouth is an utter nonsense." She waved her hands. "I can't do that, Logan. I don't think I am ready."

"You weren't ready when you kissed me just minutes ago?"

"I don't know, okay? I am not ready anymore."

"Wow. Really Alexandra? You are going to give that shit to me now? For all I know, you wanted to kiss me just as much as I wanted to. So why are you fighting this?"

"Insufferable jerk. I am not fighting this. I am just trying to think like a rational adult, when you are acting like a tween."

"Yeah, no tween can kiss like this." He winked. *Smug little jerk.* "Are you saying that your decision is final? That you don't want to kiss me again?"

"Yes. I am exactly saying that."

"Oh, we will see, Ms. Steele."He winked as he walked away, not before bending down to press his lips on her cheek.

She groaned before she took a glass of lemonade for Eliza and followed him out.

"So, what were you two discussing about?" Emma winked when Alex sat next to Eliza.

"Um, nothing?" She stuttered.

"Oh, don't worry. I have had discussions of nothings once too. God we were so young." Emma sighed.

"How old are you now, Grammy?" Alex smiled at her and they laughed and after that, amid teasing Alex, Emma and Eliza asked about what Alex wanted for her wedding and they discussed about flowers and cakes and everything. It was a little bit fun, except for the fact this was all a waste of time. And money. For something that was going to last only for an year.

But Logan didn't look like he cared. In fact, he was really engrossed in talking with his sisters.

Later that night, when his family was gone and as she was searching for suppliers in her laptop, Logan came out with bunch of files and a plate of lasagne his mom had left for them.

"Lasagne?"

"Of course." She said as she grabbed the plate from him and shoved in a forkful. It was yummy and cheesy, and it tasted like home. Alex had wished for her dad, a thousand time that day as she had seen how happy and lovely Logan's family was.

They were fun and big-hearted and kind and she had missed her mom and dad when she saw them together. The bond between them was unbreakable, and it showed. Even when they teased and fought.

He sat down next to her and opened a file that was at the top.

She looked at him with heart thudding closer to her throat. The top two button of his cotton shirt was unbuttoned and the sleeves were folded up to his elbows, showing how strong he actually was, and she could feel his arms wrapped around her as he kissed her. And she knew she was the one who had tried to be sensible and said no to kissing, but at that moment, she wanted nothing but to be wrapped up in those arms and be kissed by those lips, which were now in a frown, as he stared at those files.

No one had ever looked that gorgeous just flipping files. At least never to her.

"Take a picture. It will last longer." She jerked up. "What?" He sounded amused as he quirked his brows. He looked so self-satisfied.

"Um, what are you talking about?"

"If you want a kiss, all you have to do is ask." He taunted.

"You are delusional." She said and tried to hide her flaming cheeks. Oh yeah, he already had such a big head and she wasn't going to feed his ego with her lusty thoughts. No, sir.

"I am not. But let us talk about that another time." He winked. "So, did you call Mathilda? How is it going?" He asked.

"Oh yes, we finalized deals with Lowell Lightings. They have agreed to give us 10% discount and all. It is a really good deal and I am glad it all worked out."

"Whoa! Who did you talk with?"

"Rose Lowell. She is amazing and nice. She saw one look at my proposal and she was all for it. She gave the discounts all on her own, too. It was awesome doing business with her."

"No, she is not at all nice." He said as he shook his head. "Are we talking about same Rose Lowell? Tall, redhead, and strict like a Math teacher?"

Alex nodded. "She looked strict, but it is not arrogance. It is strength."

"Whatever. Rose Lowell is always trying to rip us apart. She rejected our proposal saying it is too low, when it was just right." He said as he flicked his pen in his hand.

"Maybe she doesn't like you." Alex smirked. "I mean, you are very unlikeable."

"Everybody likes me, Alex." He said as he frowned at her. "What are you talking about?"

"Have you looked at yourself in the mirror? Huh?" She shrugged as she switched on her laptop.

"I have and I can see why you like me very much."

"Wow. Your head is bigger than a blue whale." She chuckled as he took a bite of his lasagne and gave her a smoky look. "Don't do that!" She giggled.

"What?"

"You- God, just stop."

"What? I am trying to be sexy." He tilted his head and gave her a look that made him look like he had just eaten something very sour.

"That wasn't sexy. That was scary." She laughed as he shook his head.

"Brat." He said. "So what were you whispering with my sisters?"

"Ah, this and that. Emma and Eliza are bringing me to buy a dress tomorrow and bouquet." She said. "El's friend own the most amazing bouquet shop in the whole city, according to El. Emma says it is just bleh." Alex shook her head.

"No, you aren't going anywhere with them to buy a dress. Not alone. I am coming with you."

"No. You are not. Remember you have a meeting at ten. And then a site search."

"Oh, yes, thanks for reminding me. Then we can go sometime else." He said.

"Nag. Nag. Stop. Emma and Eliza are bringing me and that is that."

"Don't trust them, Alex. They will make you wear an unicorn onesie and make you believe it is a tux."

"When did they do that to you?" She laughed as his contorted face.

"When did I say it is about me?"

"I saw that constipated look on your face, Logan and it only meant one thing." She laughed as she searched through furniture catalogues for Mathilda's house. He grunted next to her.

"Okay, okay. It was when I was too young to realize they were pranking me. I was at a tender age of seven and I had a crush on this girl and Eliza and Emma convinced me to wear that, because it makes me look handsome and strong and the rest... I still regretted that day."

She laughed. "Do they have a picture? God, they have, don't they? I am messaging Em right now."

"No, don't do that."

"What? Messaging? I already did." She said.

"Not that. You, brat, you are imagining me in an unicorn onesie, now and it doesn't suit my manly appearance." He winked at her and she laughed as she swatted at him.

"But it does. You look adorable, dork."

"I am not a dork."

"You are."

"Brat."

"Onesie-Patootsie."

"Haha. Very funny."

"Yes. It is." She laughed and as she looked at him, she prayed that he would always find a way to laugh.

Maybe she wouldn't. But she was enjoying every moment with him and she wasn't going to let her own thoughts put a damp on them.

They might be friends. Might one day become friends with benefits. Might one day become nothing.

But now he was here. She was here. And that was all it mattered.

~~~

(Logan)

Logan was here, but he wasn't really here. It was true that he didn't like shopping. He never liked it. Sometimes Emma and Eliza would bully him into going with them and he had always hated how much time they would take to buy two tank tops and then keep arguing about how it was totally wrong.

But today he wanted to be there with Alex, he wanted to see how she would look in the dress and damn, was he distracted!

And Tom wasn't Tom, if he didn't give him shit for that.

"You know boss, you look like someone has just put a bagful of itching powder in your suit. Twitchy. And I wonder why that is!"

"Well Sherlock Holmes, if you are done wondering, I need this contract typed."

"When do you need that?" Tom asked.

"Yesterday." Logan said as he closed the file. Tom shook his head and gave him a look. "What?"

"It is not my fault that you are stuck here, boss. But you have to finish it all if you want to go on your honeymoon. So don't whine."

"You are such a pain in my ass." Logan grunted.

"I am." He looked almost proud to admit that.

"That is not a compliment. And call Amelia in, Mitch McConnell will be coming in here with a revised budget and I want her to be on point."

"Done. Done. She will be. Now boss, I still haven't met the lady boss, you know." He wagged her brows, looking like a clown. "And you asked Daniel to be your best man. He was so wrong for that."

Sometimes Logan wondered if this man was made in a shop instead, but what did he know...

"Lady boss? What the heck, Tom?"

"You are my boss and that makes her--"
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"Nothing of that sort to you. God. Where the hell do you dig up these ideas from?"

"From somewhere deep inside."

"We have to give Alice Nobel Prize for putting up with you."

"Whatever you say, boss. But I know you love me." He winked. "And about that best man stuff."

"And Em would kill me if I choose you. You want to fight her?"

"No way. That woman is a menace."

"So Daniel it is."

"So boring it is, boss." Tom sulked.

"Whatever. Now the contract." Logan waved him off as he walked out whistling a tune and Logan shook his head with a smile.

His phone rang. He shrunk his eyes as he answered the phone.

"What?"

"Hello to you too, Logan."

"What do you want Leo?"

"I heard you are getting married. I haven't received an invite, you know."

"I am not sending you any. Now if that is it, I am hanging up."

"I am coming, anyways. Alex invited me."

"Why in the world would she invite you?"

"Ask her. We have this-how do I say it, a connection. And it is all wonderful. It is so bad she is marrying you."

"You called me to taunt me into a fight with you, don't you?"

"Yeah, can't sleep at night without that. Tata." He hung up, leaving Logan gritting his teeth.

"Tom, where the hell is that contract?"

"Who is on the phone?"

"No one. We are going out right now."

"Where?"

"Just come." He said as he dialled Alex number. She picked up in the second ring. He heard giggling and shouting in the background.

"Where are you?"

"In a cake shop? Want to come?"

"Dress and bouquet?"

"Done."

"Did you like them?"

"They are beautiful. So will you be here? I can wait."

"Ok, I am coming. Wait, who the hell is that? Is that Leo?"

"Yeah. We went to Mathilda's house to iron some minor problems with the project and Leo said he had a Baker friend who bakes world's best cakes. So he brought us here. It is a nice place. Warm and cozy."

"Stay right there. I will be in a minute."

"Logan, don't drive fast." She said and he heard her giggling to something someone said. "Em, ask him to stop. Leo, you are going to--" She stopped. "Oh hey, bye Logan." She said as she hung up.

"Tom, damn, the contract? Now." As Tom handed, he quickly checked it and signed. "Mail it to Courtney. I an all done for the day."

"Boss, Hansen called."

"Tell him I will call him tomorrow. Now I don't have time."

"Where are you off to in such a hurry, boss?"

"Cake tasting."

"Cake tasting?" Tom looked bewildered.

"Yes. So?"

"Nothing, boss. You should go, before they finish all your cakes."

"Yeah, very funny. Bye."

"Adieu."

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(Alexandra)

"You keep looking at the door." Emma asked as she took a bite of the macadamia nut cake. "Good. But..." She shrunk her nose. "Not good enough."

"Logan said he would come." Alex said as she took a bite of the coffee cake. She liked it.

"Aww. So sweet." Leo cooed. "Isn't it so cute?"
~~~

"He is high on sugar." Eliza said as she grabbed the plate in front of him. "None for you. We still haven't officially started it and you are already looking loopy."

"Why are you marrying him, Alex?" Leo asked with a pout. "I am way more handsome than him."

"Yeah?"

Alex smiled when she heard Logan.

"Tell that to the poor mirror that committed suicide." He said as he say next to Alex. "Hello sisters. And you."

"And you." Leo mocked, making a face.

"So, have you decided?" He looked at her and she nodded.

"No. But I am thinking chocolate and coffee."

He leaned closer to her and whispered a no.

"Why not?"

"And then you will become high on sugar and begin to say things like impotence, intercourse, and geeling freat. No way in hell you are saying those in our wedding."

Her face heated as she glared at him.

"Ssh." She shushed him and he laughed.

"They are way past caring." He said looking at the trio.

They were.

Leo and Emma were already singing pat-a-cake pat-a-cake Baker man, and Eliza was half snoring.

"You jerk... You promised to not talk about that."

"But you look so beautiful when you blush."

"Shut up." She whispered.

"You wanna make me?"

"Annoying." She said as she pushed a spoonful of cake into his mouth and laughed as he blubbered and shook his head.

"There is cream there." He said once he finished eating.

"Where?"

"Right here." He said as he wiped the cream away from the cake in front of him before he smeared it on her nose.

"You just didn't do that." She glared at him.

"I did. I can help clean it up, too." He looked at her and smiled.

"What are you thinking?"

He smiled. "Dirty girl." He laughed.

"Guys, stop eating each other by your eyes and start eating the cake." Emma said. She was finally done with singing rhymes. And so was Leo. But his eyes we're still bright as he took a bite of his cake and moaned. He did.

Emma shook her head and Alex chuckled.

"What? This is cake-gasmic." He defended. "Hey, Alex, here eat this." Leo put the fork in front of her. "It is heavenly. You should definitely go with this."

She took a bite and nodded. "It is." She almost moaned, but she controlled herself.

"Almond butter cake. Simply amazing. We can add elegant decor and this will be the winner." Emma said as the man who owned the bakery came out.

"Kale, my man, it is your traditional Almond butter cake. Can you show us some design." He showed them some and Alex loved the one with four tiers and roses, with white cream. It was beautiful. It made her mouth water just thinking about it.

"What do you think?" Alex turned to look at Logan and found him glaring at the fork in Leo's hand. He looked angry. Dangerous.

She leaned closer to him. "What?"

"Nothing. You like that?"

"Chocolate or this."

"It is fixed, then. Come on let us go home." He said as he pulled her up.

"Yes. Home. I am tired." She said as she turned to three goofy looking faces.

"Enjoy." They said and Alex blushed a bright red.

"Get your minds out of the gutter, guys."

"Naughty girl, Alex. It looked like your mind is the one that is drowning in the gutter."

"Bye." She gritted and as they laughed, she walked out, a smile on her lips, only to be stopped by Logan.

"Don't get too close to him. Okay?" His voice was edgy as he opened the door for her.

"What?"

"You heard me."

What I would give to have you look at me like the way I look at you. - Alex

Chapter 19

18. Rings, Promises and Meetings

(Alexandra)

Alex rubbed her eyes as she blearily walked inside the kitchen, hiding a huge yawn behind her palm. Her hair was sticking up in all the direction and her crumpled pajama looked like it had seen better years. Oh, it was, but it was also her favorite one. It was the last on she had bought when she went out to shopping with her dad. Whenever she missed him, she would put it on and it was most of the times and so the pajama had become worn out and faded, but she couldn't throw it away.

"Aren't you ready yet?" Logan stared at her with a frown. "God, Alex, we don't have time and we still have so much to do with the wedding." He looked impatiently at his watch. "We are kind of short on time, you know." And then he looked her up and down, his eyes squinty. "And what is that you are wearing?"

She groaned. She was feeling sleepy and head achy and she was not particularly in the mood to listen to one of Logan's infamous lectures. Not today.

Her head was pounding and if she didn't do anything about that right now, it was going to burst. She pressed her fingers against her cheeks and frowned at him.

He looked fresh as early morning snow and irritated her. In his crisp suit and neatly combed hair and pristine shoes, he looked like he was going to walk the runway this early in the morning and that was just not right. She looked like she just walked out of a garbage bin and she almost smelled like it too.

"You remember the one who just randomly blurt out a date to taunt Stacy? I am sure that blabbermouth is not me. Do you know who it is?" She said as she narrowed her eyes at him. "And this is a pajama, dumbhead."

"Oh, come on. Can't you just stop being your annoying self for today and nobody in their right mind would call it that."

She yawned again and shook her head. "Whatever, Logan. If you really want to lecture someone today, there is a lizard renting our pool house. It was peeping at me the other day."

It really was a very ugly lizard and it felt like it was staring at her when she was swimming.

"Haha. Very funny."

"What? You don't do that anymore? I mean you were once famous for lecturing a mouse."

"Oh, but I am the one who rented the pool house to *Willie* --that is the lizard. So I am not going to lecture him and, Lex, I know you are afraid of him, but he is such a standup guy, darling." He had a cheeky smile on, that made the side of his eyes crinkled and his grey eyes looked more light blue as they shone with humor and she loved the sight of them too much.

She rubbed her eyes. "You think you are funny?" She asked as she yawned again and staggered. He grabbed her by her arm and pulled her flush against his body and she wanted to snuggle in.

Remember about the boundaries. She told herself.

Oh, yes. I do remember, but... Just for a moment, I want to cuddle with him and forget it all. It was someone inside her, and this part of her was her own enemy.

And the moment would become hours, hours years. You are not doing that. The rational part of her made her pull away. He narrowed his eyes before he took a step back.

"My God, when did you sleep?" He asked, and she could hear the edge in his voice. She knew he didn't like it that she pulled away, but he was trying and she was grateful that he was.

"Somewhere after 3. I had to finish a plan for Mathilda's library and she had given me a list of books to order and I had to order it all before going to sleep."

"God, she couldn't have given you a time off? You are overworked."

"I don't want time off, Logan. She is my client and I am doing everything in my power to do what I have to do to finish my project between the proposed time line. She is not doing charity, she is giving me a job."

"And you are wonderful at that. Couldn't she just--"

"You didn't ask time off from your work, Logan and why do you think she has to give me some time off! Because I am a woman and I am weak and I can't take-"

"When did I say that? If anyone can take all this shit and still stand here straight, arguing with me about how she doesn't need any special treatment, it is you. Only you." He chuckled sarcastically as he shook his head.

"You know, all that you said, they just went right over my head. I am still half asleep." She said with a smile back.

"Yeah, everything you don't want to hear always go right over you head. Hey, you want some coffee?" He asked as she yawned again. "Go sit."

"Yes, please." She said as she walked over to the table and put her head on it. After a minute, he handed her a tall mug of coffee and she took the first sip of piping hot coffee and moaned. "Thank you." She said, feeling grateful. It was a hazelnut blend and creamy and he added just the right amount of sugar and cream that she took with her coffee. "God, you made my perfect coffee." She looked at him, her eyes shining.

"Wait right here." He said and she nodded as he walked away. Five minutes later, he put a plateful of scrambled eggs on front of her, with roasted veggies on the side and she inhaled the heavenly smell.

God.

"Marry me, Logan." She said as she spooned buttery eggs inside her mouth and chewed. It felt heavenly and the butter made everything better. There was a hint of thyme and oregano in the egg and the bell peppers and potatoes were crisp and salty.

At his moment, Alex was so sure she had never tasted anything like this. It wasn't probably true, but it felt just like that.

"I am already marrying you." He chuckled as he walked away and came back with a glass of clear orange juice.

"Okay then, have my children." She groaned as she licked her fingers and he looked at her, amused.

"You know it doesn't exactly work like that, right."

"Just as I said, I am still half asleep. Wait until I wake up to ask me about all this. I will probably plead my fifth."

"Wow. So you won't remember asking me to bear your children?"

"Nah. Not possible. I will deny everything." She said as she stood up and waved at him. "I will be in ten. Okay?"

"It is okay, take your time. I have some suppliers to call and I think I will do that while I wait here."

"While you are on that, can you find me someone who knows about their granites? We wanted to change the kitchen island."

"Sure. I have just the right guy. Me. but I thought you are just doing decorations."

"Good boy and yes, I am. It is not for my project, Mathilda wanted to renovate one of her summer house in Hamptons. She will probably call you about that. Tata." Alex waved as she walked to her room and shut the door.

She pulled out a white sweatshirt and a jeans and walked inside the bathroom, whistling. The hot water was warm on her skin and she closed her eyes sighing in pleasure.

This time around, she was taking time to appreciate everything around. Every little and big thing. Living in the motel had taught her how life was fickle and only this moment right her was hers. She had realized how everything would shift in a moment, and how no one had the power to change that. So she vowed to herself that she would never take anything for granted.

As she rubbed a lavender soap over her, she wondered how her life would be after the marriage. She wondered how she was going to face him every day, pretending to be unfeeling with all these feeling frothing inside her, bubbling, boiling, and ready to spill over. She rubbed her chest with a sad smile.

She didn't have any idea how it was all going to be, but she was going to stay strong and face it.

~~~

(Logan)

"Yes, Tom. That is what I am saying. You will call Aaron Masters and get him to sign on the first payments and I am going to go and buy my ring peacefully."

"Okay, then, oh and boss, Mr. Thorne called. He wanted to know when you will have an appointment for him."

"Right after my marriage. It is a big project, so..." He said and looked up when he heard Alex coming down.

"...and boss, I still--"

He couldn't concentrate on whatever Tom was saying, because she was a distraction. She had always been a distraction, no matter what she did or wore.

She looked like an angel in her white tee and jeans. No Angel in their right mind would wear that and expect to be called an angel, but she was.

Her brown hair was curling at the ends and the tips were still wet and limp and his fingers itched to touch them. Her lips were painted a dull peach, and looked delicious and the smile on them, something he wished he could see for forever.

"Boss? You there?" Tom shouted and Logan pulled the phone away from his ear with a wince.

"Umm, yes. Don't shout."

"I called you for five times before I resorted to shouting. Umm, are you staring at lady boss, right now?"

"W-what?" He asked as Alex waved at him and he waved back.

"Boss, you are in trouble. I think you are totally lovesick."

"God, don't start this again. Do what I asked you to, and get the hell away from the phone. I am not paying you to gossip with me." Logan grunted.

"You can hang up, too, you know." Tom chuckled. "I must see this woman, boss, who has you wrapped in her little finger's nail."
~~~

"Nail! God. I am hanging up." Logan rolled his eyes when he heard Tom shouting something, but he hung up anyways. "Alex, come on. Let's go."

She swayed towards him, grabbed his keys from his hand and smirked. "This time, I am driving."

"My God, woman." He sighed as he followed her, but if she had just turned back, she would have seen the smile in his eyes, that reflected how happy he was right this moment and he wished and hoped that this happiness would stay. That she would stay.

But after a year, she had to go. She would go.

Maybe you can convince her to stay.

How can I do that? How can I do that to her?

How could he, when he knew she wanted a love that her father and mother had? How could he make her stay, when he knew that he would be unable to give her that kind of love?

She was his friend. His best friend, if he was being honest. She was one of his best decisions, even though it was so illogical and atypical at that time. She was an adventure, as she had told him the first time.

And yes, he liked her very much. He cared about her more than he had ever cared about anyone who was not related to him, and he was attracted to her, but love... The kind that would give her power over him, the kind that would mess up everything, the kind that could break him and leave him vulnerable and miserable, that kind of love was something he couldn't give her.

She deserved that kind of love.

He had seen the look on her eyes when she was talking about her parents, the longing, the pain and the desire. He had seen her need to find that kind of love, the one her dad had shared with her mom and how could he stand on her path as an obstacle?

He wanted her to stay. Of course. He wanted her to stay forever.

Even though he couldn't love her like that, wholly, fully, desperately, he would give her everything he could, he would try to do everything she wanted, but he knew she wouldn't trade the possibility of finding true love for all of his money.

And it stung, it stung to think about where she would be, and with whom she would be after the year was over. But it was nothing compared to how he would feel like, if he became that someone who stopped her from finding what was out there for her.

He wouldn't. He couldn't do that to her.

You know... Maybe this is love. The voice was hopeful. Wistful.

But it wasn't.

He wasn't made for loving selflessly. He wasn't strong enough for that. Everything else, he could do, but this one... Not so much.

That was his cross to bear. His burden. He couldn't put it over her.

She honked from inside the car.

"For God's sake, I am coming. You don't need to keep doing it." He yelled over the honking noise. She was still rigorously honking as he opened the car.

"I would have opened the door for you had you come sooner." She said. "And I wanted to give you this donut to you." She pointed to the paper plate in the dashboard with a shrug.

"That an invisible donut? Because I am not seeing anything there." He said with a frown.

"Heard about '*it is the thought that counts*'. It is that! The donut is now happily settled inside my stomach." She patted her stomach.

"I can see why it is getting bigger each passing day."

"The nerve of this man!" She said as she started the engine. "I can see that your six packs are melting, too." She gave him a glare.

He chuckled and patted his stomach. "This here is not what melting looks like, Alex. You can touch it and see for yourself.

"Nah, I am not touching it even in your dreams, wacko." She poked her tongue out as he laughed.

"Where to?"

"Annabelle's creations."

"Ooh, swanky." She smiled as she swerved suddenly.

"God. Keep your eyes on the road."

"I am. The moron was coming the wrong side." She glared at the rear-view mirror. "Driving like a monkey."

He laughed.

When they reached the store, she parked the car before she stepped out.

"Come on." He opened the door for her.

"I am forced to believe chivalry isn't dead, but then I know you. You are the same psycho who ordered me to become his wife. So... " She winked before she walked inside, leaving him swearing under his breath.

"So you like anything."

"They are all good."

"But I am not buying you everything."

"Can you afford to?" She smirked as she leaned against the counter and looked up at him, her eyes mischievous.

"I can't. I can only afford to buy half of it." He said.

"Honesty." She smiled and looked at the boxes the woman in front of them was stacking.

"We have some exclusive collections, too, madam." She said. "Mr. Forte, Mr. Lawrence said he is sorry he can't come today. He is of town."

"It is not a problem, Gretchen." He smiled.

"How many times did you buy rings here?"

"Why, jealous?" He smirked, looking at her flushed face. She did look jealous.

"Nah."

"I was the one who came here with Marcus and Deke to buy wedding rings. And Lawrence is my friend. So..."

"That better be the only reason."

"And I bought Stacy's ring here too." His eyes were on hers the whole time. She tried to look nonchalant, but he could see it, that small flicker of annoyance before she smiled and shrugged with indifference.

No matter what she said, he knew she was envious that moment, and he didn't know why it made him ecstatic. But it did. It made him like he had just jumped over the rainbows or something.

"Hey don't be like that." He nudged her and she bit her lips as she looked up at him.

"What did you do with that ring?"

"Donated to charity?" He said and she smiled. The eyes that were mutinous the moment before glittered and he could see the gold in them shining like miracle and it took his breath away. He leaned closer to her, her scent and her warmth, almost instinctually, but when he realized she moved a little further, he stopped and stood straight. And cleared his throat.

The shop attendant, Gretchen, looked away with an indulgent smile. "Dearie, I can look away." She said, shaking her head. Her dark brown eyes reflected happiness. "I have seen lovers, and it is no shame to want to kiss the woman you love."

He saw as Alex's body went rigid. She looked startled and weary as she tried to smile at the woman standing there.

"It is fine." Alex said as she picked out the box and showed it to him. "What do you think?"

"Nice, but we can see the exclusive ones, if you want to."

She shook her head. "This is beautiful. And I love it." She said. "And if you buy me something extraordinarily beautiful, I wouldn't have heart to return in on our first anniversary." She whispered to him and he twitched away from her, as if she had just slapped him.

How could she remind him of that now, when he was feeling so happy and free? Why would she?

It was as if she wanted to remind herself and him that no matter how it felt, that it was all just fake.

She handed the ring to Gretchen and she nodded appreciatively. "Nice. Let me pack it for you." She said as Logan handed his card to her.

"You don't have to return it." He looked at Alexandra. "It is part of your payment." He said viciously, and saw with satisfaction as her smile wilted. He felt angry and mad.

"Oh. It is fine. I would rather have money than a ring that is going to remind me of things I would rather forget."

"You would rather forget me?" He asked. His stomach was churning in an unfamiliar way and it made him feel like he wanted to puke. He rubbed his sweaty palms against his pants and stared at her, as she stared right back at him. He wanted to hear what she would say, the answer was important to him. Even though this was all a fight, he wanted her to say no.

"I would never want to forget you, Logan and you know that. I was angry and you were too, and I am sorry I said that." When she said that, he wanted to slink down and sit on the floor and sigh.

"Come here." He opened his arms and she walked closer to him as he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer to him. "I am sorry, too." He whispered as he kissed her head and he could smell her shampoo and he wanted this moment to stay. She rubbed her cheeks against his shirt with a sigh.

"Why are we always fighting?" She asked, her voice weak.

"It is okay, because no matter how much we fought, we will always be back to where we are. You are my best friend, Alex, and I promise, you will always be. This ring is not your payment, okay. This is my promise to you that I will always be here for you, even after the year is over. That I will always be your friend and well-wisher and confidante and will always stand behind you. Okay?"

"Okay." She said as she smiled up at him and he wiped her tears away with a gentle smile. "Don't cry. I don't ever want you to cry."

"Okay." She sniffled. "Thank you, Logan." She stood on her tip toes and kissed him on his chin. Her eyes looked soft and warm and her lips were gentle against his stubble. "Now, this ring doesn't feel like a burden." She said as she pulled away from him.

"Here is your rings. Have a nice day and happy married life." Gretchen handed the bag to Alex and Alex smiled at her.

"Thank you."

"I can see how much you two are perfect for each other. You will live a long, happy life. God bless."

Perfect, Logan thought. *Only if he isn't like this, she will be perfect for him. But he is like this!!!*

"Thank you." Alex said.

"Hello madam, how may I help you?" Gretchen walked over to the older woman who came in and Logan stopped on his track. His body went rigid and he wanted to run away and stay. His feelings are conflicted seeing the woman. He wanted to see if she recognized him. He didn't want her to remember him. He wanted her to remember him.

"Logan?" Alex called him and the woman turned towards him, her eyes wide with recognition.

"Coming." Logan said as he walked away, but from the side eyes, he saw the woman walking to him and then stopping on her tracks.

How could she come to him and talk? How could she show her lying, cheating face back here?

But she had never had a problem with lying or acting all high and mighty. She had always been a selfish, obnoxious woman and it looked like she hadn't changed. Not a bit.

"You know her?"

"Oh, I do."

"And?"

"She was my father's first wife. The woman who gave birth to me and my sisters."

Some of the worst days in my life become almost okay to deal with, when you are with me. That is your magic. - Logan. ~~~

Chapter 20

19. Mothers, OSLs and Hot girls

(Logan)

Alex looked at him, her eyes wide with shock and disbelief. Her hands stopped on its way to turn the keys sitting in the ignition as she nervously looked around and she looked like she was trapped in a cage with a hungry lion or something.

He almost wanted to laugh.

He was back from the shock of meeting the woman who gave birth to him, but it left a strange and bitter aftertaste in his mouth that he badly wanted to wash away with something. Anything.

Just looking at her made him feel like he wanted to wash himself off her. Again.

Barbara looked thin, and he was sure she hadn't achieved the fame that she had once desired so much, because he hadn't seen her in any of the movies he had watched. Maybe she acted in some foreign films, but he just didn't care.

Yes, he hated her, but he was also grateful to her. If it wasn't for her, they wouldn't have ever found someone who was a thousand times better mother than her.

"Are you okay?" She asked, as she searched his face with sympathetic eyes. He didn't want sympathy. He hated that look even when he was four.

It wasn't like he had sad, destitute childhood. He only barely remembered this woman. Everything was almost a blur for him, except those pieces of grief and rejection he felt when she left him, left them.

And that is why you can never love anyone.

He hated that it was the truth, but here it was. Staring right at him. The truth of what Barbara had done to them would never leave him no matter how hard he tried.

And it reminded him that love made people weak and vulnerable. Easy to break, like a chinadoll. He didn't want to be broken, not by anyone.

When his mom had walked away, Beth had walked in. Beth walked in, with her big heart, and her all encompassing love. It was *love*, too, and his father had trusted Beth to never do the same thing, but Logan- he wasn't strong like his father.

Because, before Beth, he had also seen how his father had been, when when his wife had walked away. He had been broken, wrecked and the sorrow in his eyes... If Logan tried hard enough, he could still hear his father sobbing after Emma and Eliza went to school. Logan was four,

sometimes he was hungry and so alone, and Logan didn't go to school and he heard everything. He heard every heartbreaking sound coming from his strong daddy and he would curl up in his bed and sob along with his dad. And that was hard to forget.

And then one day, someone had knocked at their door. They had opened, and they had hated the woman standing there. But she hadn't given up on them. She still hadn't.

So maybe love isn't bad.

Maybe. But I know it is not for me.

Why not?

Just because.

Oh, yes. He had seen full, kind, giving love from *his mom*. Generous and wholehearted. His father had found that kind of love, with Bethany, and Logan still wondered how he could have after his first wife had broken every vow of their marriage, destroyed their family and their trust and walked away with some sleazy director with the dreams of becoming a successful actress --it wasn't that she wanted to be a successful actress that made them hate her, it was the way she chose to make her dream come true.

His father did find love again, something much better, maybe because Logan's mom was special. She was unlike no one.

"Oh, I am." He shrugged.

"So... Your mom?" She looked befuddled. He didn't blame her. Most of them didn't know about the woman who gave birth to them. She was the past no one wanted to remember. They were happy now and she had no place in that happiness. She had no place in their world.

"No, Beth is my mom. This is someone who gave birth to me."

She looked like she wanted to ask him something, but then she decided against it as she started the engine.

"That is good. Because I can see how you three are Beth's world." She looked like she meant it too.

"You don't want to know what happened?" He asked when she turned away.

"Something happened, and I just want to tell you what you had told me once. I am your friend and I will be right here if you ever want to talk about it."

"It is not like I have some derelict childhood or something, Alex. Don't look at me like that." He tried to chuckle. She pressed her hand against his and he grabbed it like it was his lifeline.

"I am not looking at you like that because I pity you. It is because I pity her for losing your amazing family." And that was the right thing to say and he liked her all the more for it.

"She left one day, because she felt like we were all an obstacle in her path of becoming someone popular and it would have been alright, had she walked away alone, but she cheated on my dad and walked out with the same man --some director. We were all scared when she left, but Beth came and she healed us." His voice was cold. Like he was reading a news, like he had no part whatsoever in the story and it looked like she had seen it, too, because she leaned closer and grabbed his face in her palms before she pushed her finger against his knotted eyebrows. For a moment, he wished he could hold on to her, but holding on brought pain along with it.

"You all look like Beth, you know. How is that possible?" She asked after a moment as she took her hands away from his cheeks and he felt the cold air stinging his cheeks.

"Because Beth is her sister."

Alex eyes widened, her mouth agape. "God, really?" She asked after a minute. "Wow. I just don't know what to say."

"And we hated her when she first walked in. She reminded us of Barbara --that is her name. But then Beth healed us, she loved us and she fell in love with dad. Dad, dad didn't want to fall for her or marry her, but he just couldn't help it. My mom is amazing like that."

"Yes, she is. I am so happy that you all found each other."

"We are, too."

And I am happy I found you, too. He thought.

Before Alex started the car though, Barbara was standing there, looking at him with the eyes that looked so much like his. She knocked at the windows and Logan gritted his teeth.

Yes, they had almost forgotten her, but that didn't mean they had forgiven her. He hadn't. He couldn't.

He rolled down the windows and stared at her.

Her skin wasn't smooth any more and she looked looked skinny. Time wasn't kind on her like it was on Beth.

He almost felt sorry for her as he looked at her.

She opened her mouth, and then closed her eyes with a tired sigh. She looked pathetic. Even though she was wearing designer brands and diamond glittered at her throat, she looked pathetic.

"Yes?" He asked impatiently.

"How are you? How is Eliza and Emma?"

"I don't see how any of it is your business." He said.

"Logan- I-"

"I don't care. I just want to tell you one thing. Don't come anywhere near us. Okay?"

She looked like she was hurt, but he didn't care. "Okay." She mumbled before she walked away, her back bent in defeat.

"Logan... "

"If you are going to tell me that I should not have been that hard on her, don't. I wasn't."

"I am not going to say that. Where are we going now?"

"I have some files in the office to sign and look. We will stop by and grab them okay, and also... I need to introduce you to one pain in the ass."

"Tom." Alex chuckled.

"Yes, he had been whining about how he still hadn't seen you. And it is getting frustrating."

They were silent for the rest of the drive, but he cherished the silence.

"Hello, welcome." Logan had no idea how Tom was already here with a half wilted sunflower in his hand, but he was there, his eyes knowing as he gave the flower to Alex.

"Did you install some tracking software on my phone or something?"

"If I had, would I be a fool to admit to it?" Tom asked before he looked at Alex. "So, you are the mystery woman. Now I know why my boss kept you in hiding." Tom winked.

"Thanks for this." She waved the flower at him before she looked at Logan. "You had never given me flowers." She said with a grin.

"That is my boss. Totally unromantic, but don't worry, I can change him. I will. Come in." Tom said as he opened the building door for her. "We are in the eleventh floor. Boss loves his view." Tom said as he pressed the button in the elevator.

"Tom, take a breath. And hello, to you too."

"Oh, hello, hello. It is not like you are new around here. And I see your boring face almost every day, boss, so..."

"One day or the other, I am going to fire your stupid ass."

"You have been telling me the same for God knows how long."

"You two know each other for a long time, didn't you?"

"A long, long time. We grew up together, you know and he hired me when he started his company and he is still so grateful that I agreed to come working for him, he would be totally lost without me."

"Keep telling yourself that." Logan said as he looked at Tom.

"Wow, you are funny."

"I know and I also know your man is not, but bear with him. He is a good guy, if you look past his grumpy self."

"I did and that is why I am here with him." Alex said with a smile.

"Now what, you are best friends with him?" Logan groaned when the elevator came to a stop.

"Boss, it is so unbecoming of you." Tom said as he opened the door. "Guys, everyone, come here already."

"What are you doing, Tom?"

"What? I am going to introduce lady boss to everyone else.

" Oh, please." Alex smiled shyly and it was amusing. Logan smirked.

"Wow, you almost look shy."

"I am not, I just-"

"Just what?" Logan taunted.

"Shut up, jerkface."

"Wow, that is a new one." Logan whispered as her face went red. Before she could retort, Tom was back with Amelia and Camden and Fiona and Sebastian. He introduced them to Alex before he turned to her.

"We still have four more, but they were on site, today. And Amelia, where is Donna?"

"Here she is." It was a tall woman, with gray hair. She smiled at Alex. "I am Donna. And I am-"

"Yeah, tell us. What are you?" Sebastian smiled. "No one knows that."

"I am the one who is in charge of morons." Donna looked at him pointedly.

"Yeah. She is in charge of Sebastian, Camden, Quinton and Sam." Tom said with a haughty look which fell when Amelia added, "And Tom." She said as she smiled at Alex. "Nice to meet you."

"You too." Alex replied, shaking her hands.

"Why don't you show her around? I have some files to see and sign, so?"

"It is okay, I don't want to impose." Alex said.

"Nonsense, come on, you are not imposing and this is the only time our boss has asked us to do something fun instead of working." Donna said and Logan grunted, looking at the woman standing in front of him.

As they said, no one exactly knew what she did, but she did everything and anything around the office to make it run smoother and it was that day when she was absent for the first time they all had realized that. She was the messenger. The mailman. The cook. The occasional receptionist. The supervisor.

"I have never seen you doing anything." He shook his head with a chuckle as the older woman gave him a pat.

"Can I take the next week off?" She looked at him and wagged her bushy brows.

"No ma'am, sorry." He raised his hands and she shook her head.

"That a good boy, now leave us alone." Donna waved at him as she hustled Alex inside the break room. He could vaguely hear her asking Alex if she wanted coffee and he heard her saying yes and then gasping.

She might have found their espresso machine.

He smiled as he closed the door and sighed as looked at the files piled in front of him.

The message at the top caught his eyes.

"Tom, did Lawyer Marino called again?"

"Yes, he said to tell you that there are some new developments after you talked."

"Good. Now get out, I have things to finish."

"I am expecting you to tell that to me. I mean, I can't be bored here when everyone else were talking with lady boss."

"Stop calling her lady boss."

"No, not doing that. Bye, boss. You do your job."

"You are not going to do yours, is that it?"

"Of course. Tata."

Tom walked away and Logan picked up the phone to call his attorney.

"Did you look into their paperworks?"

"I am going to have to subpoena them, Logan. But I have this feeling that the whole things is fake. If we can prove that, it will be easy to get this to trial and win."

"And we need to win. There is no way we can lose this suit."

"I am going to file to the judge to subpoena the records from Mr. Williamson, but first we need to find evidence of foul play. If you can find anything important."

"I will try. Thank you, Michael."

"Bye, man."

"Bye." Logan hung up and went back to his files as he heard her laughter ringing through the half-opened door.

He smiled to himself as he signed the first one.

~~~

(Alexandra)

Alex looked at the espresso machine with envy as Amelia made a coffee for her, filled with froth.

"Cream. Four sugar."

"Wow. That is a lot of sugar." Sebastian said as he leaned against the chair and stared at her.

"Seb, don't look at her like that. She is boss's future wife."

"And she is a beautiful future wife. So..." Seb winked. Alex shook her head with amusement.

"She is, but boss will gouge your eyes out." Camden was almost boyish and very shy. When he talked, he talked so gently that it took a lot of effort to hear him.

"What he doesn't know can't hurt him."

"It won't, but it will hurt you." Tom joined them with a chuckle.

They were all friendly and wonderful, except Fiona, who was glaring at Alex the whole time. Nobody said anything about that, but Alex could almost feel the hostility radiating off her. After a minute she left with a huff and Alex left out a sigh of relief.

She didn't know how to ask them anything, so she ignored it.

After a moment Donna shook her head. "Don't worry. She has-"

"OSL." Sebastian said.

"OSL?"

"One Sided love. Crush. Whatever. Don't worry, though, she is a good girl."

OSL.

Does this mean you have OSL too? The pesky voice snickered.

Obviously. Yes.

It looks like Logan has that effect on woman, eh? It was very annoying.

Eh. Whatever.
~~~

"I am not worrying. It is fine. I mean, I have no right to say that she can't have OSL, now can I? If it ever become TSL, you guys will let me know, right?" She winked and they laughed.

"You will be good for him." Donna said it almost like a blessing and Alex nodded.

"I know. That is what I have been telling him."

They all laughed and she laughed along with them.

After another ten minutes, Logan was back. He handed them the wedding invites to them personally and Fiona's face crunched when she looked at it, but Logan didn't saw it. He was too busy smiling and talking with the guys.

"And Sebastian, if you ever looked at my wife like that--"

"How did you know?"

"I know everything."

Alex walked next to Fiona and smiled at her. "So I heard you have a crush on Logan."

She gasped. "N-no, I mean-"

Alex shook her head. "It is okay. I am not going to bite your head off. He is very crushable, isn't he?" She checked him out and Fiona smiled a little.

"He is."

"Good. I wouldn't want to marry someone who is so ordinary and boring."

Fiona shook her head. "It looks like he wouldn't want to marry someone ordinary and boring, as well." She looked down at herself and Alex patted her. "You are lucky." Fiona said.

She was not, but how could she tell that to

"Oh, you are not boring or ordinary and you will find someone."

You will find someone who will love you. But, me, I can never. So you are the lucky one here, Fiona. Alex thought as she walked to stand next to Logan. He looked down at her and gave her a soft smile, that made her feel like everything they were play-acting was real. Almost.

"Are you ready to go?" He whispered and she nodded her head.

"You looked whipped, boss." Tom said as Logan grabbed her hand in his and locked his fingers with her.

"Don't you dare start another one of your ridiculous allegations." Logan said as he said goodbye. "And you all are staying and going home only after you finish everything you have to finish for today. Donna you make sure. Bye. And Tom, don't come to our wedding empty-handed." He said as he walked out, her hand still in his. And she was so happy holding his hand that she didn't remind him that they were alone now, that no one was looking.

She let it stay right in his, where it felt like it belonged. ~

~~

(Logan)

It was two nights before *the big day* as everyone was calling it. The garden looked beautiful. Eliza had hired a wedding planner as she had promised and the woman worked like a hurricane until everything was smoothed over. And Alex liked it all.

He lounged in the couch, sipping the hot chocolate Alex had made for him, when his phone rang.

"Where in the world are you, Logan?"

"Dan? What?"

"What? God, you forgot, didn't you? Today is your bachelor party, dude. We are already here in the bar."

"Umm, I don't remember agreeing to anything like that."

"The hell you don't." Dan said and then Logan heard him yelling at Tom. "Tom, did you tell him or not?"

"Or not. Because I know he will say no."

"Dude, what the hell!"

"Why don't you all come here and I will order pizzas and beers for you?"

"You want to celebrate your bachelor party in your home?" Daniel sounded incredulous. "God. Guys, listen to this. Logan wants to party with his bride."

"Oh my God, there is something so wrong with you." Deke said.

"Am I on the speaker phone?"

"Yes, dude." Markus said.

"Boss, you are so-so- I can't even find the exact word."

"Stop badgering me. If you want to come, come. I will order everything you want."

"Italian?" This was Deke.

"Chinese?" This was Tom.

"Pizza and tortilla chips." This was Daniel.

"And a hot girl." This was Markus.

"I will call your wife and ask her for some recommendations." Logan said and Markus groaned.

"Not fair, man." He said. "Okay. Everything minus the hot girl. We will be there."

"Good." He hung up and started dialing for chinese and Italian and pizzas when the hot girl walked in.

But this hot girl, he wasn't sharing with anyone. This girl was his!

"What are you looking?" She asked.

"Nothing. The guys are coming here and if you want to join-"

"For your bachelor party?" She chuckled and shook her head.

"What is so funny?"

"Do you want me to strip for you." She winked at him, looking like a mischievous devil and he groaned.

"No way in hell are you doing that in front of them. But I won't say no to a private one." He gave her a wink back and this time she flushed.

"In your dreams." She gave him a sassy smirk. "And no, I am not staying here. I am going out with Em and Eliza and I am having a private stripping."

"Not in a million years."

"Says who?" She gave him a challenging look.

"Says me. You are going nowhere. You are staying right here. With me."

"Careful there, tiger. You are starting to sound jealous."

"I don't care."

"I was just kidding. We are just going to a pub."

"And asking to be ogled." He hated the image of men ogling her and hitting on her.

"You are asking for a beating." She threatened.

"You really want to go?" He asked to her with a frown.

"Nah. I would rather stay here. But Emma and Eliza-"

"Then it is done. You are staying here and I am calling my sisters."

~~~

(Alexandra)

Emma and Eliza came with a frown. "Why in the hell are we here instead-" Eliza narrowed her eyes at Alex.
~~~

"I - I want to stay here." Alex smiled at them, but they still looked furious.

"Is it Logan's doing?"

"No." Alex defended him.

Maybe it was half him, but Alex was not lying when she said she would rather be here than in the pub. It was not her kind of scene, anyway. She loved the privacy of their home and the silence of it. Loud, noisy, boisterous, drunk crowd didn't appeal to her.

"Okay, then. Take out his credit card and we are emptying it." Emma said as she stomped to the room and screamed.

Alex heard another voice cursing.

"Whoa? What happened?" She hurried to see what made Emma scream and gave a sheepish look to her friend.

"Sorry."

"You know they are coming?"

"Why are you here?" Markus looked at his wife and groaned. "One night. Was it too much to ask?" He whined and Emma rolled her eyes.

"One night of handsome men was all I asked, too. But here I am, looking at all the same boring faces. Your fault, Alex." Emma shook her head.

"Is this a party or a sleepover?" Daniel groaned. "Why don't you go ahead and invite your mom and dad and the kids, Logan?"

"I did." Logan said.

"What?!" Five voices yelled in unison and Alex giggled.

"He was pulling your legs. Come on, it will be fun." She said as she looped her hands with Emma and Eliza.

"Yeah, for you and Logan." Deke said.

"I am forgiving you because you are the bride. But, I am not forgetting this, Alex. You owe me big time." Eliza said as they all walked in.

When I said I do, I almost want it to be real. I almost want you for forever. But I also know I can't ask that of you. - Logan.

Chapter 21

20. Fake weddings and very real kisses

(Logan)

Logan yawned and stretched as he pulled the covers away from him. He had a dazzling smile on his face, which would have even creeped him out of it was any other day as he stared through the windows.

Today is the day. He thought as he walked inside the bathroom, and he strangely felt like belting out a song or something equally insane. He took a quick shower. He couldn't wait to see her.

When he walked inside the kitchen, he was expecting her, but it was empty, so he checked everywhere and the house was empty. *Gone*. Gone?

Fear gripped his throat as he searched for Alex, everywhere, including the pool house, but she was not anywhere. His stomach was unsettled as he looked for her and then tried to call her, but her phone rang from inside her room.

Did she go away? Run away from him? Did she make a fool out of him?

The thoughts were like violent burst, one after one, and it made him want to scream and punch and kick something.

It felt like a hit. Directly to his heart. He grabbed his head and sat down with a curse.

Where the hell was she?

Through the windows, he could see the beautifully decorated garden with the chairs and the archway, with dangling begonias and leaves. Everything looked beautiful, and ready, except his bride. It seemed like she wasn't ready.

He would be standing here, alone and everyone would be looking at him, their eyes with pity and mockery. And the thought of it burned like acid at the base of his stomach.

His tongue felt like cotton and his heart felt like someone was crushing it and pounding on it. Tap. Tap.

Maybe this is for the best, he thought. It was the wrong move from the beginning. And it was no wonder she was finally realizing how much of a risky, stupid move this was.

But how could she just go away without telling him? How could she do that to him?

If she had just told him...

He closed his eyes and he could remember his mother --Barbara-- walking --*sneaking*-- out of the door, with a suitcase in her hands. He was just behind the couch, hiding and she didn't see

him. He was waiting for her to ask him to come out and go with her to grandma's house, but she didn't. She didn't ask him to. She had walked away and two days later, he heard his friend's mom whispering to someone else about how his mother had ran away with someone who was not Logan's dad and when she had looked at little Logan, her eyes was so full of pity.

"Fucking hell." He threw the vase at the wall and watched with satisfaction as it broke into pieces and rained down the carpet with a clink.

"How could you, Alex?" He whispered as he closed his eyes.

"How could I, what? And what the hell are you doing? Is this the time to break things?" The voice. God. .

His eyes snapped open and he drank the sight of her in front of him. His whole body felt languid.

"You are here." He lurched up from the couch and walked to her, his steps hurried. She shook her head with a frown as he grabbed her face in his hands.

"What the heck, Logan? Of course I am here. Now care to explain what this poor vase did to you?" She looked angry. She looked beautiful. She was here. She wasn't leaving him.

He pulled her into a hug. "I thought you decided not to go with this and -"

"If I decide against it, I won't be sneaking out without telling you. You will be the first one to know that, okay. But, I haven't decided to stop being stupid. Yet. Now, are you going to clean that up?" She looked at him, eyes narrowed and he nodded.

"Yes."

"Go ahead, clean it. I am going to make you something to eat. I think hunger makes you do stupid stuff. "

It is not hunger. It is you. You make me do stupid stuff.

He didn't say anything. He just shrugged and started cleaning the mess.

She walked back to the kitchen, muttering something under her breath and he smiled to himself as he picked the pieces and put it in the dustpan.

"Shit." He shouted when a small piece slashed his finger. It stung like hell.

"What now? Oh my God, you idiot. What the hell is wrong with you?"

"What? It is not like I purposely cut my fingers." He said as he pressed his finger against his shirt.

"What kind of idiot is not careful while picking up glass pieces he shattered?"

"If you are done lecturing me, can I get back to it?" He asked and she furrowed her brows and glowered.

"Get back to what?" She put her hands on her hips and looked down at him. For a shorty, she sure did act so tall.

"Cleaning this mess." He said in a matter-of-fact voice and her eyes went dark.

"No way in hell. Do not provoke me, Logan. Get up, you idiot."

"Stop calling me idiot, Alexandra." He said, feeling vexed. It wasn't like he was dying. It was just a small cut.

"Why, you are an idiot. So... Up you go and let me take a look at that wound. God, it is bleeding too much."

"Not. It is not." He said as he pressed it further in his shirt. She was coddling him like he was five year old or something.

"Are you going to get up or am I dragging you all the way to your damn room?" Her nostrils flared and she really did look angry.

"I really want to see you try, midget, but.. Since I am a gentleman, I am not making you drag me all the way." He said.

"Gentleman. All right." She scoffed as he stood up. She grabbed his finger and stared at it for what felt like hours before she let it go with a wince.

"What? I am. Stop being so annoying."

"You are the one who is annoying." She said as they walked to his room. She pulled the first aid box from the bathroom cabinet and sat next to him as she carefully wiped the blood away. Gently, slowly. Her eyes were narrowed as she concentrated on the cut like she was performing some major surgery or something and it made him chuckle.

She looked up and shook her head. "What? What is so funny about you cutting your damn finger?"

"Nothing." He raised one hand in surrender.

After she finished cleaning it, and pampering him, he sighed. "It is just a small cut, Alex. It is not like I am dying."

"Shut up." She looked peeved. "Don't."

"Sorry." He whispered and she looked rattled. "It was the wrong thing to say." He said, his voice comforting and she gave him a wobbly smile.

"It is."

She gave him a look that made his heart clench and throat close and body tremble.

It was disconcerting, that look.

What is that about? He thought to himself as she made circles on his palm with her soft, soft fingers. Even that small touch made his body tingle. It was so strange that she could affect him like that. He had never let any woman affect him like that, and he didn't want to let her do that, too, but he didn't have a choice when it came to her. He never had a choice.

Her hand was so small in his, and he liked how warm it felt. It made him want to protect her, always.

From the likes of you?

I won't ever do anything to hurt her.

Won't you? It was his voice, and it was doubtful.

But he would never do anything intentionally. Unintentionally, though, that was... He didn't know.

"Does it hurt?" She looked at him, her eyes soft and tender. It wasn't the look he had ever got from any woman, except his mom.

When Beth first came home, she would sit with him all through the night and he would refuse to talk to the woman who was sisters with someone who hurt them all. But then when he stopped being so angry, he started being so sad, and Beth would caress his head and gave him this exact same look. One full of understanding, and affection and--

His heart hammered as his brain shut down. Everything tilted in its axis and he felt dizzy.

No. No.

Alex doesn't love me.

She didn't. It was just his imagination. He imagined that look on her eyes. He did.

Maybe it was kindness. Fondness, yes. Not love. Not.

He blinked and looked at her eyes, fearing what he would see there, but her eyes were normal. With a little bit of warmth, yes, but nothing else.

It was his overactive imagination.

"A little." He whispered.

She pulled his hand up and pressed her lips against the back of his finger, her eyes still on him, making him light-headed and warm.

"Kissing it better." She chuckled as she ruffled his hair before she stood up. "Come on, let us make you something to eat.".

"Five minutes. I will be right there."

She stood up and nodded, leaving him to his bewildering thoughts.

Did I imagine it? Or did I see that?

"Yes. Yes. I must have. There is no way she is in-- in"

Why are you so afraid even to just say the word?!

"Love." He said as he walked to the bathroom and splashed cold water on his face.

It was just a trick of his eyes and the morning light and his hunger. It was the mix of all. Nothing else.

He dried his face before he walked to the kitchen, where she was ready with warm pancakes and cream and maple syrup.

"What if I can't stuff myself inside my suit?"

"It is okay. I will marry you even if you aren't wearing your suit."

"Are you saying naked?"

"When the hell did I say that?" She gave him an indignant look and he laughed and she joined as they sat down and started eating.

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Wedding scene.

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(Alexandra)

Emma pinned Alex' hair back as Eliza watched her like a hawk. "Good." She said after she adjusted the curls for what felt like the millionth time.

"Stop." Emma scowled at her twin. "I know what I am doing, El."

"I just want everything to be perfect for her."

"It is. Thanks you two." Alex smiled. They had stopped being Logan's sisters and had actually became her friends.

"Hey girls." Bethany walked inside the room with a small smile. "Oh my God, you look so beautiful."

"Thank you." Alex smiled shyly up at her.

"My baby boy is so lucky." She said as she handed a box to Alex. "Here. For something old."

She handed Alex a small pin. It had a pearl on the side and small stones along the body. "This was my grandma's. Pin it on your hair."

"Oh, it is so beautiful. Thank you." Alex said as Emma pinned it on the side.

"You are the most beautiful bride I have ever seen. Except me, of course." Eliza giggled and Alex shook her head.

"I feel like my leg is going to give up -I- i want to puke and cry and--" Alex whispered as she looked at herself in the mirror. As Eliza said, she did look beautiful. But her heart was like a furious drum and her intestines were tying in on itself and she felt faint.

God, I am really doing this, aren't I?

It seems so.

"It is alright, Alex. That is how exactly you are supposed to feel when you are going to marry the man you love, the man who is yours." Beth said as she squeezed Alex's shoulder.

I love him, yes, but he is not mine, is he?

"I want to seen him." Alex whispered. She wanted to see him, to make herself believe that this wasn't such a terrible mistake. Somehow she was sure that this would all go away if she just saw him for one last time. She hadn't seen him for almost three hours and the doubt was starting to creep in, slowly, steadily.

She nervously placed her palms on her stomach over her dress. It was a beautiful dress, and everything was beautiful, except this marriage was a sham.

They were lying to everyone. These two women who was trying their best to make this day perfect, Alex was lying to them and so was Logan. How could they?

The thought of the contract in the back of her closet made her wince when Emma opened the door and picked out the bouquet.

"You can see him in twenty minutes. Please, Alex, it is alright." Emma said. "We are right here."

"Smile, babe." Eliza said and Alex sat down when her legs started to tremble.

"Oh my God, if I faint and you have to call an ambulance, please tell Logan I said sorry." She whispered as she wiped her sweaty palms on the bedcover.

"Oh, come on." Emma chuckled. "Hey, it is your phone." She handed the phone to Alex. "Is that Logan?"

"No, it is unknown." Alex frowned as she pressed answer.

"Babe, you are getting married and I am so sorry, so so sorry I can not come and be with you."

"S-stells? Is that you?"

"Oh my God, I missed hearing your voice. God, I have called you for a thousand times and it said not available."

"I lost my number. So how did you find this number?"

"Your hubby called me, you know. I didn't know how he found us, but he did. How are you, baby?"

There was a big lump in Alex's throat and she couldn't speak. "Hon, you alright?" Emma asked and Alex shook her head and gave her a watery smile.

"Who is that?" Stella asked. "God, I wish I am there with you."

"It is Emma, Logan's sister and I am fine. God, I have so much to say to you... I want to-"

Emma and Eliza and Beth walked out. "Call us when you need us." Em said before she closed the door, giving her the privacy to talk with her best friend.

The last time Alex talked with Stella was after her dad died. Stella wanted to come back, but Alex had said no. After that, they hadn't talked for almost three months. Stella didn't know about her losing everything. It all happened after she went away with her husband as a part honeymoon, part business tour.

"I am so jealous right now. It is like one hell of a bad luck. I miss you and -- Adam and I, we are stuck in the Switzerland airport."

"Airport?"

"Your Logan booked tickets for me and Adam, you know, to come to your wedding. God, I was so excited to see you, but I am stuck here in the snow storm. It is chaotic in here."

"He booked you a ticket." Alex whispered as she wiped her cheeks. She couldn't stop crying. She was going to mess up everything Eliza and Emma had done.

"It was a surprise gift for you."

"And what a gift it is." Alex said as she stood up.

Even though Stella was not coming, it still meant Logan tried so hard. He cared enough to find her friend, who was her only family, right now. It meant the world to her.

"God, I really wish you are here. I have no one who is mine. I wish my dad is here, too." Even as she said it, she knew. If her dad was here, she wouldn't be *here.* She wouldn't have met Logan or agreed to this outrageous ploy. So...

"You have Logan, honey. You know, he did this for you. It is one hella gesture, from your hubby, babe. You are lucky. Not everyone would have thought of this, thought to find me for you."

"Yes."

But he did. He did it for her. And the fear, the panic she felt a moment ago --and the guilt-- evaporated as she said bye to her best friend and hung up.

Alex would do anything for him, and if he wanted her to lie, she would.

She dialled Logan's number. She wanted so bad to say *I love you* to him, but no, she would not.

"Hey." He said.

"If you are here, I would kiss you until you can't see straight."

"Whoa! Slow down. What happened to friends and not kissing and having boundaries?" He chuckled.

"That still stands, and this was an one time only offer." She smiled and he laughed. "I got a call from Stella."

"Oh." He said. "She is coming, right?"

"No. There was a snow storm, and they are stuck in the airport. That was why she called me. But thank you, Logan. You don't know how much this means to me."

"Uhm, you are welcome, Lex and hey, if the offer still stands, I can sneak in."

"Nah. It expired." She said and he groaned.

"That is so unfair. You are the one who called me and made me feel all hot and bothered-"

"Are you? Hot and bothered?"

"You wanna come and take a peek at my pants?"

She flushed red. "No thanks." She said, her voice husky.

"Are you imagining me naked?" He sounded suggestive.

"N-no." She twitched as her body felt heated.

"Why do I think you are so lying?"

"Jerk. I am hanging up."

"Scaredy cat." He teased as she hung up and someone knocked at the door. She was quick to open the door.

"What is that look? Did you think it is Logan?" Emma winked.

"No."

"The blush in your cheeks tell a whole other story, girl friend. Get up. It is go time."

"Okay. Where is Andy and Brian?"

"Here." The two came to her and grabbed her hands, one on each side. "You look beautiful, aunt Alex." Andy said and Brian agreed. They both looked dapper in tuxes and bow ties.

Camille wore a beautiful silk dress, that matched Emma's and Eliza's. She gave a smile to Alex. "Welcome to our family, aunty."

"Thanks, honey."

"Okay, here we go." Eliza said as Emma walked out.

"You know, you can still marry us."

"Stop trying to poach her, guys. Uncle Logan would skin you both." Camille chuckled as she followed her mom and with a small smile, Alex followed them.

And this time she had no doubts.

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(Logan)

"Logan, stop twitching."

"Why are they not coming?"

"They are coming. Stop thinking and just look straight ahead. She will be there in a minute."

"It is already thirty minutes." Logan complained.

"No, it is not. It is only five minutes since you are here." Daniel grumbled. "God, you are a wreck."

"Thank you so much." Logan grumbled. "Now where in the world is she?"

"There she is."

He looked up and he was stuck by how angelic she looked. His breath stuttered and he could not take his eyes off her. He couldn't even blink.

Where in the world did he find her?

It wasn't just how beautiful she looked, it was also that smile in her lips. Genuine and pure.

"Close your mouth. It is unattractive, boss." Tom whispered next to him. "But it is so sweet."

Logan ignored him. He didn't want to miss looking at her, not for a second.

She looked up and her eyes found his. Her eyes smiled as he widened his eyes.

You look so beautiful.

Oh, I know.
~~~

Cheeky.

Thanks. You look okay, too. She rolled her eyes and he chuckled.

"Wait, are you two talking with your eyes or something?" Daniel's voice was puzzled. "I mean you smiled, she winked and you bit your lips and she rolled her eyes and then you chuckled and she looked like-"

"Shh, go away." Logan said when Alex came to stand in front of him.

Andy and Brian gave him a sullen pout. "You should take care of her." Andy said as he looked at Logan.

"I will." Logan said.

And then everything was going according to the plan. Logan went with a Judge rather than a priest. It felt too much to get a priest.

"Yes, I do." He said when the man asked if he agreed to legally take her as his wedded wife.

The judge asked the same to Alex. She looked around for a moment and she looked distracted. Logan squeezed her hands in his and she gave him a look that was unreadable before she nodded.

"Yes." She said, her voice barely audible.

"You can kiss your bride." He leaned in and pressed his lips against those warm and plump lips. It had been too long, okay, maybe not that long, but still, he missed kissing her. And if what she said was true, this was his only chance.

She was unmoved for a moment and he cringed inside. She stood still and he wanted to make her kiss him back. He wanted to make her want him just much as he wanted her.

He pressed a little and this time she gave him a kiss back. This time, her hands crept around him and all was right.

Someone cleared their throat.

"Log, you can do the rest when you two are alone. Young kids here." It was Daniel. Logan pulled away, and Alex looked embarrassed.

"Come on, let us go party and dance." He grabbed her hand and they went to great the guests.

"You look beautiful." Logan stopped on his tracks.

"What the hell are you doing here? Nobody sent you and invite." Logan glared at the man in front of him. His smug smile made Logan want to punch him in the face.

"I did." Alex said as she smiled up at Leo. "Glad you could make it."

"Mom came too. She was so impressed with what you did so far for her, even when you were planning the wedding. I was, too. It was all amazing, Alex."

"Thank you."

"Come on," Logan said.

"What?"

"Dance."

"Why are you not singing?" Alex blinked at Leo, looking flirty as hell.

What the hell. She just got married and she was flirting with other men in front of her husband?

"Nobody asked me."

"I am asking you. At least one song, please. I love 'loving the liar' one."

"That is an odd request for a wedding song." Leo said.

"I just love that song."

"Okay, I will sing it for you." He said as he walked to the band in the back. They all looked awestruck when they saw Leo and when Leo asked for the backup, they were ready to do anything he wanted.

As he started singing, Alex closed her eyes.

"Are you just going to stand here and moon over him or are you dancing with me?"

"Grumpy. What crawled up your ass?"

"You were flirting with him."

"No, I was being friendly."

"Whatever." He grabbed her hands and pulled her closer to him. This was exactly where he wanted her to be.

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(Alexandra)

Everyone was gone. The house was empty, and as soon as everyone left, she came back to her room and was avoiding Logan. He left her alone, as if he understood.

She stared at the mirror with wonder. She had never believed that she could be this beautiful. There was a glow in her face that belied the fact that this was all faked.

It was as if she had just married the man she so dearly loved, and it was all for real.
~~~

If she just closed her eyes and let her dream... She could see, feel how this night would be.

She would not be staring at herself in the mirror. She would be with Logan, touching, and kissing him, all of him and he would be the one staring at her. His eyes would be the one all over her, feasting on her.

She could imagine him on her, taking her, teasing her, giving her a taste of him. He would be delicious, and Alex had no doubt about that. He would be all that she had ever dreamed of

You can just give in and maybe then it will not all be in your dreams.

The voice was taunting. Goading. It almost wanted her to make him beg for her, just as she was begging with herself.

What would he do if she wore one of those skimpy negligees Emma and Eliza had bought for her and showed up in his door? Would he refuse her?

No, he won't.

The answer was almost instant. He wouldn't, because she knew he wanted her. Everytime he looked at her, she could see how much he wanted her. She could see his desire burning trails on her skin, on her body. And it made her feel sexy and bold. It made her want to tease him until he couldn't stand straight.

Oh, how she wanted to stop being so sensible and do something reckless and wild. Do something so wrong, until it all felt so right.

She pulled the pins keeping her hair away and let her hair fall down her back. She massaged her aching scalp, imagining that it was Logan.

She sighed as she pressed her fingers against her cheeks.

She pulled one of her old ratty shirt and wore it to bed. She didn't want to even see the things her friends had bought for her, for she was afraid that it would wipe her clean of rational thoughts and that she would do something dangerous that she would regret later.

Please. No way. You can't do that to me. You can't.

The hell with it!

Your tears are my undoing. - Logan ~~~

Chapter 22

21. Wet dreams and very real realities

(Logan)

He couldn't sleep. All he could imagine was her, in his bed, twisting and writhing, as he made love to her. As he took them both to ecstasy. And beyond.

He could almost taste her in his tongue, the taste that would be unlike anything. Addictive and alluring. Her.

He wanted to go to her door and plead with her to just give him this one night. But he was sure one night wouldn't be enough for him to satisfy his hunger. It was like a sharp, stinging pain, and it was everywhere.

He craved, yearned a taste of her. Just her. And this hunger, only she could feed. No other would do.

He felt like his room was in the middle of a burning building or the Sahara desert. It was so hot. His whole body was burning. For her.

He pulled the cover over his head and groaned as he closed his eyes.

"Damn it. Get the hell away, Alexandra, I am trying to sleep."

"You want me to go away?" Her voice was sultry, and it was almost too real. He blinked and opened his eyes. She was still there.

"Now I am going insane."

Why the hell is he imagining her now? God. It almost felt real. He looked up and choked on his own spit.

Her hair was loose and all over her and she looked flushed. She looked like seduction and sin, wrapped up together. Like she came to him to give him pain and pleasure. All at once. She took a step close and then she was dancing towards him.

He moaned as he pulled the cover away and she teased his lips with her fingers.

"Kiss me."

"Oh, naughty, naughty, I am not kissing you. I told you the other day about that contract."

"Then what the hell are you doing here?"

"You tell me." She said as she stood up.

"Don't go. Don't."

He woke up, feeling sweaty and hard and wanting to go back to sleep and dream more.

Is that all a dream?

Shit. Shit. Shit. I am in deep trouble.

He took the bottle of water in the small refrigerator he kept in his room, and took a sip and then another and before he knew, it was over and he wanted more water.

He splashed some water against his face and fell head first into his bed.

Sleep. He had to go back to sleep. It was just two and he didn't even have to wake up early to go to work. He needed to sleep, right now. He couldn't just sit here staring at the shadows.

I can't. I want her. I want to see her. To touch her. To -

Make love to her. To mark her.

But she was not his to mark. Or make love.

He sighed as he stood up.

He needed more water, his throat felt like a dry, arid desert. He opened the door, walked out and he wanted instantly to turn back, but he couldn't.

He stared at her, standing there in the light of the refrigerator, wearing what felt like something made to torture men, especially him, and he shut his eyes and sighed. She looked like sin and pleasure. She looked like the promises of hundred sleepless nights.

God. She is going to kill me.

The thing was shorter than his boxers and it had straps on her back, that showed everything to his feasting eyes.

And it was deep, seductive red.

He shuddered. If he stood there any longer, he was going to come and this was going to be faster than his first time.

Where the hell did she find this thing and why the hell is she wearing it?

This was damn middle of the night.

He almost wanted to believe that she was wearing it for him, just to torment him.

Would it be preposterous to think so?

Maybe not.

***

(Alexandra)

She woke up from a dream, a hot, bothering dream and she couldn't go back no matter how hard she tried. She told herself that what she would be trying to do was not only dangerous for her heart, but also for her body. But...

What if she wanted more and more? When it came to Logan, she was always greedy. And unsatisfied.

She shook her head as she pulled the red thingy and stared at it with a sigh. No one in their right mind would call this *thing* anything. A piece of cloth was what it was. She removed her white tee and put it on and the satiny silk slid against her smooth skin that made her moan.

She was going to him, but first she had to make a pit stop to prepare herself. She walked to the dark kitchen and switched on the bulb. It casted a dull blue glow over the place.

She opened the refrigerator and pulled out a bottled water.

"What are you wearing?" His voice sounded hoarse. It rasped against her skin, sending delicious tremors through her nerve cells. She wanted to hide, but she wore this negligee for him, so.

The night breeze was gentle and cool on her skin, and so was the refrigerator air, but she still felt hot all over when she heard him taking a step. Away from her or towards her, she had no idea. She didn't turn to him. She didn't look at him.

She was teetering and she was sure just looking at him would push her off the ledge. She wasn't ready, but she was always unprepared when it came to him. So... Better be safe than sorry. Better not turn to look at him and his temptations.

Not before she was fully ready.

She pressed the water bottle against her burning cheek and inhaled. She could hear the tik-tok of the clock and if she tried enough, she could also hear how uneven his breathing sounded. She smoothed her dress with sweaty palms.

Okay. Here I go.

"You want water?" She asked, and her voice was strange even to her own ears. In the shadows and silence of the night, it felt like a seductive song, a siren's call.

She could hear his breathing hitch and suddenly he was near her. She gasped when she felt his body behind her. Too close, yet too far away.

Only a step and she would be in his arms. She could have it all. Her dreams would come true. And it wouldn't just be dreams.

But she was afraid to take that step.

He was not.

His heart was not on the line, here.

He pressed an open-mouthed kiss to the back of the exposed skin and she gasped and moaned. He pressed another kiss at the top of her spine, in between the crisscross of threads on her back and she felt weak-kneed.

"If you want me to stop, please tell me now. If it goes any further, I am afraid I can't do it, I can't control myself." His voice was hoarse and pleading and thick with desire.

That was the push she needed. She turned back and pressed her body against his and he groaned as his arms went around her to pull her closer.

"My God, Alexandra, you don't know how much I wanted this." He said as he grabbed her by her hips and lifted her up to the kitchen slab, before he came to stand in between her legs.

She could feel how much he wanted this. Her cheeks heated as she stared in to his eyes. Dark and dangerous and addicting eyes. They could just look and make her feel like the most amazing, most wonderful woman in the world.

"God, you are so beautiful." He traced her forehead, to her eyebrows, to her cheeks, to her lips and pressed a kiss on her chin. His fingers followed his lips, now, down her chin, her neck. They traced her collar bones, gentle and then with pressure and she shuddered when his fingers moved down, further and further. They lingered closer to her heart and she was so sure he could hear her riotous heart, slamming against her breast, against his open palms.

His eyes were full of unquenched desire and she knew hers would look the same when he bent down and nuzzled her slender throat with his lips and grazed along it with his teeth.

She moaned as she bit her lips and pressed closer to him. God. She wanted the clothes between them gone. She wanted to touch him without any barrier.

"Do you like it?" He whispered, the sound of his voice deep and urgent as he pushed his fingers inside to find her naked, scorching skin. It felt like sweet relief.

She nodded. She couldn't find any words, nothing in her body was working the right way, when he was touching and teasing her and it was making her feel things she wasn't sure all right!

"Do you like it?" He pressed his lips against her neck and sucked and she groaned. It was torture. Pure and simple. And his voice was like a trail of fire on her body.

The pain in her core, the heat pooling between her legs, it was all so strange and different for her. He grabbed her hands in his and pressed it against his chest. "Tell me, Lex."

"Yes." She mewled, feeling wanton and shy at the same time. She pulled his hands and pressed it against her aching breasts, her eyes looking anywhere but at him.

"Look at me." He said softly and she did.

His fingers played with her and she arched back and she wanted to purr like a cat. She didn't.

Her nerve endings felt like a tightly strung guitar cords and only his fingers could tune it. Only he could make a music out of her. This sexy, seductive, alluring music.

It was like he was the fire she had needed in all those nights of empty coldness. He was warm, he was burning, he was fast and gentle and she felt desired. She felt like she had wings on her back and like she could fly away with him. To everywhere and nowhere.

She clawed at his shirt, feeling like she would simply explode if she didn't feel him, touch him. He chuckled as he pulled his shirt away and there he was, so strong, so beautiful and so warm.

Mine.

For tonight, he was all hers. And she wasn't going to waste it by overthinking everything.

Tonight they belonged. Even if it had all started with some inappropriate proposal, they were married and they were here.

She let her nails draw on his skin and then her fingers soothed it and he stood there, still, unmoving, his eyes locked on hers. She could see how dark they could get when he was aroused and it made her feel so powerful that she could do that to him.

She looked up at him, her eyes hooded and shy, and he smiled.

"God. You are-" He pulled her to him and kissed her lips and she playfully bit it and he chuckled before he pulled her back to him.

His lips fused with hers, breathing her in, and giving his breath back to her. Sharing essence and breath, the kiss left her with hope and confusion.

I love you.

The tumult of emotions surging through her heart and body, it was so uncontrollable. It ran wild with abandon. The words wanted to come pouring out of her, but she bit it back.

This wasn't the time. If she told him, she knew he would never touch her like this. He wouldn't use her after knowing how she felt. He wasn't like that. So she just shut her love and let her lust pour out.

Slowly, he pressed his tongue against her lips, leaving tingles in its wake, and she gasped open, giving him the entrance he so badly wanted. His groan died inside her throat, and her words died inside his tongue. She didn't remember anything, except him.

"Logan..." His name on her tongue went unheard as he mated with her tongue, and she savored every nip and bite. He took his sweet time torturing her. And she felt the pain grow as he kissed her like he had all the time in the world.

What is happening to me? She thought as her eyes went blurry. She looked up at him and he gave her a dazed smile, with dimples and all and she felt like someone had just dipped her in a bath filled with fresh cream and honey and white and pink roses.

When he stopped kissing her, finally, to take a breath, she felt like a warmed marshmallow melting by the campfire.

He pressed her fingers to his lips and smiled up at her, looking so self-satisfied and happy and delirious. She felt the same. She wanted to dance and bounce and do a pirouette.

"I told you that we will see and here we are." He gave her a naughty smile and she shook her head.

"Are you for real? Are you really going to bring that up now?" She shook her head as she gave him a dirty look.

"I did." He said as he grabbed the half finished bottle and gulped it down and looked her up and down. "So where did you find this thing? And what is it?"

"I didn't. Your sisters brought it for me and it is a negligee."

"Yuck. I didn't need to hear that." He shrunk his nose and shook his head, as if he wanted to dispel whatever thoughts he just had. "And the thing neglected to cover you up!"

"You did, after you just brought that day up." She smiled as she pulled the fridge open.

"What are you doing?" He grabbed her by her hips and pressed his body until she could feel every contour of it, every ridge and pane and his desire. His skin was smooth against her back, smooth and exciting.

"I feel like eating an ice cream. That was why I was here in the first place." It was only half a lie.

"Really? So you are wearing this thing for yourself? In the middle of the night?" He gave her a wicked smile.

"Of course." She shrugged.

"Yeah?" He nipped her shoulder and then licked it before pressing a kiss right where he nipped. "Why don't I believe that?" He grinned at her.

"You have the right to your choice." She gave him an innocent look before she took the ice cream tub from the freezer. It was cookie dough and the moment she saw it, she wanted to eat it. She was too hot and she needed to cool down.

"Really? God. I want to eat you, all of you and I am starving and you are going to eat ice cream?" He sounded exasperated and she chuckled.

"You want to eat me?" She smiled at him. "I don't know, but can you? Our contract-"

"The heck with the contract. I can do it as long as you want me to do it." His eyes x-rayed her from the top of her head and the tip of her toes and she felt heat pulsing through her. The fizz of electric charge between them wasn't her imagination.

"Then you have to wait."

"Heartless woman." He sighed as she sat down. He sat down next to her and put his chin on his opened palms and watched as she ate.

"Don't look at me like that. It is distracting me."

"Like what?" He asked and she stared at his chest before she looked up at him.

"Like you want to swallow me or something." She rolled her eyes.

"I do want to swallow you." He said as he grabbed her up and then pulled her down his lap. "Now you can finish your ice cream." He said as his fingers played with the hem of her skimpy negligee.

"I want to rip this away."

"Don't you dare. It is expensive."

"I can buy you a new one."

"You are not ripping it off, Logan. Hush now, and do what you were doing before and let me eat in peace." She said and he chuckled.

"So bossy." He said as he went back to kissing her and teasing her and touching her. When she finished eating ice cream and felt like she could finally control herself, she stood up, turned around and sat right back on him. He gasped and she could feel him, she could feel how turned on he was and it almost frightened her.

This was all so new to her. It wasn't like she didn't know what was what, she wasn't that naive, but she had never experienced it. Everything she had known was from her bookish knowledge.

"Ah, that feels so good, baby." He said as she pushed her fingers through his thick, silky hair and stared at him.

He was so beautiful in the moonlight. Like a prince, only much, much better. He looked like someone had taken time to carve him up. All lean and lithe and when he moved, he moved like a ballet dancer.

Whenever she looked at him, she couldn't help but admire how handsome he was. Yes, she loved him for his heart and his mind, but his body was an added, amazing bonus

"Lex." He said after kissing her for a while. She panted and took a deep breath. "Will you come with me?" He asked, his eyes dark and stormy on hers. She knew what he was asking, she knew she could never go back if she said yes.

Could she say yes.

Kissing, she could say yes to, without any fear. But this, this would mean something more to her. This wouldn't be just a roll in the hay or sex. This would be love making for her and she-

You know you want this.

But--

"Yes." She was more shocked than him to hear her say it.

His answering smile was what she needed to soothe her fear and the twisting in her stomach, but it didn't completely go away. The pressure in her chest was getting painful and her lungs felt like it couldn't get enough oxygen.

He grabbed her hand in his and hugged her for a moment. She pressed her cheeks against his naked chest and could hear his heart thudding the same way hers was. His skin was heated, as well.

His hug was so soft, so gentle and it made her feel safe. Like this was home. Like he was home. From the very first day, he had been home to her.

This was the same man who had just kissed her so passionately, so wildly, but he could also be just as generous and gentle and that was exactly why she was so unprepared.

She hesitated near the door and he gave her a comforting look.

"Logan." She nervously watched him as he stopped. He was tall and lean and beautiful and her eyes skittered down to his boxers and she gasped. She didn't know what to do.

Just looking at that made her eyes wide.

She felt like a coward. She felt so scared that she wanted to just run away and hide behind her room and never come back out.

"Yes?"

"I-I-" She closed her eyes before she took a deep breath. "I have never done this before."

***

(Logan)

"Logan?" Her voice was soft and breathy and nervous. He stopped and turned to look at her. She was standing just behind the door and she looked twitchy and her face was pallid. She looked like she wanted to vomit her stomach out. Or run away.

Oh my God, please don't tell me you are not leaving me like this. He thought as he looked at the beautiful woman standing in front of him. She looked ravaged, her lips were swollen and her cheeks and her whole body was flushed and her eyes were hazed and dreamy. She looked like a

moon goddess, bathed in the glow of dim light and the moon light. He wanted to take her right then and there.

She looked nervous and he wanted to say that it was alright, that it was her choice.

It was. But if she went away, right now, he would go crazy.

"Yes?" He gave her a comforting smile.

What he didn't expect was her to say what she said.

"I-I have never done this before."

His eyes widened as he appraised her. "Oh my God." He breathed out as he grabbed her hand and pulled her to him.

He kissed her forehead. "It is okay if you want to say no. But just stay with me even if you don't want to go any further, because I can't sleep alone." He was lying. He knew he was, because he didn't want her to say no.

"I really-I thought-" She looked down. "I am sorry."

What he wanted was to scream. He was aching and she was- shit, he wanted her. So bad. He closed his eyes for a moment and took a gulp of freezing air. It almost calmed him.

"Hey, don't be." He pushed a finger to her chin and pulled her face up. Her green eyes were shiny, like she was trying hard to hold in her tears and he felt like a bastard. "You don't have to say sorry for that."

"I thought I was ready. I wanted- I did, but now-"

"Ssh." He pressed his fingers against her lips. "Just come here and sleep."

"I feel like a tease. I wore this for you, Logan and I know what will happen if I did, and then- then you asked me to tell you to stop if I don't want it to go any further and I really wanted it to go-"

She closed her eyes and a single tear rolled down her cheeks and he felt his heart give. She looked so young, and sad and apologetic he couldn't help but comfort her. He wiped her tears away.

His protective instinct came alive and he didn't want to scream anymore. He just wanted to hold her in his arms and go to sleep, with her besides him.

"Lex, darling, shush now. I feel sleepy. Are you going to stand there and continue blathering or coming to sleep." He said and yawned.

"I can go, if you want me to." She said.

"I don't want you to go anywhere." He said as he sat down and she followed, her steps small and hesitant.

He pulled the cover away and crawled in before patting the side next to him. "But you are going to be my pillow today." He said and she nodded.

When she lied down, he pulled her to him and she snuggled closer until she was comfortable and he pressed his lips to her hair.

"Sleep tight, darling."

"You, too."

"I will."

Who dare question fate and its frivolous plans and ploys? If it is what made me meet you, and what made me fall in love with you, I am grateful for it. Even if it is the same that is going to break my heart. - Alexandra

Chapter 23

22. The morning afters and the surprises

(*Alexandra*)

After a while, it got harder to keep snuggling, and it felt like Logan had the same idea. He stretched and she turned around, pretending to take a glass of water and then they both pretended they were fine where they were.

She wanted to sleep, of course, she was tired from the wedding party, but she couldn't. She closed her eyes, and somehow she felt too wound up to sleep. And a little bit guilty. But a lot turned on.

She felt like a wavering pendulum, oscillating between this and that.

Now her back was to him, but she knew he wasn't sleeping, either. She could feel his every weary breath vibrating along her skin.

She turned around, trying not to make a sound. And breathed a sigh of relief when she saw his back was to her.

She didn't know what she was doing, but her hands had a mind of their own, and they crawled around his naked back and the moment she touched his skin, he jerked up, and then stayed calm. But she could feel his shiver as she wrote his name on his skin with the tip of her finger.

It was like a game. They both knew they were playing this, but nobody knew the rules. They made it as they went along.

She drew a line on his spine before she wrapped her hands around his torso and pulled herself closer to him.

She was still afraid, but she trusted him not to hurt her, not this time.

Yes, she also knew it would hurt when she said goodbye, but she almost felt like this was the right time to give in. After seeing how soft and gentle he had been when she said no, she was sure he was the only one who could take care of her, and he was the only one she wanted to have sex. To make love.

So... If she let this moment pass, she wasn't sure when it would knock again.

Not missing this.

Her fingers, slowly, hesitantly crawled down his stomach and further down and she could feel how hard he was. How very hard and she knew what it would have taken him to say no and then invite her to sleep in his bed, just to comfort her.

If he wasn't the right man for her, who else would ever be?!

His breathing hitched when she shyly touched him and he groaned.

"What are you doing?" His voice was pained and breathy. She loved it. She loved how she made him feel. How she made her feel.

It wasn't love that he felt, but she would take lust now. At least he wasn't indifferent to her. He had never been.

"This time I am sure."

"I- I don't know." He said as he grabbed her teasing fingers and pressed it against his lips. "Do you really want to or is this just some misplaced guilt, Alex?"

"I want to be friends with benefits. No strings attached." Even as she said that, she knew she came with strings, strong strings, but she would be very careful not to let him see those strings and tangles. She could pretend that her heart was not involved in this game.

That this was all some primal, lusty instinct.

She could do that.

I can.

Look how far she had come in lying, since she met him. Once upon a time, not so long ago, she would have messed his plan from the the get go, but here they were, in the bed, together and no one was the wiser.

"You know what, why don't we just go to sle-"

"Don't you want me anymore? Did you change your mind?" She bit her lips as she stared at his back.

"Does this feel like I have changed my mind?" He pressed her hand against his tented briefs and she sighed.

"No? So why not?" She said as she tried to sneak inside those boxers, but he was strong and he held her hands back.

"I am just looking out for you. You know-how"

"How I am a virgin. I know. But it is not like I am totally innocent, Logan. So why don't you just shut up and kiss me."

"You were afraid... And-"

"Oh God, are you going to keep talking?" She said as she rolled him to face her.

"God, woman, what are you-"

"You are still talking. God." She said as she grabbed his hands, pulled it over his head and kissed the hell out of him, until he started to thrash and moan her name.

"Now, this is exactly what I had in my mind when I put this thingy on." She said as he pulled her in, and kissed her, passionately. And she was begging for oxygen.

This is hot. The inner voice said with a snicker. *But dangerously addictive, so...*

God, I don't need lectures right this moment.

When he pulled the thingy off, she instantly wanted to cover up, but then she looked into his gentle gray eyes as he caressed her body with his eyes. The look on his eyes was warm and adoring and - like he had never seen anything so beautiful, like she was a fragile rose made out of blown glass and she stopped herself from closing herself or her eyes.

He made her feel beautiful.

Sometimes when she was out, she had seen eyes that wandered over her, but those eyes made her feel disgusted, feel like worms were crawling in her skin, but when Logan looked at her, it made her feel warm, tingly, excited and safe, at the same time.

She looked up at him. She wanted to see every moment she had with him. She wanted to see the look on his eyes, sometimes warm and placid, and sometimes hot and urgent as he touched her and made love to her.

"You are so beautiful."

"You are beautiful, too."

"Oh my God, no man ever want to be called beautiful. Handsome, yes. Sexy, hot, okay. Smart, can take that."

"Sometimes you talk too much."

"I have never been a fan of talking, that is until you came and messed up all my dynamics." He said as he grabbed her hips and she chuckled. "What, I am trying to be sexy here."

"And you look funny." She said and he grimaced. "And beautiful." She gave him a salacious wink and he groaned before he grabbed her. "God, don't do that. No, don't do that."

"What? What am I doing?" He asked as he continued to tickle her and she laughed and thrashed beneath him.

"Stop. Stop."

"Tell me I am handsome and I look really, really sexy, minx."

"Yes. Yes."

"What? I don't hear you."

"Wow, you are annoying, Logan and do you think this is the time to be your usual annoying self?"

"That is not what I want to hear." He said with a smirk and she smiled up at his beautiful face, with his eyes crinkled at the sides with a smile that made him glow like those glow in the dark stickers.

"You are handsome." She said, her voice soft and husky and he stopped tickling her. "So handsome that I want to keep looking at you." She moaned when he drew circles on the inside of her leg and she let her fingers memorize his face, his body.

"Come here." He pulled her to him. "You want me?"

"Yeah. So much." She groaned when she felt him closer to her, so much closer. And then he was inside her, all the way, and there was pain, yes, but when it was over, the pleasure stole her breath away. It was like the stars colliding, like the storm brewing in the secret depth of the ocean. It made her eyes roll and her breathing hitch.

She could almost see herself floating in the cloud of rainbows with liquid chocolate running, her legs weak and trembly as he pushed her to ecstasy. It was something so different, so unlike anything she had ever felt and she loved it. She loved it was him.

When she thought this was the end, he pushed her further. She closed her eyes and she screamed out his name.

"Logan." Her voice stuttered as he pleasured her beyond the lines of pleasure, until she could not keep her eyes open, or ears, until all she could feel was him and the building pleasure, and then she shattered into a million tiny stars and fell down the earth.

He followed. "Oh, my, this is-" He sighed and rolled down from her.

He pressed a kiss to her sweaty, slick shoulder and she pushed her face inside his chest.

"Wait, are you like, shy? After all this?"

"Shut up." She said before he pulled her closer. She felt warm and fuzzy and this was the only time she had ever been closer to magic.

Her eyelids drooped and for a moment, there was silence and then she gasped. His fingers made a beeline to her stomach.

"What? It is only been ten minutes." She almost purred.

"Tell that to this one." He said as he pulled her back to him and then he was lost inside her and she was found by him.

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(Logan)
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Something was ringing. He didn't want to wake up. He was perfectly fine where he was, snuggling against his -

Wife? Friend with benefits?

He groaned when the thing kept ringing.

Get a hint. I don't want to pick up. Shut up, phone. He ordered it, but the thing was not picking up his mind voice frequency.

"Logan, that is your phone." She said groggily as she leaned against him and he mumbled as he rubbed his eyes.

"I know, I am hoping that whoever it is will decide to grow some brain cell and stop." He yawned.

She tried to sit, but he pulled her back to him and she hissed at him like a steamy kettle.

"What?" He gave her a strange look and she blushed.

Okay? That is interesting.

He tried to grab her again and she swatted his hands away and this time he couldn't help but chuckle. She looked red as a tomato and she looked like she wanted to sneak out of his room, but was caught trying to do just that.

"Are you just trying to sneak out? Before my phone rang?"

"No, what are you talking about?"

"You did. Oh my God, you did. But- just humor me. Are we or are we not living in the same house?"

"Shut up and can you please turn around and hand me over a shirt."

"Do you want mine or do you want that scrap of cloth you called as a negligee." He felt like irritating her. She was so cute when she was annoyed.

"Something, anything. I would even take a dress made out of leaves."

"Okay, so to be clear, the woman who didn't want me to sleep after the third time and wanted to tease me about how lazy my thing was --which was not really lazy, if you ask me-- is now so shy she wants leaves to cover herself up."

"Don't sound too smug, you arrogant little-"

"There is nothing little about me."

"God, your head is much much bigger than everything else."

"Are you one hundred percent sure?"

"Narc." She scoffed at him. "The damn phone stopped. I am going back to sleep." She said, looking indignant.

"Not trying to sneak off anymore?"

"No."

"Good, now let me sleep for a while." He said as he spooned her and she snuggled back against him and then the phone started ringing again.

"The hell." He picked up the phone and Daniel's name flashed on the screen.

"Hey, man, are you still sleeping?"

"So? I just got married and what are you doing calling me at eight?"

"You know, you and your wife have a plane to catch at eleven. Remember that?"

"Oh shit I have totally forgotten that."

"I know, that is why I called you."

"And that is why I keep you around." Logan said and Dan chuckled.

"Okay, up and about and Em said she packed Alex' bag."

"Good."

"Wayne will pick you up in Limo."

"That is kind of over-the-counter, don't you think?" Logan scrunched his nose.

"It will be romantic. You said you want to surprise her."

He said that, yes, but he didn't say anything about Limos.

"Okay, if you are sure."

"She will love it. So..."

"Okay." He said as he stood up. Alex screamed.

"Gosh, wear something."

"Now, she wants me to wear something." He taunted as walked to his bathroom. "I have my boxers on."

"Ugh, you are insufferable."

"Alex, you have twenty minutes to get dressed. We are going out."

"I want to sleep in." She grumbled as she pulled the cover up and snuggled inside. "It is so warm." She moaned.

"No, we have some place we need to be."

"Where?"

"Just drag your lazy ass out of the bed and take a shower, or you can join me. We can save water and time."

"Perv." She mumbled.

"What? I am trying to be sensible." He chuckled as he opened the warm water and the water slid down his body, soothing and comforting.

He closed his eyes and leaned against the wall when the door opened. He jerked upright and his eyes widened when he saw Alex standing there, with a smirk on her beautifully flushed face.

"What?"

"What what? I am just looking for some shampoo. Mine is empty." She said with a wicked smile.

"Brat." He muttered as he grabbed his shampoo and threw it at her. "Catch."

She tried, but the bottle slipped down her hands and hit the floor.

"God, idiot, warn me next time before you decided to throw random things at me." She bent down to pick it and the slippery floor was too much. She slid down and looked up at him, her eyes furious.

"I asked you to catch it."

"I can't stand."

"Here, hold my hand." She did and as he tried to pull her up, he slipped and fell down, over her, hitting his head in the glass.

"Oh my God, what are you doing?" She screamed as her back hit the tiled floor with a thud. Now she was fully wet and he was fully awake and aroused. "Ow, ow, God."

He rubbed his head as he looked at her. "You alright there?"

"Yeah, I am so comfortable here in your cold tiles with soap suds and freezing water that I just want to go back to sleep." She said, her words dripping with sarcasm.

"No need to be all sarcastic. It is not my fault that you can't catch a bottle." He said as he sat down next to her. "Come on." He said as he grabbed her by her hips and pulled her next to him. She grumbled as he rubbed the back of her head. "Did it hurt?" He looked into her dizzying green eyes and she shook her head.

"Nah, fine." She stood up and he picked up the shampoo.

"You can stay, you know, you are already half done."

"No thank you, idiot." She said as she grabbed the shampoo and stormed out.

"Be careful." He said at the same time he heard her cursing at the *damn* door. He chuckled as he went back to his shower.

After he was done showering, he wore a black turtle neck with his leather jacket and pulled out his favorite denim pants. Combing his fingers through his hair, he started himself at the mirror and shrugged. That was as casual he could ever be.

When he walked out, she was already in the kitchen, scrambling eggs. She looked up and stopped as she stared at him.

"What?"

"You look different."

"Good or bad different?" He smiled as he pulled out a chair for him and her and poured two cups of steaming coffee.

"Sexy different." She said in a matter-of-fact tone before she went back to her eggs.

That was something he liked about Alex. She was shy, yes, but she wasn't all games. When she wanted to say something, she said it without overthinking it or being coy or subtle. He loved how straightforward she could be.

"Thanks. You look okay yourself." He said and she threw a sliced pepper at him with a grumbled. He caught it and took a bite out of it with a smile.

When they finished dinner, he walked her to the limo and he loved how her magical green eyes were sparkling with mirth when he opened the door for her and poured her a glass of bubbling champagne.

"Whoa, this is fancy. So where are we going?" She asked as she leaned back on the leathery cushion. He pondered to think before he gave her a wink.

"Surprise."

"Ugh, I don't like surprises very much. I kinda abhor it." She wrinkled her nose and he had this urge to tweak her nose. She looked too cute when she was annoyed.

When the limo stopped in front of the airport, she rolled her eyes.

"What?" He asked.

"Are we going somewhere loud and glamorous for our honeymoon? Please tell me no."

"No." He shrugged. He grabbed their suitcase and rolled them inside as she followed him, peppering him with questions.

"Oh come on, stop asking." He said, when she asked for the hundredth time where they were going. "Woman, please."

"I really don't fare well with unanswered questions. They claw and claw on my insides, until I burst. It is going to happen and then you will be the one to blame."

"Ah, don't be so dramatic." He said.

"I am not. It is the truth. And if I burst, there will be no surprise anymore." She gave him that doe-eyed look that sometimes made him want to do things he would not typically do. Like buying a new table. Like asking her to sleep with him even after she said no to sex. Like... Like marrying her.

"No, can't tell. You have to learn patience, Alex." He taunted as they walked in through security check. She rolled her eyes and muttered something under her breath.

"Oh, wait." He said as he stopped and picked up his ringing phone.

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(Alexandra)

Alex watched as he stopped on the tracks. Just a minute ago, he looked so warm and naughty, but now the look was replaced with stark seriousness and cold aloofness. He was full on business mode now.

It was such a contrast, the two face of his. He pointed her to sit and she didn't want to, but she took the seat, anyways, as he paced the room, looking like a caged tiger wanting to rip off its cage. He was saying something to the person on the other end in an angry whisper, but she couldn't hear anything.

Whatever the person had said might have irritated or angered him, because he looked like he wanted to punch through the walls.

He said something, and then shook his head as he stalked towards her.

"I have to go." He said and she felt the deep pit of disappointment widening in her stomach, but she nodded he head as she stood up.

She was so excited to be with him, to be alone, to have him all for herself. Just for a few days.

"Okay." She stood up, hauling a bag and he waved at her.

"You can go by yourself if you want." He looked like he meant it, too.

Like I want to go on her honeymoon all alone. How pathetic would that be!

She really wanted to throw that bag at his face, instead she scoffed.
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"Yeah, like I want to go anywhere in the first place. It was your stupid surprise. Well. Consider me surprised." She said as she marched past him.

He didn't say anything as he followed her out of the airport and called in a cab.

"I am sorry." He said when they sat in the cab.

She shrugged.

"It is okay. It is not like any of this is real. So it will be better if we stop pretending that this is. It will be much, much easier." She said before she looked out the window.

"I know you are angry, but..."

"Please don't say anything."

This is not real. We are not the real deal.

She had to remind herself how unreal this was. Over and over and over again.

Because her stupid heart was not getting the damn gist.

My heart is riding on an unicorn over a rainbow whenever I see you. - Alex

Chapter 24

23. Good songs and bad, bad shocks

(Alexandra)

Alex opened the shower and stood under it, eyes closed, a small frown adorning her lips. She had been feeling vengeful and murderous since that fateful night and the ruined morning. Her morning.

It had been two days since he had brought her all the way to the airport --she didn't want to, did she? All she wanted was to sleep in --and then asked her to go on her honeymoon alone.

He is such a moron.

She still didn't know where he was planning to bring her, she still didn't know why he had to cancel at the last time.

It wasn't like he was giving her excuses or reasons. He was giving her nothing.

She felt moody and vexed and she wanted to kill someone. If that someone was Logan, all the better.

They hadn't been talking much since then. He was barely home and when he was home, he was on his phone half the time, whispering into it.

She just didn't care anymore. She didn't want to be the only one who was trying.

What am I suppose to do? I am an idiot. A brainless, senseless idiot. I should have woken up the moment he gave me that damn contract, shouldn't I? She thought as she toweled her hair dry.

I hope he had had his breakfast. She thought as she pulled on a robe.

"Well. I don't care. No. Dammit. I won't care." She muttered as she turned off the shower and walked out.

It wasn't like she had too much time on her hands. She couldn't waste time thinking or pondering about the mystery of Mr. Enigma.

Oh, he so loves to act all so mysterious, doesn't he? She scoffed as she threw the towel at the bed. If he saw that, he would be all mighty and smug and tell her not to be messy.

"If you want to take that towel and dry it, you do it. I am not doing it, stupid ass."

Girlie, you are going insane.

"Stop thinking about him. I have things to do."

Of course, she had things to do, as well. She was busy redecorating Mathilda Shine's mansion. She had to call the furniture store two times to ask about the shipment and they had said no both the times and it was frustrating.

Alex pulled out a cardigan and put it on before she walked out. She had called Emma to ask for a ride, because Logan was just so busy to do so. He was already a no see.

Alex scoffed as Em opened the door for her and gave her a frown.

"You two are the most unromantic, impossible people I have ever seen."

"Not me. Just your moron of a brother."

"Why again did he cancel the trip? He was excited about it." Emma said as she stared at Alex.

Alex really wanted to ask where he had planned to bring her, but she knew how it would sound and look. So she curbed her curiosity and looked out the foggy window.

"Don't look so morose." Emma said and Alex shook her head as she sulked.

"I have earned the right to be. I hate your brother."

"Nah, you love him." She chuckled and Alex threw a candy wrapper that was on the dashboard at her. "Ew."

"I do, but for now, I have earned the right to hate him, as well."

"That you did." Em patted on her palms. "You should buy yourself a car."

"Ow, what? You don't want to be my chauffeur?"

"I like it, but what if I am not available?"

"I will ask El." Alex shrugged. She wasn't going to ask Logan for a car. It wasn't in the damn contract.

"What if she is not there as well."

"I will walk." Alex grumbled.

"Don't be an idiot. He is your husband. You have also earned the right to nag, complain and empty his bank balance. So?" Emma said with a smug look.

"No, don't do anything, please. I really don't want a car."

"Alexandra Annie Steele. You are the most stubborn woman I have ever seen. You really are a perfect person for my brother."

If only your brother can see it, Alex thought with a frown. But he would never see it. Never see her the way she wanted him to see her.

Of course he cared. Of course he liked her. but that was as far as he would go, and it was so obvious with everything he did. Or didn't do.

"Here is your stop. Do you want me to pick you up?"

"No, Leo said he will give me a drive. Apparently he has a singer's block or something and he has so much time in his hands."

"Leo Shine is cute." Emma smirked. "Maybe this isn't completely pointless."

"Don't let your brother hear that!" Alex wagged a finger at her before she stepped out and waved Emma a good bye. She watched as Emma drove away before she walked in.

"Hey, Alex."

"Hi, Leo. Are you ready for this adventure?"

"I am born ready." He said as he gave a fist to her.

"Do I have to bump it." Alex shrunk her nose as she looked at his fist.

"Oh, come on. Do it already." He groaned when she shook her head.

"No, I am fine here."

"God." He shook his head, looking dejected. "Have you lost your funny bones after being in the company of Logan for so long?"

"Maybe." Alex grinned as he opened the door. "Hey, are those-"

"Books, yes."

"They are already here. Wow, fast."

"Do you want to do the library today? I can help you out?"

"So you really have so much time in your hands, eh?"

"That is what I said."

"Ok, let us do it then."

They both walked to the library and stared at the shelves for a while before Alex dragged a box inside the room.

"God, they are heavier than they look."

"You know, you must hire an assistant. It will get harder once your business grows, and it won't be easy to do this all alone. Two assistant, much better. A guy to do grunt works and a girl. Hire a pretty one."

"Leo Shine, stop thinking about girls and get into these boxes." Alex ordered as she plucked a pocket knife from her bag, which was more of an utility sack than a bag and started pulling it across the tape in the box.

When she opened it, she couldn't blink. It was breathtaking, the sight and smell of it. So many beautiful covers of so many beautiful stories...

This was like Alex's heaven. This here was beautiful, beautiful beings living inside a book, fighting for what was theirs, giving hope to the hopeless. This here was magic and reality packed together, pages after pages of words and worlds.

She sighed.

"Oh, you look like you are in heaven or somewhere closer."

"Yes, I am. What have you there?"

"Autobiographies." He said with a smile. "And this one is a box full of romance novels." He gave her a wink. "The covers look hot."

"Yeah, the stories are hot, too." She said as she picked up a novel by Nora Roberts and pretended to swoon. "I love Nora Roberts."

"I do, too."

"You do?" She gave him a look that said she didn't believe it.

"What, I grew up reading my mom's novels. My mom loves Nora and so am I. It made me who I am-"

"A playboy?" It wasn't Alex. Alex looked up to see Trish Patel standing there, her hands on her hips, a frown on her pink painted lips. Her ponytail was still straight, still neat and her power suit fit her like a glove.

Alex tried not to cringe. She knew how she would look -- like she had just been on a ride in the rollercoaster-- messy hair and an even messier cardigan.

"Nah, a romantic. But, what are you doing here?"

"Hunting you. Are you hiding in your Mother's house? Have you really stooped that low?"

"No, I am not."

"Really?" Trish gave him an irritated frown. Alex shook her head as she went back to her books. This was not her problem and she really didn't want to make an enemy out of Trish Patel. She looked like she could win all the battles and wars and still stand without any wounds, so...

No, thank you.

"Come on, just don't call Meredith. Please. I am in a rut here and I need a muse. I am trying to find a muse, I am, so cut me some slack, Tree."

"Leo Shine, I have been to two of your messy apartments --do you clean them ever?-- and after that I went to three of your friends houses, and except Greg, the other two are sex-addicted morons with penis as their brains and after that I have to call your mother and then Sameer and then here I am. So don't tell me I need to cut you some slack. What I need is to cut you. Into damn little pieces."

Alex really wanted to chuckle. Or maybe applaud. The woman didn't even look breathy after that very long, angry monologue. She looked calm and steady as she waved her hands at her face before she took a deep breath.

It was really amazing and amusing to watch Leo turning that shade of vivid red as Trish went on and on about how irresponsible and childish he was.

Alex was enjoying the show. She let out a small chuckle when Trish called Leo a pea-brained pest and a moronic monkey. That was really creative.

"What?" Trish gave Alex a glare. "You think this is funny?"

"No, sorry." Alex said as she shook her head.

"Why don't you get someone else to do your works? He already has too much to do and-"

"I didn't ask him to help me, you know." Alex cut in. Yes, she almost feared Trish Patel, but she wouldn't sit still and not say anything when that woman accused her of things she didn't do. It wasn't like Leo was a kid and she took advantage of him.

"Yeah, whatever. Look here, Leo, if you are not done writing that cover track for the 'Last Summer Night' in two days, I will personally deliver you to Meredith. I am not even your damn manager. God. You should pay me a hella lot than you are paying me now." Trish sighed before she looked at Alex. "Hey I am sorry, it is just that he can be so frustrating at times. I- I am sorry." She looked ashamed.

"I am sorry, too." Alex said as she waved at Leo. "Get going, Leo. I can do my work. I don't need you here."

"But I want to be here, Alex."

Alex didn't miss the sour look Trish gave Leo when he said that.

"Do whatever you want. But that damn thing has to be ready in two days. That is all. Now, I am going to go." She said as she stormed out the same way she stormed in.

"Gosh, can you believe that woman? It is like she is paying me and I am working for her."

"But she is not totally wrong. You need to finish that track, no? I have been waiting for your new album, Leo."

"The thing is, I-I just don't have the right music for the cover track. It feels too bland, too ordinary, and I don't want that. You know, as you get older, it almost feels like the music is slipping away from you and you are doing this all for money and I hate that feeling. I hate that."

"Why don't you let me hear the track and be the judge?" She said as she picked up the books and stood up. "After I finish this. You can go to the room and work on it until then."

"Okay. Thanks." He said as he stood up with a grin. "My guitar is in my car. I will go and bring it in."

"Very good, go on. I am fine here."

"Bye, Alex."

[*Sunkissed goodbyes]*

The magic in your eyes

The twilight hours of

Love and dreams

The blush in your cheeks

The sun-kissed skies of

Pinks and romance

Oh,baby, I close my eyes and see

That all your smiles are not for me.

I close my eyes and dearly wished

For all the things I have missed.

Leo's voice was smooth and beautiful. His eyes were closed and he looked like he was lost in his music, in the words. He sang like he meant it, but still...

He opened his eyes and took a deep breath. "So? What do you think? Good enough to be the cover track?"

Alex smiled up at Leo. "This is beautiful, but yes, as you said, it is not totally right there. There is something missing. I don't know what, but I just know I am not feeling Leo there."

She had heard all of his songs and there was something in that, some magic, heart and feeling in the music, even if it wasn't in the words.

"That is what I am saying. I feel like it lacks some essence. Something. That is why I need time to get it together." He said as he stood up. "I am going to work on it, some more." He said and waved at her. "Come on, I will drop you off." He grabbed the keys from the lone side table and picked up his guitar like it was a baby.

It might be his baby.

"Thanks, Leo." She grabbed her bag and walked out with him.

"Nah, thank you. I feel like I can make the song much better now. I needed the break. I needed a friend."

"Yeah? I am a good friend material, am I not?"

"Weirdo. Stop." He chuckled and rolled his eyes and she followed.

***

(Logan)

"Tom, I have a meeting scheduled now. I have to go. You will get me an update on the new site, right?"

"Just whatever. Boss." Tom grumbled.

"What is with you today? You are all one words and grunts. You don't sound like yourself."

"I sound like you, I know."

"Okay, are you going to tell me what is wrong?"

"What is wrong? What is wrong?"

"Yes, Tom. That is what I asked."

"What is wrong is that you are here. You are here for two damn days and you got married. To an amazing woman. That is what is so wrong."

"I just have some important-"

"Yeah, save it." Tom said as he walked out. Logan shook his head as he stood up.

"Donna, I asked Amelia about the Marble price from Al's and Eckhart's. Make sure she has that ready for tomorrow. I am going now."

"You should be going yesterday, but here you are."

"Wow, everyone in this office is really concerned with my honeymoon. Even my wife didn't care that much."

"You sure?"

"I am sure." He was sure. Almost. Okay, he wasn't sure, but he didn't have lot of time to think about that right now.

"Bye." He said as he walked out and opened his car door.

To think about it, he had not seen much of her since that disaster in the airport and after he said those angry words. She reacted angrily and he didn't know whether she had gotten over it or not.

Today, I am going to talk with her. I have to.

He thought as he steeped out and walked inside a tiny, cozy cafe.

Logan looked at his watch and then at the door. The woman was still a no see. He frowned as he opened the file in front of him.

He didn't feel like ordering anything when the server came. "Coffee." He muttered. But he really needed coffee if he was going to do this.

His phone rang, again. "Are you here?"

"You need me, Logan. Not the other way around. So why don't you hold your horses."

Logan gritted his teeth. He really didn't want to be here, waiting for her, but he had to.

"Okay, take your time." He said sarcastically.

"Good." She hung up.

Logan stared at the phone before he switched it off and drank his bitter coffee. It was sweeter than his mood.

***

(Alexandra)

"I think she hates me." Leo said with a frown. His fingers kept tapping against the steering wheel and it was kind of distracting for Alex to think.

Yes. She was thinking. Again. About her contract husband and the surprise and the ill-timed phone call. Yes. She was doing it again. Torturing herself with the questions she could never ask and the answers that she might never get.

"Hey, you." When Leo shouted, she jerked back in her seat. "I am talking to you."

"God, I know. Don't scare me like that." She gave him a look. "And who hates you?" Alex asked as she looked away from the window.

"Trish. She is always calling me names. And making me feel like I am still a teenager. A troublesome teenager." He had this cute wrinkle at the side of his eyes. He got that look whenever he was angry or thinking or both. Alex smirked.

"Then don't give her reasons to treat you like that." Alex said. "And she won't."

She really wanted to say more on the topic about Trish Patel and her probable feelings, but it was none of her business. Not at all. So...

"It is not like I am intentionally doing things like that. It is just-" His eye brows were knotted as he shook his head. She patted his hands.

"Hey, don't worry about that. You are a good guy. So that is that." She said with a smile.

"Ah, the silver lining." He gave her a pout. "But I am a great guy."

"Umm, let me sleep on that for a while." She said and he gave her a fake glare.

"You are a great woman, too."

"Really? Or is that one of this complement exchange? I am not doing it with you. I am not going to say you are a great guy just because you gave me one." She wagged her brows and he grinned at her. One of his sunshiny, Leo-ey smile. She had seen this smile, a million times, had crooked over it and here she was, witnessing it in the person, but somehow it didn't make her feel all warm or hot or tingly or sexy just looking at it. It didn't make her want to lean in and kiss or bite him.

It is not like that with Logan, is it?

Yes. It was never like that with Logan. Logan's smile made her want to do all the things she would never consider doing in million years. Logan made her feel things she wasn't supposed to feel and he made her do things she wasn't supposed to do.

And look where that has gotten you. Pining over for a man who is clearly emotionally unavailable for you. That is a bad idea.

The inner voice thing, it sometimes need to take a break. Or maybe go on a long, long vacation. Whatever.

"You and your weird ideas." He said and she smiled.

Leo didn't make her feelcakk those things, but he made her feel comfortable and happy and she liked it. Liked having him as a friend.

"It is not weird. It is a very valid one."

"Whatever, Alex." He said as he hummed a song and the started belting out the tune to a random song.

"God. Stop."

"What? Anyone would love to have a private concert by Leo Shine. Consider yourself lucky that I am not asking you to pay an exorbitant +*-amount to hear it."

"I am not paying you anything, silly." She smiled as he continued to belt another song in a weird voice.

Her happy smile died when she saw two familiar faces through the glass walls of a cafe. They were both having a red mug --blood red mug-- in their hands.

Her face went rigid and her heart felt like stone as she tried not to flinch back. It felt like a bucket of ice cold water in her dreamy, stupid, impossible dreams.

Is this why he is so busy all the times? He had me and he didn't want me anymore. Is that it?

As the car sped past the cafe, she tried not to look back, but she did. And yes, her eyes weren't playing tricks and no matter how much she tried to blink, it wouldn't go away.

The image Stacy and Logan sipping coffee in blood red mugs.

I don't know why, but I will do everything and anything in my power, for you, to see you just smile. - Logan

Chapter 25

24. Old Girlfriends and new wounds

(Alexandra)

"Are you okay?" A voice asked, ripping through her foggy brain and pulled her out of her trance.

She jerked up in her seat as she heard him talk. She had totally forgotten she was with Leo, cooped up inside a car. She had forgotten that she wasn't alone, that she couldn't let her emotions out when she was in the presence of someone else. She forgot. All she could think about was them.

The blood red mug. The steaming coffee as smoke swirled out in a slow, seductive dance. Logan --*her Logan.* Stacy. *His Stacy?*

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stop the image from creeping inside her, from torturing her. From plaguing her with doubts and heart breaks. And grief.

What is he doing with her? Is he going back to her?

Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe she was just imagining the worst case scenario, but it was there -- the doubt. The vines of doubts tangling around her heart, branching around her windpipe and crushing her. She couldn't breathe properly.

She wasn't naive or a romantic --she was a realist-- and she had always known that her love for him was homeless and hopeless, that it only had a murky, fuzzy future, or no future at all. But still...

Somewhere deep inside her crazy heart, there was a small ember of hope, burning, still alive. Still thrumming, hoping. Hoping for a miracle. Though the light of the ember was dim, it was light. It kept the darkness at bay. And then she saw them. Seeing him with Stacy was like a heavy downpour, fast and furious and the small ember flickered off. It was snuffed out by the man she loved so dearly, so hopelessly. Now, she could the ember dying, leaving her in the empty void of blackness.

Dark. So dark. So depressing.

I am not going to cry. She thought as she blinked her tears in. Swallowed the big lump of distress with brave face. Leo was still next to her and he was still waiting for her to answer him. She turned to him and gave him a fake, fake smile, which felt so wrong on her lips. So difficult.

"I am good." She lied through her teeth. She wasn't. She couldn't be good.

He gave her a doubtful look. "Are you sure? You look like you have just seen a ghost." He said as his concerned eyes searched her face.

Yes. A ghost. A Ghost of Logan's past. She had just seen it with him and only now, the ghost wasn't just his past. It was here. It was Present.

Stop. Maybe there is nothing between them. Maybe they ran into each other and were being civilized and grown up. Maybe it is nothing like this thing you are building up in your head. Give him the benefit of doubt.

"It is nothing." She said, hoping he wouldn't pester her, as Leo stopped the car in front of the massive grilled gate.

She pressed the remote for the gate and the door groaned open to reveal the majestic house sitting in the green lawn, dotted with crowns of colorful flowers. Logan's house. Artfully built, with the hands of an artist. His hands.

She had always thought it as *her house* from the moment she walked in and fell in love with the place, but today, today she couldn't call it hers. Not theirs. It was his. It had always been. She was an idiot to call it otherwise.

Stupid, stupid girl. Stupid of you to feel like this is your new home! It is NOT. It will never be. She thought as a deep frown marred her face.

Leo drove inside the long gravel path and stopped the car in the driveway before he turned to look at her with a small smile.

"You know what, don't worry too much. Maybe this things that made you look like *that, may be it* is not as big as you imagined. So..." He gave her a cheerful nod. "So cheer up, Alex." He said.

She slid off the car seat, stepped out and bent down to look at him through the window, a small smile on her lips. "Maybe. Thanks, Leo. So, you wanna come inside?" She asked, hoping, pleading that he would say yes. She didn't want to go inside to the emptiness and go insane thinking about Logan and Stacy. The prospect of it was mindblowingly stressful.

Please say yes. I need you to come inside and distract me. I can't go inside, to his house, where I can remember him everywhere --with me-- not alone.

But oblivious to her dilemma, Leo shook his head, looking apologetic. "I am so sorry. I would love to come in, but I really have to go and finish this song or Trish will hunt me down, cut me into pieces as she had promised me and then FedEx me to Meredith. So... Another time?" He smiled up at her, looking hopeful. His blue eyes shone shone in the sunlight.

She felt like someone had carelessly poked a needle inside a balloon -- her balloon. She sighed. "Another time. Go on and finish your song." He waved her *goodbye* and she watched as the car peeled off and vanished from her sight.

She didn't want to go inside the massive house standing there menacingly. She hesitated on the side walk as she stared at the door like it was a ticking time bomb or something equally sinister.

She really didn't want to stay alone, cooped up inside the house, where it smelled and looked like Logan, with her paranoid thoughts running amok inside her, filtering inside her mind, filling her with bad feelings.

She didn't want to stay alone with her thoughts as the only company. She would go insane. And she would rather stay sane.

At least half sane. Because the other half is already insane. She thought as she walked towards the bench at the side of a bougenvilla tree. The tree was still so young, and its head was adorned with crowns of pink papery flowers. It looked aloof and beautiful. Majestic.

She sat down the bench and pried her phone from inside her bag.

She didn't know what she was doing until she heard the ringing on the other side and then the familiar voice greeted her. Alex sighed as she closed her eyes.

"Hey Alex, how are you?"

"Stella. Hi." Alex said as she tried to absorb as much of Stella's warmth as she could from such distance. For the thousandth time this month, she wished Stella was here.

"Is everything okay?" Stella asked, her voice loaded with concern.

Alex never knew how Stella could do this, but she could. And Alex really wanted to tell Stella everything, from the moment she met Logan up until now. But she couldn't break the contract, she couldn't do that to him even if he did *this* to her.

Maybe he didn't do anything. Maybe your imagination is running wild.

"I just wanted to hear your voice. God. I miss you so much." Alex said as she closed her eyes.

"Oh God, Alex, I miss you, too. I really want to come back. God. I miss home. Did I say I miss you. And trust me, this has been fun, but I can not wait to come back home. I can't. I am so tired." Stella did sound tired.

Stella, who made bleak and dreary things alive with her bubbly personality sounded tired. Stella, who lived for parties and world tours sounded tired, and wanted to come home and Alex pinched her nose, worried.

"Everything alright, Stells?" She asked, her voice laced with love and concern.

"Yes, it is. Alright. But this feels like forever, babe, so long. Trust me, I love this, I love tasting new cuisine and enjoying new culture, but I am so homesick. I am Alex-sick. I miss my bestie." Stella said with a deep sigh and Alex snorted.

"It is forever, you know, since I have seen you. " Alex replied grudgingly and Stella chuckled.

"I will make it up to you." Stella promised.

"Make sure you do." Alex said as she watched a pink flower fluttered down from the top of the tree and rested on her lap. It was wilted and the side of its faded pink had crinkles of paper brown, a stamp of death and decay. As it died, the tree stood proud in its glory and welcomed another new bud, a new bloom. A new life.

No one would miss this one. No one would remember as it went back to Earth. As it walked away.

"Wait, what are you doing talking to me during your honeymoon? It is your honeymoon. Why aren't you busy ripping sheets and your husband?" Stella asked with a tint of worry, even as she tried to sound cheerful.

"Oh, he is outside doing something, he is a workaholic, and I was bored. So..." Alex said as she picked the flower in her palm and closed it inside.

I won't forget you. She put the flower inside her bag. *I will remember you.*

"So you call me only when you are bored?" Stella huffed.

"Of course, yes." Alex said with a chuckle and Stella growled. "Okay, babe. I will let you go, but come back soon."

"Oh, I am coming back. Soon. I have to." Stella said as she hung up. Alex watched the dead screen for a minute before she pushed it inside the bag and stood up.

She walked to the pool house, her steps determined and stripped before she jumped inside the cool water. With a splash, the icy blue water accepted her inside its watery embrace. She sighed and turned to her back and floated to nothingness.

It was beautiful, the painting of nature over the sunset skies. Through the glass roof above, she could see the oranges and pinks and violets mixed with tints of azure blue and a slight slide of gray.

Gray like his eyes. Beautiful, beautiful eyes.

She tried, she really tried to stop thinking, thinking about him, to just be empty, and after a while it was almost possible. She could almost stop thinking of them and the bloody mug. And his eyes.

God. The image was seared inside her brain. Like a damn tattoo on her nerve cells.

Stupid. Stop thinking. Stop. Don't start it again.

The water lapped against her skin, almost lazily and she drifted. Like a log lost in the stream. She loved how the evening setting sun was golden warm over the cold water, how the trellis and creepers on the side made this place feel like a secluded Haven.

This was another one of Logan's masterpiece. His brain was a wonderland. *His body, as well.* A small smirking voice added with a wicked smile. *And his thingy.*

"Logan. Logan. Freaking Logan. Stop thinking about him. Stop thinking about his brain or body. Especially, stop thinking about his thingy." She shouted over the sky.

Irritated and angry with herself, she walked out of the pool, soggy and wet and cold, picked a white towel, and wrapped it over her wet underwear and picked up her dress from the floor, before she turned around and left the pool.

The wind was chilly on her already cold skin, but it was a welcoming chill. She cherished it as she walked all the way to the house and opened the door and then screamed. Her bag and clothes fell to the floor with a thud.

"Why are you screaming? God, you have one hell of a voice." He said as he looked at her with his shining eyes and then the eyes turned dark as he took her in. Took her half naked state. She saw as they transformed. Slowly. Like a stormy cloud. Swirling with the coming disaster. It was all consuming.

"What the hell." She muttered as she glared up at him and felt a shiver running through her bones, as his intense eyes looked her up and down, a lascivious smile on his plump lips. His eyes smoldered as he took a step closer to her. He licked his lips as if he couldn't wait to take a bite of her. She gulped nervously.

What the hell was that look?

Hunger. Yes. His eyes were hungry.

She wanted to take a step back. She wanted to turn around and run away.

She wanted to turn back the needless of time and say *no* when he asked her to become his wife. *Fake wife.*

But no. She couldn't. She wouldn't.

She felt frozen in place. Trapped in time and him. Like someone had poured buckets of wet cement over her and asked it to set around her. Like someone had stolen the batteries of all the clocks around her the moment she said *yes* to his lunatic plan.

She was unmoving as he came closer to her, she was frozen as his fingers grabbed the towel and pulled her to him, she was shocked from the sensations as his hands wound around her hips to bring her closer. And closer to his waiting body.

She was frozen. Her brain, her blood, her heart, everything was frozen inside her. And he was slowly thawing her. With his touch. His breath.

"God. You are so beautiful." He licked his lips and it was like the wake up call she needed.

She pressed her palms against his chest and pushed. It looked like he didn't expect it. It looked like he was expecting her to dance to his tune --*tough luck, mate*-- because he staggered back and his hands fell away.

He looked up at her quizzically and his eyes searched her face for a moment before he nodded his head. "You are angry." He said, looking confused. "Oh, you are angry." He said again and this time, he looked amused. "You are *so* angry."

Alex wanted to kick him, instead she gave him a derisive look. "Do you have short time memory loss or something? You said the same damn thing for three times already and I heard it. Loud and clear. I am not freaking angry." She said as she stepped away from his warmth.

"Oh, don't worry, babe. I won't bite." He said sarcastically as she turned her back.

Her spine went stiff. She stopped and turned around to see him with a gloating smile on his stupidly handsome face.

"You think I am afraid of you?" She stood taller and straighter. "Do you really think that?"

Of course, she was hurt and angry and yes, jealous, but she wasn't a coward. Even Logan couldn't make her a coward. Never.

"Aren't you?" He asked smugly. "Isn't that why your are running away?"

"I am not running away. I have to change my clothes. So I am walking, like a normal human being would walk, to my room." It was a wonder her voice was steady. Her legs weren't.

"Alexandra, Alexandra." He sounded indulgent as he gave her a smirk. "You are so afraid." He said in a patronizing tone. "But why now? You loved it the first time. And the second. And the third."

"Condescending jerk." She muttered as she bent down to pick up her bag and she could feel the chill air on her back through the parted towel and he groaned aloud.

She think she heard him say, *shit.*

He didn't look so smug anymore. Or gloating. There was only fire in his eyes now, sizzling fire.

She wasn't going to touch. Not anymore. She didn't want to get burnt.

"Two days ago, you are all over me and now- you are stepping away. Why is that? If you are not afraid-" He paused and gave her a look. "You really are angry. So Tom is right."

"What the hell Tom got to do with anything?" She asked as she crossed her arms around herself, in an attempt to warm herself up. She was almost freezing, standing there half-naked, with just a towel. But Logan looked like he wasn't finished talking yet.

Freaking fantastic. Of all the days, today is the day he wants to be chatty. She groaned inside as she glowered at him.

"You really wanted to go to Seychelles, eh?"

Alex's eyes widened with doubt and wonder. Seychelles. God. She didn't know where they were planning to go before the phone call interrupted their honeymoon, but knowing that he booked a trip to Seychelles was- was like a slap and a pat. Both.

"Don't look like that. I knew you love beaches and love your privacy. Stella said you had always wanted to go to Seychelles. So..." He said with a shrug.

Would this man voluntarily choose to hurt her?

Maybe not. Just maybe.

It is good. You know, you should think like that. Give him the benefit of the doubt.

But it all felt like excuses she was giving herself.

***

(Logan)

She is angry.

He didn't know why it made him giddy, but it made him giddy.

She was angry that they didn't go away. It meant she cared. It meant she wasn't indifferent to him.

For the first time in his life, Logan was happy that Tom was right.

The feeling pulsing inside him was equal parts lust and tenderness.

Her eyes glowered as she looked at him. "Now I am angry. I didn't know it was Seychelles, but now... I am really angry." She gritted her teeth and shook her head.

Her wet hair dripped down her shoulders, curling brown mess at the sides of her flushed face, sticking to her bare shoulders. Her cheeks were red with blush, a byproduct of cold. At that moment, he saw her shiver and he grabbed his coat from the couch and wrapped it around her.

"It is easier if you just let me go change my clothes in peace without taunting me." She scowled at him as she shook her head.

"But this is more interesting. I prefer you like this." He said as he hungrily took in her body. He didn't miss a single part as his eyes traced and teased her half exposed skin. It was tantalizing, giving peeks of what was hiding underneath.

He could see her hair on the hands raised in goosebumps, didn't know whether it was the cold wind or his eyes. Maybe it was both.

Her neck was long and slender and as he watched, the paleness turned to rushing red. God. She was marvellous. The way she reacted to him, so innocently and also wantonly, it was like a

drug. Addictive and he was sure it took a lot more than rehabilitation to cure him off this drug. This *she* drug.

"I don't." She grumbled as she flushed a bit more.

His eyes caressed every peaks and panes of her slightly round body. The towel reached only halfway to her thigh and showed tantalizing sneaks of her legs. Long, long legs. He could imagine them wrapped around him as he made her scream his name out.

"I am sorry we can't go." He really was. He wouldn't have come back if it wasn't important.

He was excited, as well, to go to a beautiful place with his beautiful wife and spend every beautiful day making sexy, dirty and beautiful love to her. With her.

So when the phone call came, he was disappointed, as well. But he couldn't stay, couldn't go away, not knowing how this was going to be and so he had to come back.

"Hmm. Yeah. I can see how sorry you are." She quipped and he gave her a bewildered look. She really did look angry, but now he had doubts.

"Are you angry we can't go or is this something else?"

Women are bizarre creatures. He had his share of women in his life, from his sisters to his mom, and he knew when one said fine more than one time, they weren't fine. And he knew they get angry for unimaginable things.

"You see, I would really love to go in a lengthy debate with you, right now, but even your coat is not doing a proper job of keeping me warm. So, my Lord, can I go now? " She gave him a sarcastic look. Her voice was dripping with fake sweetness and her smile was too sugary, too phony.

"I can keep you warm." He winked and she threw her tee-shirt at him and he ducked with a smile. "God, don't abuse me."

"Oh, you think this is abuse? I would love to throw the rolling pin and pans at you, right now. But I am going to be mature and walk away." She gave him a freezing look and it almost scared him.

Chilly. He thought as he thoughtfully looked at her. She did look angry, but somehow he was beginning to doubt it was for missing their honeymoon. *What then? What did I do?* He thought as she turned away from him. And walked away.

He let her go.

After twenty minutes, when he realized she wasn't going to come back outside, he walked to her door and knocked.

He could hear her soft foot steps and her softer sigh as she opened the door. She was wearing a long gown made of soft fabric and it hung loose over her body, but still she looked like sin. Like pleasure. He hadn't had the pleasure of her body for two days, because he was busy running after Stacy --*that woman is like a headache that won't go*-- but today he wanted Alex. Again. Like he had her on their first night together.

But... It looked like this was not the right time.

"What?" She snapped and he almost wanted to take a step back. Instead he pushed the mug in front of her, filled with steaming hot chocolate he made for her.

Her face contorted as she stared at the red mug.

"No thanks. I don't-" She said as she tried to close the door. He grabbed the handle, pushed it and walked inside the room and he could hear her curse as she slammed it shut

"Tell me what I did?" He said and she looked like she was contemplating his question, and he knew when she decided against it.

"Can I ask you something?" She said after a minute of stretching tension. He nodded yes.

"I called you this evening. Tom said you left. Where were you?" She asked and he shook his head.

"I was out. On a business meeting. With a client." He lied. It made him feel guilty, but he had to lie. Until everything was sorted out, he had to lie.

He watched with frustration as she turned cold in front of him.

The shutters to her eyes came down. The green in them became darker and the gold specks --the one that shone like stars whenever she was happy -- because dimmer. It was like a physical barricade. A tall wall, and as he watched, she built it until it was secure around her. Until it forced him to take a step back.

She gave him a cool look. It made him colder all over. The truth was at the tip of his tongue.

Did she know? He thought, but how could she?

She wrinkled her brows. "Are you going now? I need to sleep."

"Alexandra? Come with me." He knew it was the wrong thing to say when he saw her eyes flash in rage. But he didn't know what else to do, didn't know how to appease her or to calm her down.

"You see, it was a one night package deal. One night stand. Whatever. I was so wrong that day and it was a mistake. It isn't going to happen again. It is not in the contract." She said, her voice clear and loud.

"Fuck the contract." He swore as he stood up from the bed before placing the mug with a thud on her side-table. The liquid sloshed and spilled around, making brown spots on the white table. A drop of hot chocolate burned his hand. He welcomed the small pain.

"What? Does this mean I can tell everyone that this is all fake and you will still pay me?" She looked different. This wasn't his Alex. His Alex had eyes that sparkled with life and innocence. His Alex laughed and even when she was angry, she never looked vile. Never looked like this. "Does this mean I can finally tell everyone that you are not man enough to accept rejection?" She looked spiteful as she said that. She looked so unlike Alex.

His patience snapped. He wanted to growl. He wanted to punch something.

Now, this was unexpected. Uncalled for. They had joked about it, joked about how he couldn't take rejection without being a sore loser, but this- this was the line she shouldn't cross. Nobody talked with him like that. Nobody.

"I can show you how much of a man I am, Alexandra, but you can't take it. You are so very inexperienced and it is all fun, for a night, but don't kid yourself with anything else." He scoffed as he stared straight at her.

It wasn't just fun. That night was everything. But she hurt him and he wanted to hurt her back. Hurt her just as much as she did.

It looked like the arrow pierced what he had aimed for. Her heart. She flinched back from him and took a step back.

Her eyes lost its cool and she stumbled back as if he had backhanded her. Her eyes filled and her lips trembled.

Now the arrow was back to his heart, piercing his skin. It ached. To see her like that.

"Get out." She said. "Get the hell out." She quivered like a leaf left alone in the winter night storm.

He regretted what he said, he did. He couldn't take it back.

"Alex..."

"Please." She whispered.

He turned and left.

The way your eyes flit away from me whenever you lie to me-- it is their way of being almost honest. -Alex. ~~~

Chapter 26

25. Confrontations, promises and healings

(Alexandra)

Two days. Two long days. Alex was holed up in her room and Logan, Logan was still so busy he didn't have time.

Busy running around with Stacy. She thought with vengeance.

This morning, she woke up again, feeling groggy and miserable and irritated. She hadn't sleep much since the day they fought with each other and even when she slept, she dreamed --*it was mostly nightmares*--of Logan leaving her before the year was over.

She had wanted an year with him. If it made her a greedy person, so be it, but she needed that year, needed it like a fish needed water to survive.

Now it looked like she might never get it.

The morning looked bleak and dull and it looked like the sun was lethargic, as well. The usual bright rays were almost a vane shadow through her curtains. She opened her eyes as she stretched under her cover and closed it again with irritation. She didn't want a wet, gloomy day to add to her misery.

She wanted sunshine. She needed it to get out of her bed and get going. But even the weather was not on her side today.

He lied. She thought for the millionth time in two day, as she burrowed further into her blanket. The soft wool slid over her body, like a comfortable cuddling partner. For one night, he had been her cuddling partner. And it was all over before it had even properly started.

He lied, as he looked into my eyes.

She had asked, didn't she? She had decided to give him a chance to come out to her. To tell her the truth. Instead, he looked right into her eyes, without even blinking and said he was meeting a client.

A client would not wear a low cut, sexy black dress for a meeting. She would not paint an obnoxious red on her lips --maybe she would, but that wasn't the point. The point was that it was Stacy and it was a date. Or it was more, more than just a date.

And as if lying to her was not enough, he poked at her right exactly where it would hurt. He knew it would hurt, he knew it would embarrass her, paralyze her from saying anything.

Virgin. Inexperienced.

He had laughed at her, mocking her ineptitude in bed with such cruel casualness that it made doubt ripping through her heart.

Didn't he enjoy me like I enjoyed him? Was he just patronizing me because I was a pathetic girl, ready to give up her virginity to him and because he felt sorry for me?!

She wondered whether he ever enjoyed making love to her or he was simply indulging her. And faking it. The thought was like a pinprick of nasty, nasty doubt on her head and all over her itching skin.

Don't kid yourself. He had said as he looked into her eyes. *Fun for a night. Fun. Fun. Don't kid yourself.*

She could hear his voice ringing inside, like an echo, unwanted and uninvited, it rang inside her head in a loop. She shook her head as if she wanted to dislodge her mind and her thoughts, but it wouldn't go away. It was stuck.

I am a man. You are so inexperienced. Fun for a night. He had said to her without even blinking an eye.

If it was his idea of revenge, it worked, better than he would have ever considered. If it wasn't, and if it was the truth, it still worked.

Thinking about it made her feel ashamed, so small. And she hated that it made her feel like this. She had never been the one who let one person affect her life and alter it from where she had wanted it to go. But here she was, always, always letting Logan before her own desire and design and that wasn't right.

The feminist part of her was scornful and it was rolling its eyes with disdain. But she couldn't help it. It was kind of unexpected, this feeling, this need to put him in the forefront, but it happened. So... That was that.

But she would make sure it didn't happen again.

She peeled the blanket off with her jaws set and eyes determined, as she stood up.

"Stop being so morose. So what if he is a stupid jerk? You have your own life to live. So stop being a coward and stop thinking about him." She said to someone who looked almost like her --but with hair that was plundered by raccoons, eyes that were swollen to the point of impossibility, cheeks that were streaked with dark eyeliner line-- before she grabbed a thick towel and walking towards the bathroom. Today she would wash it all off. The grime of his words. The dust of her remnant love. *Maybe.*

She stepped inside the bathroom, turned the knob all the way to hot and stood under the spraying water, praying the hot water would cleanse the shame written on her skin.

When the water turned cold, she felt like a shriveled prune. She dried her hair and body before she pulled out a red cotton blouse and a skirt.

She could hear him getting ready to go out. She sat in her bed and waited for him to go away, looking at the exaggerated tick tick of the clock above her bed.

After a while, she heard an engine roar to life and she stood up with a relieved sigh. She couldn't wait anymore. Her stomach was rumbling in a weird way that made her feel like that something alien was inside her and it wasn't a nice feeling.

She padded softly along the Ruby red carpet along the upstairs' long hallway before she stepped down and stopped on her way.

He was still here. So the car? Whose car was that?

She watched as he jerked up in his couch before he folded the paper in front of him in neat square.

Pretend. Ignore. Repeat. Do it all over again.

She moved past him and grabbed a pack of bread, a tub of butter and sugar before she moved to the table. She put it all down and started to spread the butter like she was operating on something life-threatening. She could hear him stand up. She wasn't looking, but she knew he was standing there, staring at her. Maybe it was because she was so attuned to him for so long.

Not anymore. She said sternly as she took a bite of her bread, not before cutting the corners off.

"I-Alex-I..." She looked up without showing any feelings. Her eyes were clear as she looked at him. He gulped. Looked around.

"Don't say any more. It wouldn't mean anything to me. So..." She was grateful that her voice held. But her heart was not. It was shaking violently inside her rib cage, like a wild beast, ready to come out.

"I was going to apologize to you, finally, Alexandra, but the heck with it. I wasn't the only one who did wrong. Seeing you like this, so arrogant and smug --like you didn't do anything wrong, that is not how it is supposed to go. I will apologize when you do." He gave her a careless shrug.

She refused to back off. She didn't do anything wrong. She was just being furious and lashing out on him because he had lied to her.

But he did not know that, did he now? He didn't know because you didn't tell him. It was that voice in her that always took Logan's side, no matter what he did or didn't.

How could she fight with her feelings, when her enemy was her own subconscious mind. And the dang thing was supposed to be on *her* side, to take her side, but it never as hell did that.

Furious with the traitorous mind, she glared up at him. He was the reason for it all. He was the one who turned her own mind against her.

Does that really make sense to you? The damn voice snickered. She ignored it. It could mock her all it wanted, but she wasn't going to go insane and go rampage on it.

"I wasn't the one who used your sexual prowess to humiliate you." She said as she looked up at him, her eyes challenging him to refute her claims. He didn't. Instead he stared at her with something in his eyes and nodded. In acceptance. *That is good. She* thought, but then he had to go and open his mouth.

"I did. But you knew what you did too. You said something that would - oh God, you don't get it, do you?" He ran his fingers through his neatly gelled hair and a lock flopped down his forehead. "I thought you are different, but-" He shook his head and looked at her, his eyes filled with something close to despair, as if he was disappointed in her or something. His eyes were dejected as he looked at her and it made her spine stiffer still and straighter. It felt like her body was made of brittle glass and he was hammering against it with his breaking words. First came pain and hurt, but it was soon replaced with fury. Again. Fury was easier.

Her blood boiled. She felt hot spurt of anger and rage, the twin emotion surging through her. How dare he turn it all against her? How dare he stand there as he pointed an accusing finger directly at her face.

"Don't you dare put this all on me." She shook as she whisper yelled at him.

"Not all. But half. You made me angry and I- I said things I shouldn't have. But the point is we were both angry and we said things..."

"Yeah? Whatever. I don't care anymore. This wasn't supposed to be anything more. This was supposed to be a business deal. It was stupid to get involved, even physically. It was a blunder. We should just forget we are ever more than what we are. We are strangers and that is that." She said with unwavering resolve.

She was almost sure that was the only way to survive this free fall. To become strangers again.

"We are not strangers. We will never be. I know you, all of you." His eyes were potent and consuming.

"And my inexperience. Yes, you know that."

"Stop putting words in my mouth, Alex. I am trying to make up with you here, not fight more. It had been two damn days and you never even try."

"You have a strange way of saying *sorry* that I was momentarily dazed and confused by your apology. Now I am waking up. So go on." She said, her voice reeking of sarcasm.

This is fun, she thought with derision.

"I am not saying sorry anymore, not when you don't feel an ounce of regret. Not when you aren't giving an inch."

She shrugged. "I know. I said I don't care. So? If you are done, can I go now?" She said. "Oh, and I will be late tonight. So don't wait up, if you are planning to." She added as an afterthought.

"Why?"

"I am going out."

"Where? Who?"

"No offense, but it is none of your business."

"It is my business when you are staying in my home. So... Who? Where?"

She looked at him grudgingly. He looked angry and she felt vindictive.

"With Leo."

"Why? Why the hell are you going out late with him? Did you freaking lose your mind?"

He was making her angry with all the nagging questions. Angrier and angrier, as each passing minutes with him was cutting her somehwere deep inside and she was angry at herself for falling for him and putting herself through all this knotty, twisty feelings.

"Because he is my friend and maybe he will teach me how *not* to be inexperienced and how to handle a man. And maybe he will not throw that at my face two days later." She spat, feeling spiteful, but the minute she heard what she had just said, she wanted to cut the Earth and bury herself inside.

It wasn't like her. Not at all. She wasn't the one who was all dark and gray and hurricane. If anything, she was mostly violet and purple and sea breeze.

But Logan, Logan brought out all the dark things inside her, freeing the demons, snapping her bridles. He made her be everything she had never thought as possible.

"What the hell did you just say?" He growled as he took a step closer to her.

He looked mad. Enraged. His eyes was thunder and lightning and his face was dark. A vein in his forehead throbbed as he grabbed her arms.

Alexandra had never been a coward. She prided herself for being brave and wise, but now she felt stupid and she was really scared.

You have gone too far this time. Too damn far. Her mind whispered, devoid of mockery. It sounded serious.

Shit, shit. She thought as he pulled her closer.

She bit her teeth. Her arm was getting sore with how hard he was gripping it.

"Let go." She gritted out.

He did let go as if she disgusted him, as if he couldn't bear touching her anymore. She stumbled back before she steadied herself.

His face was blank, a mask of indifference and his eyes were still and calm, a waveless see. Like solid steel.

It made her flinch. She could take his anger. But this indifference, this calm composure, she couldn't.

She did tell him that they were better off strangers, but now that he acted like this, she knew how wrong she was. She couldn't take this, take days of not laughing with him, not smiling at him, not sharing stupid jokes and stories.

"Logan-" This time she was the one who was begging. And he was the one who turned his back on her. And she couldn't bear that. She had always prided herself as strong, but this one time, she wasn't. Not strong enough.

She walked to him, hesitantly and hugged him from the back, around his stomach. She could feel his body going ramrod straight. Like iron. And she wished he would melt. She wished he could.

"I saw you with Stacy." She whispered as a single tear dripped down her cheek. His body jerked and he took a deep breath.

"You saw that." It wasn't a question.

"I did. And I don't know, but it felt like -like-" She stopped. How could she explain it to him without telling him how she felt about him.

"You asked me two days ago and I lied." He said as he turned around and looked directly into her glistening eyes. Now his eyes weren't steel. Now they were warm and liquid and understanding as he rubbed a finger against her cheek.

"Yes. And it hurt and I was angry. I was so mad that I -" She looked down.

"You said things you didn't mean and then I did. And then you did." He hooked one finger under her chin and pulled her face up. "I am sorry."

"I am sorry, too."

"And I don't want to talk with Stacy or drink coffee with her, but I had to. I will tell you everything. But just give me a week or two. And then I promise I will tell you everything." He said as he grabbed her and hugged her closer to him. "Just trust me, okay. Can you do that?"

"Okay." She sighed the words into his neck. "Ok."

He pressed a kiss to her head. "God, I couldn't sleep at all. I couldn't. Please, if you ever want to ask me something, if you ever want to tell me something, ask me, tell me. If you want to be angry, be angry, but don't ever stop talking with me. I really can't- I just can't-" He stopped as his embrace became painfully stronger. But she didn't complain, because she knew how it felt to be alone in her room, alone and angry at him and sad.

You love him. So it makes sense. But why does he feel like that? Knock, knock, any idea?

Did he love me, as well? She thought and wished the stupid pestering voice would answer her.

But it stayed quiet.

***

(Logan)

His hands were rubbing against her back on their own. He loved the way her soft body fit around his, love the way her breath was ragged and hot on his skin.

He closed his eyes and put his chin over her head, and he wanted to stay right here. He never wanted to leave or go to work. Or do anything else.

"Why?" She asked after a minute. "Why couldn't you sleep?"

He was surprised when she whispered the words so softly, as if she was talking to herself.

"Because you are my best friend." He said as he pulled her away and looked at her.

"Oh, yeah, best friend." She said. Was that mockery in her voice and her eyes?

"What?" He asked.

"Nothing. So, do you do this with all your best friend." She slapped his hand which was now resting on her ass. He flushed before he took it away.

"But you are also my wife."

"Fake wife." She said and it irritated him. How she almost always reminded him of that, *fake, fake,* as if she didn't want him to forget it for a moment. As if she was sure he would forget if she didn't remind him of that.

He did forget it, often, but did she have to so stringently remind it to him everyday?

"Shut up." He said as he pulled her closer and planted a quick kiss on her lips. She gasped before her eyelids drooped. He pressed a kiss to her closed eyes. "Shut up." He whispered again as he bent down and kiss her on her lips again.

"Ok. For now." She said. But before he could kiss her deeply, a honk interrupted them. She jumped apart.

"That must be Leo." She said and then looked down, her cheeks flushed. "I really have to go now. But, but forget everything I said before. He is just a good friend." She said as she looked everywhere except him.

"I don't like it, you know, not at all, but you are your own woman and I would never tell you to do anything just because I don't like it. So..."

"Ah, so generous." She smiled. "I will be late tonight because I am going to Leo's recording studio. He wanted a friend there."

"You are not his only friend and he knows you for how long?"

"A month and some. Only a little lesser than you met me and you call me your best friend. So?" She gave him a challenging look and he conceded.

"Okay, okay." He said before he pulled her to him, again. "But I am planning on waiting." He said and she kissed him on his cheeks.

"I would want you to. I am sorry again."

"I am sorry, as well. And Alex, just to make sure, I enjoyed our night. More than I have ever enjoyed anyone. If you hadn't told me and if I hadn't seen you, I would have never believed I was your first. So..." He stopped and winked at her. "I want it again and again and again. Until you stop wanting it, because I would never. Stop. Wanting." He pressed a kiss against her earlobe and she shivered before she pulled away. He smirked at her and she swatted at his chest.

Her cheeks were flushed a beautiful red and he didn't want to let her go with Leo Shine. He didn't want to go and meet Stacy. He wanted to stay right here with Alex, just the two of them and make love and talk and joke with her.

God, you are becoming sappy.

He did, but somehow it didn't bother him. Because this was Alex, *his* Alex, *his best friend,* and it was okay. It would be okay. She wasn't just anyone.

"Bye." She said.

"Bye. I really don't know why you have to go with him." He grumbled.

"You just said you wouldn't stop me because I am my own woman."

"I wouldn't stop you, but that doesn't mean I can't complain to you." He smirked as she picked her bag. She shook her head and waved at him.

"See you at night." She said.

"And Alex, today, we are sleeping in my room. Or yours. But together."

She gave him a scowl before she walked away, leaving him looking at her back with a smile so -

Sappy? Dreamy? Or trancey?

His voice supplied.

"Trance-y is not a word." He muttered as she turned back to look at him with her magical green eyes that put him in a stupor whenever she looked.

Those eyes are illegal.

You are my best friend, my best decision, the best part of my stupidity. - Logan.

Chapter 27

26. Tulips, burnt candles and romance

(Alexandra)

Alexandra had a smile on her lips as she turned away from Logan and walked towards the door. She didn't want to, really, but work was work and she couldn't just stay at home and kiss him all day, everyday. It was an appealing picture, but she couldn't live just on his kisses, could she?!

Why not check it out? Her inner voice taunted. She turned around, almost instinctually and grabbed him by his ties. He looked baffled, but a slow, sexy grin took over as she pressed her lips to his and kissed him a little bit longer than she had intended.

"What was that for? I am not complaining."

"Don't ever lie to me." She said as she stood on her tip toes and kissed again. "Don't ever be angry with me." She muttered as she pressed another kiss.

"I can't promise I won't be angry, but I will promise I won't stay angry. I mean, I can't."

"Good." Alex said as she grabbed her bag and he grabbed her hips.

"I can't wait for tonight." He said before he pulled her again and kissed her, gentle and teasing. Slow and seductive.

"I really need to go." She said as Leo honked again. That guy had the worst possible timing.

"Go." He pushed her forward, but his hand held on.

"Let go." She chuckled when he looked at her with wide gray eyes, that promised everything good if she stayed. She could stay. But she had promised Mathilda that she would finish the kitchen today and also she had to buy some curtains and drapes and covers.

She grabbed his palm and opened his fingers with a smile. "I will be here tonight." She said as she walked away. "Bye" Alex looked over her shoulder and waved at him and Logan was still staring at her, his eyes hooded with hints of promises.

Tonight. She wished it was already tonight. 

She couldn't wait. She rubbed her palms against her heated cheeks before she opened the door.

As soon as she stepped inside the car, Leo whistled. She shook her head as she willed her face from stop blushing so much. She couldn't stop thinking about what he said about spending the night together.

Get it together, girl. She scolded herself. Yes, they had made up, and they would fight again and make up again, but nothing changed the fact that she was madly in love with him and she was his best friend.

Haha. Haahaa.

Fate sucks!

"Finally." He said as he stared at her with a smile. "You are back." He started the car.

"What are you talking about?" She shrunk her nose as he drove away.

"I am talking about how you looked like a walking corpse for past two days. Now your color is back. I suppose you made up with your moron of a husband." He said with a frown.

"He is not a moron, Leo." She said with a frown.

In the last few days, she had become good friends with Leo, as he drove her around to shop for his Mother's house and as she sat with him when he fine tuned his song to the point of obsessive perfection.

The final song was awesome, something she would hear over and over again. Something she would go to see with Stella --who still couldn't believe Alex was friends with their celebrity crush.

Now Leo was not the angel they believed to be, not anymore for Alex. He was so down to earth and he was funny, honest and truly a good guy, except when it came to women.

As Trish had said, he was almost a playboy. It wasn't so bad, except Alex had a doubt that he consciously chose women who wouldn't available for him, or who he couldn't fall in love with for dating. From a month she had known him --and before that from the magazines-- she had seen him with so many women and none of them were anywhere closer to who he would like. She didn't know what to think of that, but they were still not close enough for her to talk about that, so she kept it to herself.

"He is a moron and I don't know what you saw in him." He harrumphed.

"God, I don't know why you didn't kiss him and make up already."

"Eww, I don't want to kiss your stupid husband. He is such a pain in the ass."

"He is really not, but then you kissed his date. So?"

"For the thousandth time, I didn't know she came with him."

"Yeah?" She laughed at his red face. He gave her a pout.

"Not fair."

"Whatever." She shrugged as he stopped the car in front of a familiar shop. Her whole body stiffened as she stared at it with hollowed eyes.

It was her dad's dream. This here was the first ever shop he had opened to sell their curtains and voiles and covers from the fabric made in their GS textile.

"You don't like it here? Someone told me this is one of the good ones." Leo stopped as he looked at her face. She pulled herself back from the stupor.

After ten months, she would have money. She could fight them all, then. She could even win. Even if she didn't win, just knowing that she had fought for what was her father's would be enough for her. Just knowing that she hadn't given up would be enough.

She composed her face and compartmentalized her feelings before she stepped inside. The whole place was bustling with new salesmen, all of them young. The old loyal people were not there anymore. Maybe the new one who took over the place fired them or maybe the workers who were loyal to her father didn't want to work there anymore.

She mechanically stared through the different curtains, her eyes not seeing. She was filled with memories of herself and her dad in the shop.

Her dad brought her here whenever he could, to show the root. To show her that they hadn't always been about big, brassy shops, that they had a humble beginning.

But even this small shop was something that made Alex fill with pride. It might be small, and not massive like the new ones, but it still held beautiful clothes, all arranged neatly in beautiful bundles, pushed together to form patterns and art in their own way.

The first time she came here, she told her father how the pink bundles of curtains should come in between the reds, to make them pop out and not fade in the background and how the sunflower ones should be kept in the dimmer side of the shop because they are always bright and how dark colored drapes should be moved to the other side. She was just seven. Her dad had been proud.

That was when her eyes for colors and arrangements stood out.

Her father took note, carefully on the details without dismissing it because she was just a child and ordered the guys in there to do it like that and the next time they came, her eyes popped out to see everything was exactly as she had asked.

One of the salesman in the shop had come to her then, with a smile and said that she had a good eyes, that the shop looked much more attractive since her idea.

She was so happy she bounced around and her dad beamed at her.

Her heart clenched. She missed her dad. She missed how she could not tell him about the silliest, simple parts of her life. And the serious ones.

"Hey, if you don't like it here, we can go somewhere else." Leo patted her back and she was back from the stupor.

"Oh, it is fine."

After half an hour of pestering and bargaining, Alex had everything she needed. Big bundles of curtains and drapes were packed as they stood and watched and after giving the address, they both drove away to Mathilda's mansion.

***

(Logan)

"I am really not in the mood, Stacy." He said as he glared at the devil sitting in front of him. He didn't know how he found her attractive once. Oh, yes. She was super hot, but beyond that, there was only the spasm of cold emptiness behind her frigid blue eyes.

After soaking on the warmth of Alex and her generosity and her kindness, Stacy was like a wax doll with beautiful face and no life. None at all.

"You see, Logan. You need me. So? You do what I ask or this deal is going down the drain." Stacy said as her sharp fingers pushed one single curl behind her ears. "I am a business woman, I have always been. So I am okay to throw my brother under the bus, but not without getting something back in return."

"I can't guarantee what Fabien's opinion would be. He is not easily swayed."

"Let me worry about that. All I need is an introduction with Fabien Hass and I won't back off from this deal, even if he said no." Stacy said as she took a sip of her coffee.

"So who is stopping you from backing off, after I introduce you to Fabien?"

"I am a woman of my word."

Logan chuckled. "Really? I am not random stranger, Stacy. I dated you for a year."

"And proposed to me and then married a girl --how old is she again?-- but I almost believe that you still have unwarranted feelings for me." She winked as she gave him a smile.

He shook his head with a smirk. "Don't worry about any unwarranted feelings, Stacy. I believe you have some unwarranted delusions. So..."

She scrunched her nose before she picked a leaf up from her salad and chewed it, daintily. Logan couldn't help but think about how Alex would have vehemently opposed the salad -- God, Alex could eat.

"I will ask Mr. Marino to call you with further details."

"Ouch. You don't want to talk to me any more? That hurts." She said in a fake voice before she stood up and gave him a half wave. "Buh-bye Logan. I hope you bring your wife to Fabien's gala."

"Why? So that you can spill some more red wine on her?" He narrowed his eyes at Stacy.

"Uh, not really. I would like to apologize."

"You?" He shook his head. "Apologize?"

"Don't look too doubtful. I am being genuine here."

"Whatever, Stacy. Good bye."

"Not good bye Logan. I have a feeling that you will soon come back to me. When the newness of your marriage fade and I will be waiting. Oh, don't worry, I will take you back."

"The hell you are talking about?" He gritted his teeth.

"Nothing." She said and sauntered away, her back swishing in the tight black dress she draped her body with.

***

(Alexandra)

Alex had a long long day and she couldn't wait to go back home to Logan. She couldn't wait to get back in his arms.

And into his bed. The voice added with a sigh.

She flushed as she pressed her face against the cool glasses of Leo's car.

They had just been coming from Leo's recording studio and it was all so mesmerizing, the way a song is made. She loved every moment of it, of seeing him sing and be lost to everything around. There was a kind of serenity there, with the buzz of the equalizers and microphones and guitars. She loved it there, but then there was Trish, who kept glaring at Alex as if she didn't want Alex to be there or something.

Alex had wanted to tell her that Leo was just her friend, but how could she start a conversation with a woman who she hadn't talked about, especially one that sounded like that? So she kept quiet.

She had also met Meredith and Samir. Meredith was nice, but in a scary way and Samir, Samir kept looking at Trish with the same intensity Trish looked at Leo. And it was so obvious, except the Trish, who never turned in his direction.

It made Alex curious, but since she had promised to herself that she wouldn't poke her nose where it was not wanted, she tried not to look at people and only at Leo.

"Here is your stop." Leo said as he dropped her off. "I will pick you up tomorrow?"

"I will call you, okay. Bye, Leo. Drive safe."

"Oh, I will." He said before he drove off, leaving her in the dark.

She looked around and wondered what happened to Logan and his idea of waiting?

She walked inside the house and called for him, but there was no reply.

"Yeah, look how you are waiting for me! Knowing you, I am not really surprised." She muttered to herself as she flicked the lights on. "I am hungry." She muttered as she raided the refrigerator for something to eat, but the damn thing was empty. "And you forgot the grocery list, again. Logan. You idiot."

She muttered to herself as she walked towards her room and the changed the direction towards his room.

She just had to see that he was sleeping. Of course he would be sleeping.

"God, I can't believe him." She muttered. "I was like buzzed... to finally finally have him. All of him. Again. And he went and fell asleep. Stupid. He was the one who started all this idea in my head." She wrinkled her nose as she stomped upstairs and pushed his door open.

She could feel the low moan of the song against her body, draping her like a warm velvet.

She looked up and she gasped. Her heart thundered against her throat. The bag in her hand fell to the floor with a clutter as her wide eyes took the scene in. He startled awake from the bed and then shook his head at her.

"Oh God, I must have fallen asleep." He said as he sat straight and the silky satin cover around him tauntingly slid around his body like the promised seduction. She took a peak of his tantalizing body. He looked so adorably, hair mussed, eyes still dazed from his nap, lips pulled together in a moody pout. She wanted to go to him and hug him to her.

He rubbed his eyes with a yawn as he motioned her to come inside. She looked around the room and she gasped again.

There were candles stacked around, almost melted to the base, but they still flickered on, filling the room now, with waxes pooling around them like tears, with the scent of lavender filling the room. There were tulips, their head dropped in misery, as they waited. For her. The rose petals in the bed looked like someone had murdered them -- Logan had murdered them.

"I didn't think it will be this late." He said as he pointed the clock. "It is one."

That was when she realized it was really, really late. In the studio, it felt like it was nine. Everyone was alert and awake and Alex was high from the coffee and the thoughts of Logan that her head and body felt fresh and electric.

"I am sorry. I hadn't realized it, as well. I can go to my room." She said and he sighed.

"Come on in." He said as he looked around. "This was supposed to be romantic, not depressing and dreary." He said as he gave the room a cursory look. "Oh God, now I wish I have thought of something else."

"Nah, this is nice." She said. It really was.

"It isn't." He sulked as he stretched and she gasped again.

"Wait, are you like, in your birthday suit inside this red satin?" She couldn't stop the giggle from escaping her lips as she stared at him, mirth shining in her eyes.

"Don't you dare laugh. This was all Tom's stupid idea. I am killing him tomorrow. So killing him. God. This is humiliating." He said as he grabbed the pillow closer to him. "Hope you are hungry." He said as he pointed to the covered tray at the side.

"Starving." She said as she went to the side and he opened the tray with a grimace.

"The strawberries looks starved, the chocolate looks soggy and the cream, okay, not bad. The souffle is so ruined and the eclairs looked like they are crying. This is a mess." He grunted. She shook her head as she picked up a strawberry.

"Close your eyes." She said. "Don't look. Just feel. Just feel how I am feeling."

"Are you feeling like this is hell?" He said moodily as he closed his eyes.

"No. I feel like a woman. A lucky woman. I feel lavender from your candle and the stars from its small flicker. I feel happiness from the fact that you remembered the tidbit about how much I loved tulips. I feel the red juice running down my cheeks as I take the bite of the strawberry." She said as she took a bite of the strawberry and popped the half in his mouth. "Can you feel it, too?" She asked as she leaned in closer and licked the juice off his stubbled chin. He moaned as he opened his eyes. "No, close it."

"I want to see you." He said hoarsely and she chuckled.

"No. First you have to feel." She said and he obeyed. She swiped her finger around the glass bowl filled with chocolate and licked it clean with a moan. It was amazing. The taste of fresh cocoa, undercut with hazelnut. Her favorite flavor ever. "I feel overwhelmed by you and the chocolate. Do you want to know how overwhelmed?"

He nodded.

"You remembered how much I love hazelnut cocoa, and this feeling inside me, it is like lightning, and I could kiss you until you go mad."

"Do that." He said as his hands blindly searched for her.

She chuckled. "Open your mouth." She said as she pulled her chocolate covered fingers and painted it across his lips before she scooted closer to him and kissed it off. He grabbed her by her hips and pulled her closer to his heated body.

When they broke apart to take a breath, she whispered closer to his ears. "I feel all hot and bothered by how naked you are under this cover. I feel like a wanton, wanton woman. Can you feel it?" She said as she kissed his closer eyes and then on the stubble.

"But I wanted this to be perfect. Instead it was all a mess." He complained against her neck.

"This is perfect. You are perfect." She said as she leaned against him and kissed him again, feeling like she would burst open if she didn't touch him.

This was perfect. She wasn't lying. She wasn't stroking his ego. She didn't have time or patience for that. This was simply perfect as far as she was concerned.

It was his thoughtfulness, the minuscule details he noticed and cared about, the details anyone would have missed or passed over, it was what made her fall over and over again for him, no matter how hard she resisted.

"Can I open my eyes." He asked as she pulled the satin away from his body and took all of him in. She couldn't get enough.

Her eyes shone with love, love she couldn't contain, she couldn't keep in. She loves him so much she almost hated him for making her fall for him.

"No." Her voice wobbled as she traced his body with her starving fingers, with her hungry eyes. She took as much as she could.

Ten months later, they would be no more. She would be forever hungry, hungry for him. And so she took. She took as much as she could take, bits and pieces that she could take away with her.

I love you Logan. She whispered.

"What? Did you say something?"

"Nothing." She said. "Nothing you want to hear."

"Oh, I want to hear everything you have to say." He said as he leaned his forehead against her.

"I was just telling how much I love this cheese." She said as she gave him a piece of cheese before she pushed him down and started kissing him.

"Can I open my eyes now?" He asked as his hands wandered over her back, marking her, making her feel things only he could make her feel. It was like a blessing and a curse. Logan was her blessing and curse, wrapped in a single, glorious gift package.

"Not yet." She said as she kissed him on his neck, sucked and savored every bit of his skin. He sneaked his hand inside her tee-shirt. She moaned as his expert hand teased her stomach and a bit lower.

"Why not?" He complained as she grabbed her tee and pulled it away before she dragged her pants down.

"Because I want you to feel. Everything. Until you feel as overwhelmed as me. " She said as she grabbed his hips, pulled herself over him and sat down, slowly, and then almost surely.

He moaned. "Alexandra." Her name was like a whisper on his lips, a pleading, pleasured whisper as she moved over him and he grabbed her hips with a groan.

"Don't open your eyes." She said as she wiped her glistening eyes before she looked down at his aroused, flushed face. He looked like temptation, like sin. He looked like home. Her home.

Because if you open your eyes, you will see how much I love you. I love you so so much Logan.

"Baby." He moaned. "Baby. Lex. Alexandra." His voice was hoarse and begging. "You are amazing. You are mine." He said as she exploded.

He followed her to the peak, to the sky rocketing pleasure and then came down on her with a grunt. And a sigh.

And you are mine. For now.

I *can not give you everything you want, but I will try my hardest to give you everything I possibly can give. Won't you stay? - Logan ~*

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Chapter 28

27. Memories, gifts and coming endings

Months until the contract become null? Seven months!!!

(Alexandra)

Alex stared at the calendar with wonder. She didn't know how fast the past three months had run, had disappeared on her. It was like time was wearing a jet pack, with the fastest fuel available and was passing by before she could even blink, even breathe.

She looked down at the sleeping man next to her. He looked peaceful, like he had no worries in his life. The usual knot in his brows whenever he was confused or thinking --which was most of the time -- or angry, was gone.

She smiled. She was smiling a lot these days, just as much she was worrying.

She didn't know why or how the three months had slipped by her sweaty fingers. She wanted more time.

Of course. It was the happiest days of her life, the most wonderful months, but she kept wondering when she would wake up. It almost felt like a dream. The happiness bursting inside her was only snuffed out by the reminder that this would not be forever. That they wouldn't be forever.

We are ending, but how can we?

As sun poured through the gap in her curtains, every morning, she woke up in Logan's warm embrace, just like today, feeling both happy and sad. Every morning she dreaded the coming train wreck.

And every night, she went to bed with Logan feeling like she belonged and when he slept, she closed her eyes with a twitch in her stomach that the day was over.

It was like torture, it was like she was a masochist, so hellbent on torturing and hurting herself, but she couldn't help it. She was her own enemy.

"Hey, stop looking at me, stalker." He smiled with a yawn. Even then, he looked handsome. It was illegal.

"I can't help it. I keep looking at you to find out what is really wrong with you."

"Nothing is wrong with me." He said with a frown.

"Well, I can't still believe it. So?"

"Whatever, Alexandra. Don't be so annoying. Oh, and be ready at six. We are going out to eat."

"What is special today?" She asked as she looked at him, wrinkling her eyes. He looked smug, like he knew something she didn't and she didn't like that. That cat just got the canary or whatever look he was sporting.

"Nothing. Can't I just take you out?" He asked, blinking up at her, looking all do innocent and cute, but she knew him. He was neither.

"No. You can't. So? Out with it already, Logan." She scowled.

"You haven't still gotten up from the bed already started fighting with me. You are unbelievable, Lex. Unbelievable."

"Yeah, I know. So tell me."

"It is a surprise."

"If I call Emma or El, will they know?"

"You are such a- such a child. And to answer your question, no, they won't know."

"You are such a tyrant."

"Me or is that you?" He said as he stood up and stretched and yes, fortunately --or maybe it is *unfortunately*-- for her, she had the pleasure of seeing his lean and glorious body every morning and it was a real feast to her eyes.

He smirked as if he could hear her thoughts and shook his head with a grin. "Naughty. Naughty."

"Walk away." She said and he stood there with a smirk stretching on his plump lips that she had kissed over and over again until they were red just the night ago.

"Lex, Lex, God. I can read every one of your dirty thoughts."

"Stupid jerk." She threw the pillow at him and it hit him on his chest and he shook his head with laughter, which tingled along her spine.

"You are so cute when you are embarrassed." He said as he patted on her already flushing cheek before he walked away, looking very, very pleased with himself.

Alex smiled as she curled in the bed and looked out the warm windows.

"Hey lazy, you gonna wake up or just keep lying there?" She heard Logan calling her and she stretched again before she stood up.

"I wish I can sleep in, but I am almost done with Mathilda's house and I need to finalize some finishing touches and all." She said as she walked to her room. "And Logan, I made scones. It is in the right side of where I keep the cookie jar." She said as she walked out.

"You are the best." He said and she smiled to herself.

When she was done showering and dressing, Logan was waiting for her downstairs.

"I can drive you to Mathilda's place." He said as he bit into a scone and closed his eyes. "This is delicious."

"Sure." She picked a scone and he waved at her to sit. She did as he asked.

"But I have something much much better. If you can just come to my office." He said as he put a glass of orange juice in front of her. "And drink this."

"Is that the surprise?" She smiled up at him with question in her eyes and he smiled.

"Not really. Just a gift." He said as she stood up.

"Okay. Okay. You are not going to tell me anything. I know. Can I just have the keys now, I miss driving."

"No."

"I hate you." She growled out. "I really hate you."

"You don't, but whatever."

"You are very arrogant and egoistic and I don't like it."

"You like it, alright. Now stop complaining and get in." He said and opened the door for her.

When they drove to his office, Tom was already waiting for them with a goofy smile on his face.

"Now I really have a doubt about that tracking device. Did you insert it in him when Logan was asleep or something, Tom?" Alex asked as he greeted her with a cup of steaming espresso, with cream and too much sugar, just as she liked.

"Oh yes, lady boss. I did. So if he ever did wander to places he shouldn't go, I will drag him back to you."

"Yeah?" Alex chuckled as Logan frowned at his PA.

"Tom, don't start this early in the morning. So where is she?"

"She is a beauty." Tom muttered and Alex narrowed her eyes at them.

"Who is the beauty? Does Alice know you are talking about other women?" Alex rolled her eyes as she punched Logan in the shoulders. He groaned. "And you, I am standing right here."

"Boss, lady boss is very possessive." Tom winked and Alex gave him a frown, to which he replied with another wink. It looked comical that Alex had to laugh at his silly smile.

"Are you ready to see her?" Tom asked her and Alex gave a jerk of her head with a shrug.

"Not really."

"Don't be envious. Green doesn't suit you." Logan said as he bent down and pressed a quick kiss on her lips. The kiss almost felt like a comfortable routine. Something you did, because you are familiar with it and you like it that way. Something you want to do, because it is supposed to be like that. Like sometimes how Dave would kiss Beth or Em and El would kiss their husbands.

And Alex liked it so much. It was just a simple press of his lips, it wasn't like the kisses he so deliriously bestowed upon her when they were alone, when they we're at the throes of passion, but this meant much more than sexy, hot kisses.

"Go on."

"Wait right here." Tom said as he walked away and after a while he came back, in a car.

"Wow." Alex gasped as she stared at the beauty in front of her. It really was a beauty. Body painted a gold, the Jaguar shone in the golden rays of sun, leaving her gaping at its mesmerizing body.

"You like her?"

"Of course." She said as she looked at it wistfully. "Oh God, you are torturing me." She grumbled moodily. He would show it to her and refuse to let her drive. So what's the point?

"Here." Logan said as he handed her the key with a wide smile. "Go on. Take her out."

"You are letting me drive?"

"It is yours. So..." For a moment Alex had doubts that she heard him right. Did she? Was he playing with her?

"Don't play games with me- I-"

"It is yours, Lex. You hear me. It is yours."

"Oh God, oh God, really." She couldn't stand in a place. She wanted to jump, she wanted to squeal, instead, she grabbed Logan by his tie and kissed him. Kissed him, like today was the end of the world, like tomorrow they would cease to exist.

His lips were familiar, just the taste of everything she had ever loved so much, a hint of butter and cinnamon from the scones he just ate and a whole lot of Logan, and she loved this much more than the Jaguar.

And she would miss it. God, she would miss it!

"Uhmm-" Alex jerked back when Tom cleared his throat. Her cheeks heated when she saw him giving her a wicked smile.

"Don't say anything." Logan warned.

"Nuh. Not saying anything, boss. If I am lucky, one day, I can buy a car like this for Alice and she will give me-"

"Not another word." Logan warned and Tom shrugged.

"Ok," He said and turned and walked away, but Tom wasn't Tom if he listened to Logan. He stopped half way there and turned back to look at his boss. "You can continue inside the car, boss." He smirked and threw a kiss at Logan, which Logan swatter away like a fly. She chuckled.

"It is not funny."

"It is." Alex said.

"Come on, let us check it out."

"You wanna make out?" She winked at him and he gave her a smoldering look and grabbed her hand.

"Yes, please." He said as he closed the door behind his back and pulled her to his laps and they made out, alright!

Later, that night, when Alex was driving to the restaurant, she had a dreamy smile on her face. She had the same one all through the day as she worked and Leo kept complaining about it.

"Stop smiling so much," He had said at one point with a pout. "It is kinda hurting my eyes."

"Stop being a pest, Leo." She had reprimanded as she hung curtains in the home theatre.

"Are you thinking about Logan?" He had looked at her with a kind of look she couldn't really understand and she had nodded and with a grunt, he had went back to hooking the curtains.

Alex shook her head as she stopped in front of the restaurant and handed her keys to the valet in the front. She looked at the Jaguar one last time before she turned away from her baby.

She really was happy, but it all felt like a strange dream and she wondered when it would end. She kept turning back, to look for the end.

Seven months! 30.4 weeks! 213 days! 5112 hours! 30620 minutes!

And then they would be over.

We will be so over. But I am afraid, I am so afraid...

Why don't you just tell him how much you love him?

"And, he will look at me with pity. I don't want that. I don't want him to look at me ever, ever with pity."

Maybe he won't. Maybe he will look back at you with Love.

"Will he?" She muttered to herself as she walked inside the restaurant. It was the one he had bought her the first time they met. How time had ran!!!

The voice was silent.

(Logan)

Logan couldn't contain the excitement as he waited for her. She was late, but he didn't let it affect his mood. He wouldn't let anything spoil this day for her, not even his impatience.

Today was all about Lex, and he would give this to her.

A going home present? The voice murmured with a smirk.

No. A gift to my best friend.

Here he goes, again, with that best friend Stupidity.

It isn't--

"Logan-" A voice cut him off.

"Barbara." He stood up. His irritation boiled and the bitterness he refused to seep in, burst out of him in waves after waves. Everything he ever wanted to forget come rolling down on him, once again, like a drowning wave.

He closed his eyes and clenched his jaws. His knuckles turned white. And his anger was like a hot lava, ready to burn him.

"Please, please don't walk awa-"

Someone touched his shoulder. He jerked away from the hand. He didn't want this woman's hand on him.

"Hey, it is me." Alex said as she grabbed his hand and wrapped her fingers around his. "You want to go?" She muttered next to his ear.

"Please Logan- I am sorry, sorry for everything and I know-how I don't deserve to even-even-please, just tell me how Eliza and Emma are and I - I won't bother you again."

He shook his head as he looked right into Alex's calming green eyes. They were dark now, full of understanding and love -and his heart stuttered.

And are you going to lose this because of the woman standing in front of you?

I am not losing anything. We are friends.

"Sit with me." He said to her and she nodded and followed. Her fingers were still wrapped around his and he Liked where they were. She gave his hand a squeeze as he looked up at the woman standing in front of him.

"Log-"

"Eliza and Emma are fine. We all are."

"Your dad-"

"Don't you dare." Logan gritted out. Barbara looked at him like he had just slapped her and took a step back.

"I am sorry. I am so sorry." She said before she walked away.

"Logan, do you want to go? I can cook at home." Alex looked at him with concern.

He wanted to say yes. He really want to, but...

Today was about her.

"No." He said as he composed his face and tried to forget everything about Barbara.

He closed his eyes for a minute and thought about Alex. *Only her.* About how she painstakingly made breakfast for him every morning. How she smiled whenever something pleased her-- it needn't be as big as cars, it could be just as simple as a bunch of wildflowers he picked on his way to the pool house. How she sometimes still blushed whenever he kissed her. How she was always there for him. And he wanted to be there for her.

He waved for the waiter. "A bottle of Bordeaux, mushroom cream soup, soufflè, and Lex, what else do you want?"

She gave him a smile, the one that could fill him up with warmth and wonderment. It was that smile, the one made of magic and Alexandra. Her smile. And he smiled back. How could he not!

"Ah-" She said out loud and he smirked. "Please be kind to my wallet." He told her with a begging look on his face.

"Don't be stingy." She said as she read her menu with the kind of look people looked at their medical reports and financial reports. He shook his head with a smile as he watched her.

"Coq au vin, Bouillabaisse, Mille-feuille. Thanks." She said to the waiter.

"Only you can eat like that!"

"Hey!"

"That is a compliment."

"Doesn't feel like one at all." She said with a scowl on her luscious lips and he had the urge to take a bite of it.

No desserts in the world tasted as sweet as her.

And soon somebody will be saying the same.

It was like a bottle of acid poured over his stomach, the thought, and he couldn't stop the feeling of betrayal and pain washing over him.

But how could he feel betrayed, when he was the one who came up with the stupid contract, and he was the one who couldn't love her like she deserved to be loved. It wasn't Alex's fault

that he couldn't be the man she needed him to be, and it wasn't her fault that she would be happy with someone else soon after. How could he blame her for wanting to be happy? He wasn't that selfish.

"Hey, what? You okay?" It was her voice that pulled him out of his thoughts. "Here." She handed him the glass of red wine 🍷 and he took a sip of it with a sigh.

He was spoiling this even before starting it.

"Now. Close your eyes." He said.

"What? Why?"

"Do as I say."

She grumbled as she closed her eyes. "So bossy."

"Wait. Ok. Now open your eyes."

She opened her eyes and blinked. "What?"

"Look down."

"Uhm-" She said with a confused look on her face as she stared at the file in front of her.

"Open it and read it."

"Is this your contract?"

"It is right before you, so why don't you open it and see what it is."

"Okay." She said as she opened the file. Her face was befuddled as she scanned pages after pages. Her brows were twined together and her nose was crinkled.

He knew the exact moment it all made sense to her.

Her face lit up. The gold in her winter green eyes glittered like the stars coming alive in the darkness of the gloomy nights and her smile, her smile was like a beacon for the lost hearts--for his lost heart.

"You-I-" She stuttered as she stared at him. She didn't look down. She didn't hide. He could see tears rolling down her eyes and touching her smiling lips. She just looked into his eyes and he could hear everything she wanted to say to him. No words were needed.

"Don't cry." He whispered as he closed her hand with his.

"Happy tears." She smiled as he wiped the tears away.

"How did you-? I can't believe this. You did this. For me. "

"I did it, for you, but this is just the beginning, you know that, right?"

"I know. But this is everything to me." She said, her eyes shining with tears and sincerity.

"After digging a little, Michael found out-- Mike is our lawyer-- that Mr. Weston had a hand in all of it."

"Stacy Weston?"

"Good girl. I know you are smart."

"That was why you were with her the other day." She gave him a sheepish smile.

"And you were so jealous. I wanted to tell, but I wanted it to be a surprise and also, I didn't want to tell anything if I can't make it happen." He said and signed to the waiter, who brought in a chocolate cake with candles.

"Happy birthday, Alexandra." He said and she blinked.

"Today- shit, it is my birthday." She squeaked and he chuckled.

"You forgot?"

"Uhm, yes, I did." She squeezed her eyes shut with a sheepish smile.

"Only you." He said with an indulgent smile. "Only you."

Only her.

"Thanks, Logan. This is the best birthday present ever. Oh, and of course, the Jaguar."

"That isn't your birthday present. That is Emma and Eliza pestering me-"

And me not wanting you to drive around with Leo Shine. He didn't say that out loud.

"Oh."

"Yes. And you have to sign under this document, so that Michael can file the petition." He pointed to one paper. She nodded.

"So what did you give Stacy in return? She didn't look like the type of a woman who does things out of goodness of her heart."

"Yeah, yeah, I agreed to introduce her to an old friend of mine. He is a fashion designer. So..."

"That is all?"

"He is pretty famous and introduction with him, is not easier to come by. So that is all." Logan said. "We have some legal documents right here proving the discrepancies and Michael will ask the court once it is started to Subpoena the record of GS textiles Ltd, and I don't know how it all will be, but I am almost sure it will be in your favor."

"God. I don't know how to thank you, Logan. I feel like- I don't know how I feel like, but- but you are amazing. You did this all for me."

"Of course. Can you stay?" He looked into her eyes. *Can't you stay? Won't you stay?*

Why don't you ask her?

How can I? I am not that selfish!

"What? Of course, I am staying. I have to cut my cake."

"Yeah, lets cut your cake."

She cut the cake with a delighed look on her face --she looked like a kid lost in the candy store, she was *that* kid-- and fed him the first piece. "There." She said as she wiped the chocolate from the side of his lips and licked it with a sultry smile on her face. "I wish we were alone. Wanna sneak inside the restroom?" Her voice was a breathy whisper and it made him feel hot all over.

"You are a bad influence." He muttered with a sigh. "But no, we are not sneaking anywhere." He said as he smiled at her and jerked up when he could feel her feet sneaking way up his legs.

"So boring." She said, her eyes hooded. "But I like it here, as well." She said as her toes came dangerously closer.

"You never told me that when I am doing all those things to you." He winked and she flushed. "And get your leg down, woman." He said.

"Shush." She pushed a cake inside his mouth and the waiter looked at them, bewildered as he poured water in their glasses.

"Eat your cake, darling. I can eat mine." He said as he grabbed her hand under the table and she gave him a smoldering look.

"You eat your cake." She pouted and he laughed. "I wanna go home."

"I do, too. But let us finish this first. Don't be so impatient." He said as he slipped his hand down the table and squeezed her thigh. She moaned before she gave him a scowl.

"Don't tease me, Logan."

"You started first." He smirked and pushed a slice of cake inside her mouth. "Now, shush and eat your cake."

What will I do, after this year passes and then you will only be in my memories, not in my life. - Alex ~

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Chapter 29

28. Mistakes, feuds and wrong kisses

Months until the contract become null? Four months!!!

(Alexandra)

Petitions were filed. Court hearing dates were set. Michael was almost sure that they would be winning the case.

It was a good month for Alex.

She had finished working on Mathilda's mansion --which was so beautiful at the end, if she so say herself-- and she already had a new job to decorate Emma's new house -- Emma and Mark had been living in a rented house before.

Working with Emma was almost like a vacation. Often times, Andy and Brian would follow her around, pretending to be her assistant. Sometimes Beth and Eliza stopped by, with food and lemonade and they would talk about the silliest thing that would always make Alex feel so damn happy. She would miss them. They were already her family and she was still lying to them. It felt like a rock, but she couldn't break her promise to Logan. Logan always came first. It was how it was and she couldn't do anything about that.

She had also signed a contract to start working with one of Mathilda's good friends, Avery Carlos. He had seen Alex's work when he visited Mathilda's house and he had asked for her and contacted her to work for him on his daughter's house, which coincidentally enough, Logan was building.

It was a good month all in all, but right this moment, it wasn't going exactly good for Alex.

"Oh, come on Dan." Alex sighed as she leaned across the kitchen slab. They were back to baking -- he had been trying to do that for months now, trying be the key word-- and he was making a bigger mess, a much bigger mess this time. And Logan was enjoying her misery as he sat there without moving a finger and watching his best friend torturing her. "Dear Lord. Save me." She groaned dramatically.

"Alex, you are a very impatient woman. You do know that practice makes perfect." Daniel said, looking like a hot mess. His chin was covered with flour and he smelled like burnt butter.

"I do. But what you are doing is not practice. It is practically murder." She said as she watched him took out a very burnt, very black cake out from the oven.

"Keep dissing me, but one day you will see. I will be better than you. I will be." He looked determined. She didn't know how he did that, keeping up with his optimism about baking. She

had promised that she would bake for him every day, but he was adamant about making his own damn cakes, which never come out anywhere near to being edible.

"In your dreams, Dan." She poked her tongue out as she whipped another batch of batter. "Watch and learn, amateur."

"Every great Baker started with a charred cake."

"Where did you read that, Smart guy?" Alex frowned as she poured the batter in the tray and pushed it inside the oven. "They use timer because it is easy to keep track of time. They don't just turn it all the way and forget about it." She said as she stared at Dan , who was now peacefully licking the bowl clean.

"This is yummy. Hey Log, you want some?"

"No thanks, and Dan, what the hell is this thing? If you can make a million dozens of it, I can probably build you a house with them. And I promise it will hold." Logan said as he inspected the brick like cake.

"Haha. You are a funny guy." Daniel said with a grumpy scowl and Alex snorted.

"It can be lucrative business opportunity, Dan, if you can't become a better Baker than me." Alex poked her tongue out at him.

"Yeah, you two, you are the funniest people I have seen." Dan rolled his eyes and the oven dinged. "Now, take that out." He said as the oven dinged.

"Taking."

"Now this is a cake."

"Alright. Alright." Daniel grumbled.

"Are you leaving yet?" Alex asked as she gave him a piece.

"What? What are you gonna do?"

"You don't want to know." Logan winked and Alex blushed.

"You two, you are disgusting. I am kinda single, you know, and you keep rubbing it in my face. Ugh!"

"You are always *kinda* single." Alex laughed as Daniel gave her a look.

"Bye guys." Daniel said.

"Don't you want the brick?" Logan asked as he played with the thing.

"Nah, keep it. It is yours."

"Yeah? Thank you."

As soon as Daniel was out the door, Logan was on her, like a hungry predator or something.

"What?" He asked as Alex chuckled inside his lips.

"You look hungry."

"Damn yes."

"How will you live when I am gone?" She asked with a small smile and he pulled back from her with a look in his eyes that made her stomach hurt.

"So why don't you stay?" He looked serious. Her heart thundered. Was he for real?

"What are you saying?" She looked into his eyes and he looked away.

"Nothing. I was just joking around with you."

She didn't answer. She just kissed him again. Until she could forget everything, everyone, except him.

***

Months until the contract become null? Two months!!!

(Alexandra)

Alex was staring at the calendar like every day when she felt Logan moving next to her. He stretched and she avoided looking at him.

Two months. And then it was time for goodbye. A goodbye she wasn't ready to say to him. But then she would never be ready for it. Even if Logan would give her ten years and forever, she would never be ready for that goodbye.

But you have to be.

Yes. I have to be.

Or you can tell him, you know.

She pushed herself up and he grabbed her hand and she fell over his chest. His arms went around her as he nuzzled her neck and then placed a kiss.

"Hey, you ready for today?" He muttered. She nodded.

"Yeah, yeah. It is Fabien's gala."

"Yes. So what are you going to wear?" He asked as he stripped his blanket with a yawn and she jerked up. Her eyes widened.

"Um-uh-" She stuttered as he stood up, and he was so naked, and he didn't mind. He was the most confident man she had seen -- not that she had ever seen anyone naked, but...

"You can take a picture, you know, if you want to keep looking." He said with a wink and she narrowed her eyes at him.

"Smug little jerk." She muttered under her breath. He laughed boisterously and her heart became a mushy boiled potato.

"Have you seen me?" He pointed to down below, and her eyes, her traitorous eyes, followed his fingers before she shook her head. "Want that?" He asked with an arrogant smile on his face.

"No thanks." She muttered.

"You didn't say no thanks the previous night." He looked like he was gloating.

"Shut up, and go away." She said with a frown. His body shook in silent laughter as he walked away from her, leaving a smile on her face.

Later that evening, as Alex was getting ready in her room, she heard the familiar sound of Logan and Daniel arguing about something.

They always argued about the stupidest things possible, but Alex always enjoyed it. She smiled as she applied a peach lipstick before she looked herself in the mirror. This was as shiny as she could get.

Her long gown was peach and it fitted her beautifully. One long sleeve with a slash on the side ruffled along as she walked and the crisscross across the back was studded with stones.

And it was beautiful. She had spent an hour shopping with Eliza for this dress.

When Alex descended down the stairs, Logan was staring, his eyes hooded and secretive -- and she loved that look he sported whenever he liked what she was wearing -- and Daniel whistled. "You look delicious." Dan said and Logan glared at his friend.

"You aren't allowed to call her delicious." Logan said with a frown and Daniel chuckled. Alex watched in amusement as they continued to fight why and why not.

"As long as Alex didn't have a problem with me calling her delicious--"

"You have a problem, right?" Logan looked at her and she smirked.

"Nah. It is just Daniel."

"What do you mean?" Dan asked offended.

"That means you are the same Daniel who makes a mess on my kitchen everyday in the hope that you will one day make a cake instead bricks. You are the same one who sits with me and talks about why Cristina shouldn't have married Owen in Grey's Anatomy. You are the one who watches reruns of *the office* with me. So... "

"Ah." Daniel shrugged as he hooked his arms through her and they walked out, much to the displeasure of Logan, who wouldn't stop grumbling as he followed them.

"She is my wife."

"So she is. And? What is your point?" Daniel asked as he opened the door for her.

"You have your own car." Logan said.

"I don't want to drive alone."

"Where is your date?"

"Alex had agreed to be my date?" Daniel said with a smirk.

"This is outrageous." Logan burst out and Alex snickered. "She is my wife. She is my date." He said as he placed a possessive arm around her. She snuggled a little closer with a satisfied smile on her face.

"You can have someone else for tonight." Alex said with a straight face and he narrowed his eyes at her.

"You two think this is funny. Huh?" He asked as he grabbed the keys from Daniel. "You are sitting in the back if you want to drive with us."

"You are no fun, Logan Adrien Forte." Daniel grumbled before he stepped in the backseat.

"I know."

The gala was on full swing when they walked in, Alex's hand inside Logan's -- she didn't know if it was for the show or he really wanted to hold her hand, but she didn't question it. She liked it too much to question it.

The moment they walked in, though, Logan and Daniel were instantly surrounded by hoards of people, mostly women, talking about things or telling jokes Alex couldn't understand.

She felt too alone, and she would have probably wandered off, if his hand hadn't been holding hers. She felt like a strange concept in her husband's life, but then what else could she feel - they were saying goodbye, the one that was prestamped, in five months. And that was that!

"Hey Logan. Alex." It was the unmistakable voice of Stacy Weston. She was draped in an ankle length A-line dress in deep purple, with a slit on the side that showed sneaky peeks of her legs as she walked and she looked like a woman. And Alex felt like a school girl in her peach dress.

"Stacy." Alex said in the way of greeting back. She didn't want to, but she was above the pettiness, wasn't she?

Maybe she really wasn't, but...

"You look nice." Stacy said as she looked up and down at Alex.

"Umm, what are you up to?" Daniel frowned at Stacy.

"Oh, hello to you too, Daniel. You are still the same." Stacy frowned as she took in Daniel.

"Yeah, and you are still bitching, I see."

"Daniel." Alex hissed and he gave her a shrug.

"What? I don't like her."

"Well. You have never known the idea of subtlety, so..." Stacy said as she walked away.

"Daniel, be civil." Logan chided him and he gave a pout.

"I don't want to be civil with the devil, Logan."

Alex couldn't help but chuckle at that. Looked like she wasn't *that* above pettiness.

"Logan. God. Haven't seen you in so long." A woman hurled herself at Logan --why couldn't people see she was right beside him?-- and Alex stiffened.

Now she was really angry, and this time her pettiness showed in her pout.

"Pamela. Do you only greet handsome men?" Alex asked as she watched Pam stepped back before she gave a smile to Dan. Dan smirked at Alex as if he knew what was going on in her mind.

"Oh, it is you."

"Yes. Mind stepping away from my guy?"

"Your guy?"

"Do you live in a hole or something, Pam? I thought your boutique is going good. We got married." Alex said, tasting every word of it. Alex didn't know why, but she had never liked Pamela.

"What the hell?" Pam screeched and Alex closed her ears. On her side eyes, she could see Logan's handsome smirk.

"Ouch. Stop." Alex waved a hand at Pamela and she heard someone chuckling at the side. When she turned, she could see Stacy shaking her head.

"You want anything to drink?" Logan asked and Alex nodded.

"I will be back. I am going to the restroom."

"Okay."

Alex stared at herself in the mirror before she shook her head. It was stupid to resent Stacy because Stacy had been Logan's girlfriend and Pam, because Pam didn't have a sense of boundary. But Alex could not help it.

She hated the thought of Logan with other women, even when they were his past.

One day she would be past, too. One day, she would be watching in the sidelines as someone else walked in with Logan in her arms. The image was like a sharp cutting knife.

Alex pressed a hand against her cheeks when the door to the restroom opened and Stacy walked in, like she owned the damn place.

"You are not as spineless as I thought. This will be interesting, now." She smirked as she applied bright red coat of lipstick over already bright lipstick. She smacked her lips at herself before applying compact on her cheeks.

"What will be?" Alex looked at a smirking Stacy. "What are you talking about?" Alex asked with doubt in her voice.

"This game. Of who is going to win Logan." Stacy said like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Logan is not a prize to be won, but if he is, I already did win him. I am his wife, so?" Alex challenged.

"A very unimportant and legal nuisance and I don't care for it. I still believe he was not really himself when he married you." Stacy looked so self-assured and it was the truth in her sentence --even though Stacy didn't know the half of it-- that made Alex feel empty. And sad.

"You said no. And then he went and married me and your ego can't take it, huh? Logan is not a doll that you can pry away from my fingers and I am not a kid who will easily let go. Even when I was a kid, I never let go of MY things." Alex said as she washed her hands. "If that is all..."

"You sure are very egoistical. You are not such a grand prize, Alexandra. Next to me, you are probably very cheap sausage."

"And you are? Duck? Pig?" Alex said with a dry chuckle as she took her bag and walked out, seething.

The woman was very irritating, and she didn't know how Logan could date a woman like that for a year and then decided to get married to the same one.

As she first thought, there must be really something wrong with Logan's brain function.

When she walked out, Daniel was there with a plate of chicken fingers, waiting for her.

"Thanks." She said as she took one. "Where is Logan?"

"Logan is talking with some very boring people." Daniel scrunched his nose.

"And you are just eating. Why don't you go help your dad out?"

"Don't you start too. I already have too much people telling me how I am wasting my time. I am not. I do help my dad."

"Whenever you please. That is not how you--" She was stopped halfway when Daniel shrugged.

"Ssh. My ears are bleeding. See you later."

"You aren't leaving me alone. I don't know anyone here."

"Get to know some people. Not all of them are bad wolves. Some of them are only bad pigs, so..."

"That is very reassuring." .

"Go on. I think I have just seen an angel. So... I am going to be non-single for a while."

"Shut up, and go away already." She waved him off.

As she wandered alone in the long halls, she kept looking for Logan, who was missing for a while now. And then she found him and he was --

He was kissing Stacy.

Or maybe Stacy was kissing him.

*

**

(Logan)

Logan pushed the woman away with a frown.

"What the hell are you doing?" He narrowed his eyes at Stacy. She stood there, cool as cucumber with a smug smile on her reddish lips.

"What? You have always enjoyed kissing me."

"I am married."

"So..."

"And you are delusional. We are over. We were over long before I married Alex. So? What the hell are you trying to achieve here?"

Her eyes looked nervous for a second before it went back to cool indifference.

"I know your ego was very hurt when I said no, Logan. I also knew you married Alex to get back at me."

Somehow everything she was telling him was almost right, yet, nothing of that mattered now. Nothing.

"Stop writing scenarios in your head and making up fiction. Alex and I -we are-"

Not real.

Stacy cut him off. "I don't know about that. I am still not sure about this."

"What are you not sure about?" Logan jerked back as he heard Alex asking Stacy.

Did she see it? What would she think?

"This is-" Logan pointed between himself and Stacy. "It is nothing."

"Kissing her is nothing?" Alex looked peaceful. Calm. She didn't look angry, not like she looked when Pamela had once kissed him, way before.

"It is nothing."

"Ouch." Alex winced. "Ouch, Stacy." She said again.

Stacy stared at them both and shook her head. "So he says. We will never know what he thinks."

"Wait. I will show you." Alex said and as Logan watched with befuddled wonder, Alex grabbed him and kissed him on the lips.

He was instantly lost inside the familiar taste of her lips. He loved the taste of it, addicted to it.

He protested when Alex pulled away. Alex gave him a smile.

"Now you know."

Stacy's face went dark as she stared at Alex.

"Don't be too smug about it. He once kissed me like this. He couldn't get enough of my kisses in the past, too, so who is to say that he won't get bored of you soon? We will see." Stacy said to Alex and Logan wanted to cut in, but Alex stopped him with a wave.

"Right. But right now we are here and that is that." Alex said as Stacy turned and left.

"I am sorry."

"Whatever." Alex said before she walked out.

He was staring at Alex the rest of the Gala that he missed making business contacts, but Alex wasn't looking at him. If he was being honest with himself, it almost felt like she was avoiding him.

And whenever he looked, she was talking with Leo Shine or laughing with him or smiling and he hated it.

"You are angry!" He said to her as he finally found herself alone. Without damn Leo.

"I am not."

"You are."

"It is nothing." She said as she averted her eyes away from him.

"It is not nothing." He said as he grabbed her hands.

***

(Alexandra)

She was angry, of course, but it wasn't because he had kissed Stacy. She knew he hadn't. She knew it was Stacy and she knew Logan had pushed Stacy away without a moment of hesitation. So it wasn't that.

But yes, she was angry and sad, because, what Stacy said was true.

Everything is true. We are fake and after two months, I would be a past. And I don't want to be. I want to be his future, as well. But how can I tell him? How can I contest his contract?!

"I know your ego was very hurt when I said no, Logan. I also knew you married Alex to get back at me." Stacy had told Logan and every word of it was true.

Alex was a pain medicine to soothe his reputation and ego. Maybe she had become a friend, a lover along the way, but she knew there was no way in hell she could be anything more. It just wasn't in their cards. Her cards.

And then Stacy had told her that he would get bored of kissing Alex and it made Alex feel cold all over. Like her heart was frozen.

Previous year, it was Stacy. This year it was Alex. And the next year, it would be someone else.

Logan Forte would not mind. He would move on, like she didn't matter. And she would be stuck in a place, going nowhere.

And that thought alone felt like a hammer slamming against her heart.

"It is nothing." She said as Logan stared at her.

"It is not nothing. I want to-"

"Please." She said. "I want to go home."

"I can drive you."

"No. Leo is here. He said-"

"Leo again?!" Logan looked angry.

"I am sorry, but I really need to be gone now and I don't want you to come with me."

"Lex, don't be an idiot. Whatever it is, you can talk to me." His eyes were pleading with her, but she couldn't listen to him.

She was still hurting all over. Throbbing from the pain. She didn't want to look at him.

"Not now." She said.

"Tomorrow?"

"Just-just let it go. Bye." She said and turned away from him.

"Don't go like this. If this is because I kissed Stacy- I mean, she kissed me and it was-"

"It is not that. I saw you pushing her away."

"Then what the hell is this, Alex? Why are you running away?"

"Because I feel like I am going to suffocate if I stood here any longer. I need to get out. Get away."

"Then let me come with you."

You are the reason I want to get away. So...

"No. Please."

He looked angry as she saw Leo stepping next to her. "You ready to go?" He smiled at her, the smile that made her feel calm.

"Yes."

"Alex..." Logan called and then his phone rang. "Wait." He said to her as he answered the phone.

But she didn't wait. She was too tired to wait. She walked away.

Leo drove around for a while and she say there unmoving.

"Don't look like that." He said after a while. "Wanna go eat something?"

"No." She muttered.

"Please, stop."

"Shut up, Leo."

"I can't shut up. Logan is a jerk, but..."

"Let us go eat. But promise you won't talk."

He stopped the car in front of a small, obscured place.

"What is this?"

"I am not kidnapping you. I am just giving you some authenticity." He said as they walked along a narrow walkway before it opened into a spacious place. It looked cozy and warm as they stepped inside a small wooden door.

The place was lit and bustling and people talked over each other and ate their food. Leo took a table at the side and she sat down.

"Order whatever you want. Fatty, oily, greasy food. It is good for heartbreak."

"I am not heartbroken." She said, but even as she said that, her heart ached.

"I saw Logan. Kissing-"

"Oh. It wasn't Logan. It was-" Alex looked down at the scarred wooden table where her hands were resting.

Leo took her hands in his.

"So, why are you so sad?" He asked as a single tear escaped her eye. She tried to wipe it, but she couldn't.

Leo pressed a finger against her cheek and then...

She couldn't believe her own eyes.

She couldn't believe his lips were on hers.

Life with you feels natural. Feels like it is supposed to be and yet, here we are, at the brink of falling and never getting back up. - Alexandra ~~~

Chapter 30

29. Incriminating photos and confessions

(Alexandra)

Alex couldn't believe her eyes or her lips. Or the man --*her friend*-- now leaning over the table. And kissing her.

The hell. What the hell?

But it was also nice. Comforting. Like your favorite pajama or this worn out blanket you always used. Not stormy or confusing or igniting like Logan's kisses, but nice. Just so nice and simple.

Oh God. Oh God. How could he be kissing her now? God. It was so wrong.

But no matter how hard she tried, she felt like she was glued to him, his lips. She couldn't move. It was the shock. It must be. She was freaking out, but she couldn't move.

Or maybe, you like kissing him.

No. I don't. Stop planting stupid thoughts in my head.

She didn't know how to pull away. She couldn't think straight.

Logan. Logan. He will never forgive me if I do this to him.

His name was ringing inside her like an echo, but Logan would not care. Would he? He would care that it was *bad* for his *reputation*, but would he care that another man loved her like a man *loved* a woman?

Leo's lips were still on hers, coaxing, pleading, begging. She could taste his hopelessness on her lips.

Pull away! Dammit, Alexandra. Do it.

But except knowing that this was totally wrong, she could do nothing. Of course, she wanted to move, but couldn't. Wouldn't. She was frozen. In time. In place. In chaos.

What is wrong with me? She thought. *Move, stupid. Move away.*

But strangely enough, his kiss was like a distraction. It made her forget everything else that was so wrong in her life, in her love. It was also a nice, nice kiss.

She wanted Leo to kiss her out of all her problems. To make her forget it all. Forget Logan. Forget that after two months, they would be no more. That she had to say goodbye to Logan. To her love. And Logan would not miss her or want her.

It was so wrong. It was so selfish. But for a moment, just this moment, she wanted to be selfish. She wanted to be inconsiderate. She wanted Leo's desperation. She wanted Leo's vulnerability. She thrived on it. It felt like she was not the only one who was drowning and it was wrong. So wrong.

Stop. Freaking stop this madness.

Leo was her friend, her *best* friend. He had become someone she cared about in such short time and she couldn't hurt him.

Leo is your best friend. You are Logan's best friend. And you all are kissing. Wow. Just wow. The voice taunted.

Her eyes stung from the flash of a stalking camera, and she blinked. Her head was fuzzy, her brain was in scrambles.

Step away. Push him away. You can't do this to yourself, or Leo or Logan.

The moment felt like eternity, but her hands were finally, finally listening to her. She could finally move away from him and his sad eyes.

He looked forlorn, like she had kicked him in his gut. She wanted to hug him and say it was going to be alright. She knew he was going to be alright, but today he wasn't, neither was she.

"Stop." She said as she looked up into his azure blue eyes. They were like a cloudy sky. It made her heart break all over again, for him.

She stared at Leo, her hands pressed against his chest in warning. "Don't."

Her stomach was twisting and she wanted to puke. She wanted to puke all over herself. She felt disgusted and dirty, not because Leo had kissed her, but because she had wanted to use this, use his weakness to run away from herself, her weakness.

She had wanted to feel strong and so she had let him kiss her, even though she knew it meant nothing. It would never amount to anything.

It was so wrong. She was-she had never been that selfish.

I am so sorry, Leo.

He looked at her with guilt, but there was something else there, too, something she had never expected to see in any man. *Love*. Maybe he wasn't in love with her, but he loved her.

How she wished she loved Leo, back. It would have been easy and simple. It wouldn't have been impossible and difficult like it was with Logan.

But you are in love with Logan.

But maybe I can learn to love--

Impossible. The answer was almost instant.

Leo loved her and here she was, going to hurt him for that. Just as she would forever be hurt for her love, Leo would be, for his.

"What are you doing?" She whispered. "This is totally inappropriate, Leo." She said, feeling like a hypocrite. But he needed to realize this wasn't going anywhere. She couldn't give him false hope.

"I am sorry." He said as he looked down. He looked really sorry, but she was sorry, too.

"God, Leo. Did you see that flash? Someone took a damn picture. It will be all over the news-God, you are a freaking celebrity, how can you, ugh! How the hell am I going to explain this to Logan?" She muttered, more to herself than to him.

How the hell would she? She could have if it was all Leo's fault, but it wasn't. She was equally to blame.

"I know, Alex, okay. I know, but he kissed someone else, too. I saw that. I saw your eyes and-- God, I want to protect you." He looked at her with exasperation and sadness. "And I want you to know how I feel for you."

"She kissed him, yes and it wouldn't be all over the freaking media. This is- oh my... I am married, for God's sake. You know that, Leo. You can't feel anything else for me, except friendship."

"I don't know shit. What the hell are you doing with him, Alex? He didn't love-- shit, he was Kissing that woman. He doesn't love you like you do and anyone can see that."

Anyone can see that!

It felt like a slap. His words. It might be true, but hearing it from someone she trusted as friend, in such unobscured clarity, it was like a blow to her heart and soul. She took a step back from Leo and he shook his head.

"No. Please. Sorry, that was such a wrong thing to say." He grabbed her hand and she shook it away. "Don't go. Don't go like this. I can't- I am sorry, I am sorry for being an idiot. But I love you, Alex. I love you and that is... "

"Don't say it. Don't." She didn't want to hear him say that. Because she was weak enough to hold on to that, even when she didn't want to.

"Why can't I? Over the months, you have become someone I truly, actually care about. And I- I don't want to let you go, Alex. You are wonderful, kind and -"

Leo looked determined. He looked like he would fight a war to win her. But he couldn't win no matter how hard he fought, because her heart wasn't hers, anymore. It belonged to a man who could care less about it.

And Logan was the only one she could love.

You don't know that. You really don't. She didn't know why the voice that always supported Logan was now talking her into trying to love someone else. It was just so-so confusing.

I don't, but I don't want to find out, too. I don't want to use Leo as an experiment and hurt him. I can't.

"I care for you, too, but you are my friend and you-- you look drunk. How many drinks did you have at the gala? Go home, Leo. Sleep. And get your head straight. I am not doing this to Logan and you know that. You know that." Her body shook as she stared at him, her eyes filled with tears. She blinked rapidly and he shook his head as he pushed his fingers through his hair.

"Yes, damn it. I know you love him, I know. I see every damn time how you look at him, and it is no way near how you look at me. But did he look at you like that? Tell me that, just that and I will let this go. Let you go."

"I don't care how he looks at me. Okay? We are done talking, Leo. If you want to come back, come back to me as a friend. Nothing more. Never." She said with a determined frown and he gave her a lopsided smile.

"Never say never." He said as he slumped down on his chair. He looked tired.

She wanted to put a hand on his shoulder, to assure that it was going to be alright, that he was going to be alright.

"Stop doing this, Leo."

"Why should I stop? I don't care if you are married. I love you."

"Shut up."

"No can't do." He said as he took a sip of his wine. She pulled it away from him.

"Stop drinking. It is making you say and do stupid things."

"Hey Alex, I am not drunk. I know what I am doing and it is not stupid. You are the stupid one here to believe Logan even after you saw him kissing *that- that* woman. I don't know how you can be so-"

She stood up with a scowl. "No, stop. Bye, Leo. We will talk when you are not drunk." She said as she walked out of the restaurant, leaving him inside. She saw him pouring another glass of wine with a frown and gulping it down.

She hailed a cab, and as the car picked up speed, she picked up her phone and called Trish. She knew Trish would be angry with her, but she had to do this for Leo's sake.

"Hey, Leo needs you. Pick him up from Cole's Kitchen. It is the small-"

"I know. It is his favorite place. So what happened?" Trish asked.

"Just get him home." Alex said and hung up before Trish could say anything.

She had to tell this to Logan, of course, she would. But she was so tired right now. This was a rough night and weirdly unexpected things had happened.

Her whole body was aching and her heart was like a messy bucket filled with chaos. She just wanted to lie right there in the cab and go to sleep.

She knew Logan would not take it in stride --of course, he would be angry because she left with Leo-- and before he could come to his senses and realize that this was just like the kiss between him and Stacy--

Is it? He pushed her away. You took your sweet time.

It is not my fault. I was momentarily gone insane.

Good excuse. Tell that to Logan and we will see.

She knew he wouldn't like seeing his wife plastered across paper with another man.

Maybe he would just end their contract and send her on her way. Maybe she wanted it all to happen. There was only two months more, but it was getting harder and harder to keep her feelings at bay, to keep herself from just begging him to let her stay with him.

She was so afraid. So very afraid that she was going to lose it and beg him to love her back.

When she reached home, she found a sticky note in his usual scribble left on the refrigerator. She smiled as she read it as tears dribbled down her cheeks.

Tomorrow. Somehow, deep in her bones she knew. It wouldn't be the same. They wouldn't be the same. It would all change for the better or worse.

And she also knew it wouldn't be for better. ~

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Lex,

I called you. You didn't take my call. I have an urgent meeting with an important client and I have to go. Won't be back until tomorrow. And tomorrow, we will talk. About Stacy. About everything. Never walk away. Especially not with Leo. I don't like it. And dinner is in the table.

-L ~

~~

"Why are you doing this to me, Logan? What is all this caring, understanding words? If this is all friendship, how will you love someone?" She whispered to herself as she pressed the paper against her cheeks. She could feel him in the paper and it felt almost stupid.

She shook her head and pulled out her phone. There were four missed calls from him. She dialed his number, but it went to voicemail.

God. She wanted to hear his voice so bad. To be near him. She wanted to be where he was right now.

She dialed Tom's number and he picked it up in the second ring.

"Hi, Lady Boss."

"Alex, Tom. Are you with Logan?"

"He is inside the conference room, Alex. He can't come right now. It is a big project and one of the contractors are still not giving a proposal and he needs to iron out all the details before starting the project on proposed date. So... Do you want me to tell him something?"

"Just ask him to eat his dinner. He seems to forget things like that when he is working." She said with a smile.

"Aw. My wife never calls me for things like that. Boss is a lucky man."

"Oh, shush. Bye Tom. Oh and you too, eat your dinner."

"Wow. Like really? How generous of you to add me at the end, kind lady. Bye. I am going to feed your husband. You owe me one."

"Yah, yah, bye." She hung up with a small smile as she walked to Logan's room, picked one of his shirt, wore it and went to bed. Everything smelled like Logan and her heart was heavy as she closed her eyes and inhaled in his scent.

She didn't sleep for a long, long time.

***

She woke up early in the morning and her eyes burnt from the lack of sleep, but she couldn't go back. The bed was still empty.

She took a shower and baked oat and banana muffins for breakfast and also made toasts for Logan. Then she found sanctuary inside the massive Library and tried to forget herself inside a book, but it wasn't easier like it would normally be. She closed her eyes and inhaled the calming smell of old paper and wood and cardboard. But her heart was still in turmoil.

When she realized she was still on the second page and it had already been an hour, she closed the book and put it back in its place before she walked out, switched on the TV and waited. Waited for Logan. It was already nine in the morning and he wasn't still here.

She spent time staring at the screen. It was exactly at eleven, the front door opened with a bang. She could feel his anger all the way from the door.

So what she feared had come true. The pictures, the damn pictures were already out.

God, don't they sleep? She thought. *Stupid paparazzi.*

"What the hell is this?" He threw it in front of her with a vicious scowl.

She stared at the glossy page in front of her. There she was, with Leo and her lips were on his and her hands were on his chest.

"I- this, this is *nothing*." She said, using the same word he used, but he didn't get it. "Logan, I- I was going to talk to you about this yesterday, I called Tom, but you were in a meeting." She said, trying to sound calm.

"Is that so? How convenient I wasn't here yesterday, huh?" Logan sounded sarcastic. "Is this why you are so eager to leave the party with Leo?" He asked with a sardonic smile.

"Logan, just hear me out." She said and he gritted his teeth.

He looked like he was going to punch someone or something. He looked furious. Enraged. His knuckle was white with how hard he pressed it together. She tried to grab his hand, but he pulled it away.

He kissed Stacy and I heard him out. She thought with a belligerent frown. *I listened.*

"Logan, just hear me out. Okay. I did."

"Oh, yes, you-you did. We are talking about Stacy, now, aren't we? I didn't kiss her long enough to get caught by a photographer. This isn't my face on the centre page, is it?" He said as he grabbed the magazine from her and waved it in front of her face.

"But you did kiss her and I heard you out. Why can't you extend the same courtesy to me, Logan?"

"Oh, I would have given you the same courtesy if you didn't look so cozy kissing him." He snarled the word out and she took a step back. "You know, I can almost understand this. I can understand that Leo is your backup plan. But you can not go around kissing him when we are still pretending to be a couple. You know, all these lies and plots, this contract, it is to keep my fucking *reputation* intact. And now it is obliterated. You did that. What does that say about me? What will they say when they see that my wife is going around kissing playboy rockstars behind my back? Huh?"

"Everything is always about them. And of course, your *fucking* reputation." She said as she grabbed the magazine back from him and threw it away. "Who are they, Logan? Are they your mom and dad and sisters? Are they your best friends? They are just spectators, Logan. But you always care about them. Not me. Never me and not the people who actually matters."

"Yes, I do care about my reputation, because it took me long enough to build one and come to where I am standing right now." He said with a frown. "So... How long this has been going on?

Is this why he is picking you up everyday? Did you kiss him right after you kissed me?" He asked as he clenched his jaw and stared at her with anger in his eyes.

It felt like a kick. To her heart and love.

"God, are you really asking me that? Do you really believe that I will do that, Logan?"

"Yes, I am asking you and I don't know what to believe. Shit." He grunted. "I should have stopped you from working for Mathilda after seeing how you looked at Leo. And you told me that he would teach you how to make love. You did. And I- like a fool believed it was all said in anger." He looked at her as if she was his enemy.

That look, he had never given her that look. And it was like a block of ice, right on her heart, that was already breaking and bleeding. It stung. It hurt.

"You couldn't have stopped me from working for Mathilda, Logan. I am my own woman, remember?" She shook her head with a determined frown. "And I did say that, but you know I said it because I was angry. So this- this isn't about that, Logan. You know what- you are just saying all this to hurt me, to push me away and it is working. The contract is coming to an end and you almost feel guilty, guilty to send me away, don't you, Logan?"

"Just like you to twist it all out of context. You are just-" He stopped and glared above her head.

"Just like Stacy. Yeah?" She laughed. It sounded bitter even to herself.

"I wasn't going to say that."

"You are. But guess what, I don't care what you think. I did want to kiss Leo for a minute there, I did, just to run away from my problems, but I pushed him away, because I won't do that to him or you. Or myself. I am not that selfish."

Logan growled and punched the wall and hissed. She could see the scratch on his knuckles. She grabbed it, but he pulled it away with a wince as if her touch burned him.

"Do you need Nobel Prize for pushing him away --or maybe an Oscar, because you really are a great actress! What? Do you think telling me all this might absolve you?" His smile was wry.

"Don't do this, Logan. If we are going to say *goodbye*, let us say goodbye as friends. *Best friends,* that is what we are, no? Don't do this to us. Me." She looked at him, showing every emotion that was tumbling out of her, in her eyes. He didn't see. He couldn't. "And Leo is my friend, Logan."

"I am your friend, too, and you kissed me before. So I don't know what is stopping you from kissing him? After all, you just admitted that you wanted to kiss him."

"I did, Logan. I also said it was to run away from my problems. Why didn't you ask me what my problem is, Logan? Why can't you? You never care that I am hurting. YOU always come first."

"You are twisting this again, Alexandra."

"That was the only time he kissed me and you have to trust me, okay. I am not lying to you. I am so tired of fighting with you." She leaned against the couch as she closed her eyes.

"I am not trusting anyone. Nobody is worth it." He snapped at her.

"Not everyone out there is trying to screw you over, Logan. I know what happened to you, but I am just so tired of standing here in front of you and defending myself, over and over, when you have already ruled me out as guilty. What else can I say? I am not your mothe-"

"Beth is my mother. And she is amazing. Not like you or Barbara."

She winced. "Do you truly think I will do something like that? Look at me, Logan, look at me, just once and tell me."

He looked at her. His eyes were empty. Cold. She felt like she was standing in the freezing Arctic winter, naked.

Please, Logan. Don't do this to me. Don't.

But he couldn't hear her. Couldn't see how her heart is breaking.

He couldn't even look at her properly. She was guilty in his eyes and no matter what she did or said, he would not believe it. She was just like the woman who walked away with someone else and left him.

"I don't know, Alexandra." He said as his eyes flitted away from her, as if he couldn't bear to look at her face. As if she disgusted him, as if he hated her.

He didn't know how that one sentence was enough to break her completely.

She knew he knew. If he didn't, he would have called her Lex or Alex, not Alexandra.

And that was all the answer he could ever say to her.

"Okay." She nodded defeated. She lost this battle and she couldn't fight anymore. She was so damn tired.

"I really- I, you know according to the sub-clause of our contract, you can not be with anyone until the term of our marriage is over. I understand if you want to be with Leo after the contract is over, but this is unacceptable. You broke the contract, Alexandra. And I don't know..."

"Damn you and your contract. I said look at me, you idiot. Just look at me."

He did. He did look at her, like he had never seen her before, like she was an alien residing in his *friend's* body. And this look was way worse than *not* looking.

"I told you once. I am telling it to you again. It was one time, one time when I became momentarily insane and it was wrong --and unforgivable, but it was nothing to me. It was a foolish mistake. I won't do that to you, not over and over again as you so hellbent on believing. Even if it is not in the contract, okay? I won't break your trust and your friendship." *And my love.*

"Why?" He spat. "Why won't you? How do I know that?"

"I won't. I can't do that." Her voice shook. But he stood there, unmoved. Hard as stone. His grey eyes were like northern skies, blistering with coming hurricane. Ready to destroy and swallow everything.

"I am asking why, Alex?" His eyes bore in to her, stripping her off all her defenses.

Hurt swirled inside her. How could she tell him that without exposing every one of her weakness?

"I just won't. Please."

"Why?" He repeated.

"Why? Because I am in love with you, you bastard."

Some love stories are destined to be. Some stories are fated to never be- Alexandra. ~~~

Chapter 31

30. Rejections and heart breaks

(Alexandra)

"I love you." She murmured again, her fight leaving her system. Now there was only this urgency to take flight and never turn back.

Tell me something. She thought as she looked up at him.

He stood there, still as a statue as her body shook like the last leaf on a stormy night. It was so cold. Her whole body was so freaking cold, but it was good for her heart. It numbed the pain ripping through it. The cold kept it working.

She hugged herself as if she couldn't bear the mark of his frozen eyes on her body. There was nothing there, nothing she hoped to see --and she knew it would be like this and that was why she never dared to say her feelings out loud.

His eyes were mostly aloof, but then she knew what it meant. He looked away as if seeing her hurt him. Maybe he was feeling sympathetic for her. Maybe it was pity.

And the thought of his pity ambushed her. This was why she didn't -- wouldn't tell him. Because she knew this would come and her world would come crashing down her head.

Rejection. It smelled like burning logs and woods. Burning hopes and dreams. It reeked of despair and desolation. Of disinterest.

Her despair. His disinterest.

Her head was spinning and her eyes were blurry. She wanted to sit down, but she stood in front of him, heart in her eyes as silent tears drifted down her cheeks. She was fast to wipe them away, but he did not see it. He didn't see her anymore.

He was staring somewhere above her head, refusing to look her in the eyes. *Coward.* He looked guilty and ashamed. But she didn't want guilt. Or shame. Or pity.

She wanted him to love her back. Just love her like a man loved a woman. Not lust, or desire.

She had thought she would be okay with lust, but she was so wrong.

Though he wanted her, desired her, he never loved her. She knew it, didn't she? She was the fool here and God forbid, if Logan Adrian Forte ever made a fool out of himself.

"Wh-what?" He stuttered after a while and Alex couldn't help the chuckle as he scratched at his stubbled chin.

She prayed for strength. Hoped that she would come away from this. She could. She was strong enough.

But not now. Now, she needed time to mourn the definite loss, defined rejection. This wasn't just in her head anymore, now there was no space for hopes and dreams and what ifs.

Now everything was solid and squashed. Everyone of her dreams she dared to dream even amid the hopelessness. Even in the chaos.

"I love you, Logan. Tell me something back. Anything." He stared at her as if she had two heads and four horns.

"I can't, I mean- I don't-" His voice was weak, but she heard it loud and clear.

Get it. He doesn't love you.

She knew that long before he said it, but somewhere deep inside, she had hoped. And she had prayed.

She kept believing that there might just be something between them. But no, it was all in her mind.

It was all just a fairytale in the jungle of her fantasy. It was all good and hopeful in the pages of her imaginary stories, but reality was nothing like that. Reality was a broken, dismembered puzzle of Cinderella and Rapunzel and every other fairytale princesses who ever got her prince and happy ending. Lucky girls in lucky stories. Real life wasn't always lucky or fair.

There was nothing here for her, not anymore. This wasn't her home -- he couldn't be her home. Not after it became like this - frozen and frigid.

Her heart ached and she was the reason her heart was hurting like someone was just peeling layer after layer of its muscle until it was pooled with red, red blood. She was the only one to blame. No one else.

Not even Logan. He was clear about the lines they shouldn't cross. Especially the emotional ones. He was okay with crossing physical ones, because, he was a guy and it probably would have meant nothing to guys like him.

I told you, didn't I, you stupid heart, to not fall for this man? I told you that it would only end in rejection and heartbreak, from the very first day. But you didn't listen. You didn't.

But how could she not fall for him?

Of course, she knew about the inevitable end, but she just chose to love him through it all.

How could she not? Even when they were not made to be together, he was made for her.

Their love story was only ever one-sided and pathetic. No. It wasn't *their* love story. *Her love story.* Only hers. She was the only one here in love.

He didn't love her back.

This here was real. This here was everything she had seen in her nightmares and woke up crying and shaking and drenched in sweat and praying would never come alive.

This here was that demon hiding in her closet, underside her bed. She had felt it there, lurking, silently sneaking around, but it was finally here in front of her, staring her down.

Truth. Finally.

It was scary, yet almost liberating. It felt like maybe she could breathe again even if it hurt like hell.

"Don't say anything." She pleaded, her voice almost steady now.

"I am sorry." He looked down and shook his head. "I am sorry. I didn't- I didn't think you will-"

She wanted to laugh.

This was the one thing no woman ever wanted to hear after her confession of love. I am sorry.

"Don't be sorry." She said as she shook her head. Why was he sorry? Because she was so unlovable?

"This is- I can't-" He still couldn't form a full sentence. If it wasn't her heart he was breaking, she would probably be laughing at how Logan Forte, the one who talked his way into anything and everything was suddenly speechless. Wordless.

"You don't love me." She said with finality.

He shook his head. "It isn't that simple."

"It is. That simple."

Finally she could move on without having to second guess and dream. And hope.

"I know. You don't have to love me back just because I said I love you, Logan. Don't look so guilty. You don't have to be sorry, too. It is not your fault. This isn't part of the contract. I broke the contract, again." She didn't know how she could talk like it didn't matter, when she was breaking inside. Bit by bit. But her voice was collected, strong.

She was proud of herself. Proud of how far she had come. Once upon a time, she wouldn't have stood. She would have fled. She would have hid until it all went away.

"Please, Alex. Don't say-"

He looked like he had aged in the past ten minutes. His eyes looked tired and she was sorry, sorry that her love made him feel like this. She had never wanted to *burden* him with her feelings.

"Nonsense. Don't worry about the contract. I think we should just end it right here. There is only two months more, right? You can use this picture to get out of this fake marriage. This is all falling right in place." She said almost mechanically. "And I just need you to pay for the case, to Michael, that is all. I don't need more money."

"I don't want to use you as a scapegoat to get out of the contract. This isn't how it is supposed-"

She did not miss that he used Alex again.

"This is how it is supposed to be, Logan. From the very first day we met."

"I can't do-"

"Wait, why not? It is all coming together." She said as she looked at him. She wasn't afraid anymore. She wasn't afraid that she was going to cry. She wouldn't. Her love was something that would always be here even if he was gone and she wasn't ashamed of it, nor was she afraid to show it anymore.

"I believe you. I believe you wouldn't cheat on me with Leo. I am sorry for not trusting you, but- but please..."

It made her feel angry all over again.

"Now you believe me?" She scoffed. "After ripping me apart into shreds, now you believe me." She chuckled and he looked at her like she had lost it. Maybe she had. "Oh. Yes. That is hilarious."

"I didn't mean to hurt you, I don't want to hurt you."

"You never mean anything, Logan and I don't know, I don't want to fight about this with you. Not anymore."

"I just wanted to know why- you know just why you kissed him?" His face contorted as he said that. "I didn't expect you to spring this in my face like- just- I mean you lo-l-" He shrunk his nose as his bewildered eyes looked around for a way to escape.

"Love. You can't even say the word?" She smiled. "God."

"I didn't know you love me. I wouldn't have- I-"

"Don't lie about that, Logan. You know. You asked it over and over, because you wanted me to say that, don't you? You wanted me to say *I love you.* You wanted to hear it, because you are just that selfish. You can't help it. I know how much you can't take rejection. Even from the women you don't want and you wanted me, so...

"You wanted me to fall for you, you knew I would fall for you, when you do things like buying me that stupid table," she pointed the table with a frown. "Getting me my dream job, fighting with me for my dad's factory, making love to me in the room that smelled like wilted tulips and

candles. You knew I am falling for you from every kiss you gave, ever touch I returned. You saw it. And you knew. You know I am falling when I was jealous over Stacy. So, just don't gloss it over. It won't help me. It won't hurt less. So... Like ripping a band aid- you know, it is good."

"I- I am really sorry you are hurt- I just-"

"I know, Logan. I know you are sorry. I am, too and I don't regret you, regret this. I don't blame you. But please don't give me excuses." She said as she rubbed against her cheeks. Her tears were long dry, leaving itchy, dry black patches of mascara down her cheeks.

"I care about you, Alex. You know that, but I don't know. This is all so sudden. I am not prepared for it."

Oh God, I love you. Even when you say stupid things like this, I love you.

"So sudden? It is a year, Logan. It is coming for a year." She smiled. "Yeah, you care about me and I know that. I know I am your friend. So just tell me one thing! Will you keep caring about me if I go back to Leo when the contract is over? Will you keep caring if I find someone else to love?"

His eyes went to slits and a vein in his neck ticked. His jaw was so tight she wondered if it would break. He glared before he shook his head and composed his face.

The hell with you! She thought.

"I saw that, Logan. You don't want me. You don't want me to want anyone else other than you. You don't want any other man to want me. What is this Logan? So, you said it is not love. What is this, then? Who am I to you?"

"Dammit. Now, you - you are twisting it again. Don't do this. Please. I don't want to lose you. You are my best friend. And of course, I will still care if you find someone else to love."

Ok. She thought. *Ok*.

"Friend?" She laughed at his face. He took a step back as if he was afraid that she would hurt him or kick him. Oh, she wanted to, but she would not. "The heck with you and your friendship. I don't want to be your *fucking* friend-- I meant it literally. And our freaking contract is null."

Friend. She thought with a bitter smile. She didn't know she would come to hate that word so much. As she said, she didn't want to be his friend. She never wanted to be just friends.

If she walked away from him, --when she walked away--she would make sure to cut all the ties.

Blurry, indefinite lines wouldn't work with them. They would go back to making the same mistakes, following the same pattern and she knew, he would come to her and kiss her and she would give in. She would agree to be his *fucking* friend.

And it couldn't be like that. It shouldn't be. She couldn't do that to herself just because she was so in love with Logan. There was so much to her life than Logan and she couldn't let Logan steal all her happiness away. It would be a disservice to herself and she couldn't.

She now had to fight for her dad's company, the fight was already half way and she would probably win. She had good friends who cared for her and she would not die without him. She would just be empty.

But better be empty than feeling alone together with him. Feeling miserable.

She turned away from him.

"Don't go, Alex." She stopped, her heart in her throat.

"I mean, we can be like this. You know. Forever. This doesn't have to end. We can be best friends, and like this." He pointed between himself.

"Friends with benefits?" She nodded with a wry smile. She couldn't believe all the words pouring out of him. She couldn't believe he could be this dense.

For a smart guy, he was really, really stupid.

"Yes. Yes. This is amazing. We are doing-- I mean, it is going great, you know. So why mess this up? I mean- I do care for you and you do know how much I do. we can be--"

Oh my God. Kill me, NOW.

"Don't say friends. Not again. I am not your freaking friend, Logan. You have Daniel and Tom for that."

"You are. You are my best friend. You know that, so don't blame me for what you did. You did that, you made a mess of everything- I didn't ask for you to fall in lo-" He stopped, and looked down.

"What, go on?"

"Just-"

"Goodbye, Logan. Hope you find warmth in your reputation at night. Hope all of *them* --whoever *they* are-- love you like I did."

She shook her head and walked away. When she was inside her room, she slammed the door shut behind her back.

She did not cry.

She just opened her two bags that she brought here with her when he drove her to his house --the very first night she met him-- from the motel and started packing it with her clothes.

Goodbye, Love.

***

(Logan)

For the rest of the day, Alex didn't come out. He gulped down a glass of juice and called it lunch.

Logan didn't know what to do. He sat in his room, wondering what went wrong.

The moment you decided kissing her is the right decision, that is where it all went wrong.

They were perfect the way they were. Love was-it was all about pain and chaos and heartbreak. It was full of turmoil and tears. Why did she want that?

He didn't want that. He couldn't want that. He had went through it so early in the age. That disorder. The dismay.

He had watched as people gossiped about him, his family. He had watched as they murmured behind his back about his mother, about how pitiful he was. *Poor Logan, his mommy left him. Poor baby. Oh sweet darling, you don't deserve this.* He was young, but he knew what they were talking about. It made a mark on him, something he couldn't forget. It stayed, even after Barbara left.

That was why he made the contract with Alex. So that nobody would talk about him, about how *pitiful* he was after Stacy said No. He couldn't be *poor Logan,* again. He didn't come this far to go back.

Now he knew how stupid it was. Stupid, and thoughtless.

But, love was just a technicality. It was just a word. He could give her everything, except *that word.*

But it is everything for Alex. So... Why don't you be a little sensitive?

I never wanted to hurt her, but I can't let her hurt me, either.

Yeah? Then keep doing whatever you are doing. It is working. The voice said with a tinge of derision.

He wanted to be sensitive about her feelings, but it was all too much for him. He always had such clear goals and checklists and agenda. The moment Alex walked in, everything became like one big heap of mess.

He could still feel how his heart felt the moment he saw the damn picture. Of Alex kissing Leo. And that pain, how could he let himself feel that pain ever again?

I can't. I can't feel like someone is ripping my heart away, again.

He was startled awake from his reverie when his phone rang. He frowned as he looked at Daniel's name flashing across the screen.

He knew why Daniel was calling and he didn't want to pick up, but he knew Dan wouldn't stop.

"How is Alex?" That was the first thing Daniel asked.

"You are supposed to ask how am I?"

"Angry, I know. And you would have said things that hurt her. So where is she, now? How is she?"

"She kissed him."

"Nah, she didn't. Leo did. I mean, I can't even blame Leo. Alex is amazing and if she isn't your wife, I would have kissed her, too."

"Wow. That really makes me feel so much better." Logan said sarcastically. "But really, she kissed him and I have no right to be angry, really. So I don't know why I am? For God's sake, this isn't even a *real* marriage. So..." *Shit.*

"Not a real marriage?" Was it too late to take back? "What did you do?"

"I am just- it is nothing. Forget it."

"It is not nothing. Wait. You, get in your car and drive to my dad's office. We are freaking talking about this. Now."

"I don't want to come."

"Stop being a belligerent and whiny little brat. Get in your damn car. Or I am calling Emma and El right now."

"Don't call them. I won't hear the freaking end of it if they find out. Coming." Logan said as he stood up. He walked past Alex's room and it was quiet. He wondered if she was sleeping. She didn't even eat.

"I am going out. You should eat something." He felt like he was talking to the door. She remained silent.

Logan grabbed his keys and one of the cookie that was always there since Alex and drove away.

When he reached Daniel's office, he was dictating something to his PA. He looked up and waved at Logan. "Sit, Logan. Mark, it is almost done. You can call dad with the rest of it."

"You can continue. I can wait." Logan said to Daniel. "It is a surprise you are even working."

"Yeah, dad is sick with stomach bug or something and I thought I can help him out. Alex said I have to be a little more responsible."

"Oh yeah, we can't say *no* to Alex now, can we?" Logan said sarcastically as he grabbed a book and regretted it the moment he realized it was another trashy tabloid with Leo and Alex on it. He scanned the article with his heart pounding against his rib cage.

Fuck this. He thought and threw it away

"So, start from the beginning. What nonsense is that? Fake marriage?" Daniel's voice was mocking. "God. Only you."

"That is all some nonsense I came up with. We have signed a contract and all that and it is only for a year--" Logan told Daniel about how he met Alex and how they started this ruse to pretend to be a couple. "And suddenly she is saying she loves me and all this shit and I don't know-"

"Freaking shut up." Daniel cut him off. "You are an idiot. What the hell did you do?"

"What I thought I must do."

"Did Stacy say *no* to your proposal? Did you find Alex to pretend to be your wife because you are so worried about what everyone would think? Freaking fantastic."

"How-how did you know that?"

"God. You are a stupid asshole. I don't know what to say to you right now. I would really like to punch you in your nose." Daniel scowled at him.

"So Alex said yes to your insane proposal, but why?"

"Because she needed the money to file a lawsuit to get her dad's company back."

"And?"

"And it was all going great. Until she kissed *this* bastard and now she is saying she is in love with me and I don't know what to say to that. It is confusing. I don't want her to love me." He said with a tired frown.

"Is it okay if she loved Leo?"

"Why the hell would she do that?" He gritted her teeth.

"Because Leo loves her?"

"He doesn't love her. He is just a stupid bastard who loves to kiss other men's wives."

"Your wife, *fake* wife, to be exact. So why do you even care?"

"I just-it is the contract. I don't care."

"Oh, hilarious." Daniel chuckled. "Logan, man, do you want to know what I think? I think you should go back to her and tell her you love her."

"I-I don't think-"

"Don't think, Logan. Just don't. You are the smartest man I know, but right this moment, I feel like you are also the stupidest one I ever know."

"I can't lie to her about this and I really don't want to hurt her."

"It isn't a lie if you really love her, Logan. Get that inside your dumb head, dude."

"You know how love is all messy and painful and I can't- I don't want to be hurt or in love and Barbara-"

"Stop talking about Barbara, because Barbara isn't the reason for any of this. You are. Barbara is long gone and your father, oh God, he is so freaking happy, he is happy with Beth. Emma and Eliza are happy, too. They moved onm I don't know why you are still so hung up on fucking Barbara. Why won't you move on? You are fine, Logan, but only you won't believe that."

"I saw her." Logan said.

"Who?"

"Barbara?"

"God. Shit, shit. When? Where?"

"Here. She is here. I mean, in the city. I saw her when I went to pick up a ring."

"So, how is she?"

"I don't know. I don't want to know. She is *nothing* to me."

"I hope you are hearing to yourself right now. She is *nothing*. So why are you still letting her affect your life? As you said, she is nothing, Logan. You can't make decisions based on someone who is a stranger to you. Who is nothing to you."

"But I -"

"You know what, I think I am calling Eliza and Emma. I don't think I can talk some damn sense in to you."

"Don't you dare."

"Go back home. Think. And do something about this, or I promise I will call your sisters. And Beth, if I have to."

Logan frowned at his friend and stood up. "Bye Daniel and don't do anything stupid." He said before he walked out with a frown.

He drove around in his car for a while, until night fell over the twilight hours --he could still remember how Alex loved twilight, how she said it was filled with hope and beauty--before he finally decided to go back home.

She was there, sitting in the table, eating something when he walked in. She looked calm, peaceful, except he could see the redness in her puffy eyes. It made his heart wrench.

He looked at her and she gave him a small smile. His heart felt like it would burst open.

She waved to him. "Here, I made you dinner, too." She said, without looking him in the eyes.

He hesitated before he walked to her. He sat down. He knew they couldn't go back, but for now, he was glad to just sit opposite to her and eat the cheesy pasta she made.

The silent was overwhelming, but they both sat and finished their plate.

He popped opened a button, but he still felt like he was suffocating.

She washed the dishes and put it aside.

"Alex."

"I am feeling sleepy." She said. "Goodnight, Logan."

It felt like she was saying *goodbye*. His stomach churned as he watched her walk away.

Maybe I will stay and fight. Maybe I can take another round of heart breaks. Or maybe I am just masochistic. - Alexandra.

Chapter 32

31. Goodbyes and new beginnings

(Logan)

Later that night, Logan was sitting in the couch and staring at the book --he didn't even know what the book was about-- thinking about Alex, of course, he couldn't stop thinking about her or what she said, when someone pounded on Logan's door. Like their life depended on it.

He looked at the clock with a moody scowl and realized it was over ten. He threw the book on the table and stood up with a frown. "Coming. But just so you know, it is almost eleven, Daniel."

He opened the door and came face to face with Eliza and Emma.

"Daniel called you? Fucking Dan. He should mind his own damn business." Logan cursed as his sisters pushed him away and walked inside.

"Nobody called us. We saw this. What the hell is this?" Emma waved the damn thing at him. It was freaking everywhere. It was haunting him, the damn picture.

"That is Leo kissing Alexandra." Logan said with a frown.

"And why do you look so stoic? And miserable. Alex kissed him back?" Emma asked with a scowl.

"She wouldn't have. If she did, it would be because she wanted to know how it feels like. We all wondered that, didn't we?" Eliza smirked. "Leo is hot, so..." She winked, looking all so cheery. It irritated Logan, that it was all so amusing for her. It wasn't amusing for him.

This isn't freaking funny.

"How can you say that?" Emma glared at her twin. "Alex cheated on him or at least close."

"It is not cheating. It is like you kissing Johnny Depp or Tom Cruise. It doesn't totally fall in *that* category. Mark wouldn't get angry if you do that." Eliza smiled. "And also, I trust Alex. She wouldn't do something like that. She would not even kiss Brad Pitt back. That girl is so in love with Logan that she can't even turn away from him when he was there. So..."

"Yeah, you are right. She does love this dumb head." Emma agreed.

"You know?" Logan asked with urgency in his voice. "How do you?"

Eliza scoffed. "We all know. I mean, you do and that is obviously why you married her." She rolled her eyes at him.

"I don't know. I married her, because-" He stopped halfway.

Emma and Eliza rolled their eyes in sync and *tched.*

"So what Dan told is the truth. "

"You said he didn't call you. That-"

"He is worried about you, worried about how you would mess this up. So of course, he called. But you can't blame him. And also, he told us that you met Barbara. Why didn't you tell us?" Emma asked as she sat down and patted the seat next to her.

"I don't want to-"

"Logan, you might be 27 years and a business magnate or whatever, but you are still our little brother."

"I know."

"So we want to know when something is bothering you. Ok. We don't want you to coddle us or protect us." Emma said as she leaned against his shoulder. "So does she still look beautiful?"

"No, she is all wrinkly and sad and she can't hold a candle next to Beth."

"I wish I can bring her to our home and show her what she missed out on, not to spite her or anything, just to show her we are happy without her. We are, Logan. What she did to us, it hurt, of course, but it made our family better. Because Beth is our mom, she is the one who keeps us together, stronger, and she is the one who made us into what we are today. We would have turned out to be good for nothings if Barbara had stayed, and look at us, now. " Eliza said with a wistful smile on her face.

"So Barbara, she did us good. You just need to forget her, you just need to remember Beth. Just remember Beth. You can't allow Barbara to spoil a good thing in your life." Emma said.

"I know all this, but I still can't-"

"It is okay Logan. Take your time, but don't take too much."

"You don't want to miss out on Alex. She is amazing."

"She is amazing, I know and she is my friend." Logan said and Emma winced.

"Yes, and she kissed Leo. So..." Emma shrugged.

To Logan, it almost felt like his sisters were play-acting. Like the good cop, bad cop thing. Or something.

"But this is a fake marriage, yeah?" Eliza asked.

"Umm, yes." Logan said.

"So even if she kissed Leo--"

"No El, she still shouldn't have kissed Leo." Emma argued.

"She didn't." Eliza defended.

"She did. She said she did." Logan grunted with scowl. His sisters watched with amusement as he bared his teeth. "The first minute was shock, but then, she said she wanted to kiss him. She wanted to kiss him, dammit. So she did kiss him."

Why the hell did Alex tell that to me?

"It is so wrong." Emma frowned.

"Nah, A girl is gotta have some fun, you know? I mean, after all that you said about the contract and fake marriage, I don't blame Alex even if she kissed him. You said this is all pretending, so you shouldn't blame her, either." Eliza wrinkled her nose. "I mean, did you really give her a damn contract? God, Logan. I am almost ashamed to call you my brother."

"Fun, yeah? Alright. She can have all the fun she wants to have after this damn contract is over." Logan said in a growl. "And it is already too late. You guys need to go." Logan looked at his sisters and his watch.

They had a creepy, twin look on their faces as they shook their head, almost in unison.

"Nah, we are staying." Eliza said with a smile, that made Logan feel scared. It was that smile, the one El had whenever she was about to bring some trouble.

"No, you are going. You have families, you have kids you need to take care of."

"Nah, they are having sleepover. Deke and Mark agreed to look after them. It is fine."

"I don't need baby-sitters." Logan narrowed his eyes at them.

"We just want to have some time to ourselves. Is that too much to ask?" Emma gave him a pout. "We are overworked. We are tired. We just want to relax, in our baby brother's comfy, foamy mattresses. Is that too much to ask?"

Logan shook his head. "Not too much at all. Go on." He said, giving in. "But don't bother Alex."

"We are not going to bother her. At least not tonight."

"What do you mean?" He grumbled.

"Don't worry about that lil brother." Eliza smirked as she walked away.

Emma gave a pat to his head. "Sleep tight, oh, wait, slash it. You are not getting any sleep tonight. Poor baby." She followed her twin, leaving Logan staring at her back.

He sat back down, pulled the book open, though he knew he wasn't going to read one damn page, but like Emma said, he wasn't getting any sleep either.

So...

***

(Alexandra)

Alex had a plan. She would write a letter to him and say goodbye. And then she would walk away. And she sat through the night and finished writing the letter.

Running away. Like a coward. The voice dissed. She ignored it.

She didn't want to stay here anymore. She didn't want to feel this pressure in her heart and head. She just want to stop feeling, stop being so pathetic.

She rubbed her eyes as she stared at herself in the mirror. Her eyes were puffy and she looked like a raccoon. Not the cute ones, either. And she smelled like the ugly raccoon peed down her hair and dress. Eww.

She walked to the shower and scrubbed and scrubbed until all the black lines on her cheek was gone. Then she took an hour to wash herself and when she got out, she felt like she could finally be herself. Finally smell like herself.

She was planning to sneak around, but she decided against it. If this was the last day, she wanted to look at him. She wanted to talk with him.

For one last time.

She grabbed a sweat shirt from her packed bags and pulled her hair in a bun before she walked out. Logan was reading a newspaper and he looked startled when he saw her. He gave her a half nod, a half wave and she returned it back.

"Coffee?" He asked as he lifted the carafe next to him and waved it at her.

"Yeah, thanks."

"So are we going to talk about it?"

"About what?" Alex asked as she took a sip of her coffee and winced. It was so bitter. She added four spoons of sugar and enough cream to drown it before she took another sip. It got better.

"You are going to pretend that everything is alright?" He asked.

"No. I am not going to pretend that. Nothing is alright. We are not going back. I will leave as soon as possible."

"I'm sorry, you know. You can stay, you don't need to-"

"Oh, please. Don't do this again. I am not ready to go at it again. Okay. I am leaving. Our contract is done. You don't have to pay me anything except to Michael. And that is that. There is nothing more to talk about that." She said before she grabbed the paper away from him.

"I am still reading it."

"Yeah, you can read it later." She said as she gulped the remaining coffee down. "And you make bitter coffee, like you." She wrinkled her nose.

"So you are going to be a brat about this!"

"Oh, I have the right to be. What, do you have any objections?" She smirked as she walked away and she could hear him muttering something that sounded like *brat*.

She smiled as she closed the door and then her smile fell.

She sat down and waited for him to go away. Exactly ten minutes later, she could hear his car start. To make sure he really left, she walked to the windows and stole a glance. It was him. Alright.

Then she pulled her ring out and put it in the box. She folded the letter and put it under the box.

She grabbed her bag and walked out of her room. No, it wasn't her room. His room. His house.

She was just a guest here.

A friendly guest.

She didn't hesitate or look back. She was afraid that she would stay if she looked back. That she would accept to his term and just stay.

She couldn't.

She opened the front door.

"Well, well, look what the cat dragged out."

She gasped and stopped on her way.

"What? Why are you stopping? Go on." Emma said with a frown.

"What are you two doing here?"

"We know you are going to try to run away. And so we stayed." Eliza said as she put her hands on her hips and stared Alex down.

"I am not running away." Alex gave in with a sigh.

"So why did you wait until you heard Logan drive away? God, Alex, I never thought you are such a coward." El said as she grabbed the bag from Alex's hand.

"You guys, you don't know the half of it and I don't-I can't explain anything, but I really need to go."

"Go where?" Emma asked as she grabbed the other bag.

"I don't know."

"Lookie here, she doesn't know where she is running away."

"I am not running away, El. I told you. This isn't -"

"Yeah. This isn't normal or anything close to it. We know all about the fake marriage and contract and whatever." Eliza said as she walked in and Emma pushed Alex back inside the door before she slammed the door shut.

"You know? How?"

"Yeah, we know. Logan said something to Dan. Yes, this isn't normal, but you are already here in this abnormality. So you can't get to cut him off now and freaking run. You know it will mess him up. You have to stay and fight."

"About the fake marriage, I did really want to tell you guys, but Logan-"

"It is okay. We don't blame you. Okay, that is not true. We do blame you, but not by much." Eliza shrugged. "You are loyal to Logan."

"So where is your loyalty now? You are going to leave him, without saying goodbye." Emma frowned. "And you kissed damn Leo. It is-"

"I can't say goodbye." Alex shook her head. "And Leo, it is a mistake. I was trying to forget Logan, trying to prove to myself that I can get past this inevitable heartbreak, and I lost it. I am not perfect and I made a mistake and-"

"Emma, stop blaming her. And Alex, you don't have to explain it to us. I mean, Logan is an idiot and I know how much you love him, even though he is an idiot. But you kissing Leo, it did hurt him."

"Because of the contract. Because his reputation is ruined or whatever."

"Yeah? Is that what he said? And you trusted him?"

"Of course." Alex shrugged. "He said that."

"You are not as smart as I thought you were." Emma shook her head. "The contract is nothing, Alex. Nothing. It hurt him because he cares. He loves."

"No, he called me his freaking *best friend.* He is always calling me that. What love. Psh!" Alex scoffed as she slumped down the couch and the two women followed.

"Alex, Logan is hurt and angry, because he loves you. Not as a damn friend. He is in love with you and he is too stupid to realize that he is already in love and he is refusing it to you and himself. And you are going to give up, just like that?"

"I didn't want to give up, but he looked at me and said *I am sorry* when I told him I love him. He said sorry, you know? So what the hell am I supposed to do? It freaking hurts. It still does. I

can't bear to look at him and pretend to be alright. I tried that this morning and it hurt like hell. I need to get away."

"What you need is to stay and fight for him. Don't you want to fight for him? What if you win? Don't you want to find out?"

"I don't know."

"If you run away now, you will forever be wondering, Alex."

"No, I won't. Because it is your words against his and his words are rather easy to understand. His words aren't confusing. It is rather straightforward. He said no. He did not love me. So why do I have to stay and fight for something imaginary and put myself through that kind of agony? Give me one good reason."

"Because you love him. That is reason enough. And because we can promise that Logan is in denial. He will come to his senses, but you need to stay and see that he does." Eliza grabbed Alex's hand. "I promise you, Alex, you won't regret staying."

Alex nodded with hesitation.

"And what is this?" Emma waved at the letter Alex had given so much time to write.

"Oh, it is almost too sad, but..." Eliza smiled. "Oh, and sorry for reading, we can't help it."

"Is it cheesy? Oh, it is. God. It is so cheesy."

"Yes, a little bit."

"Oh, I wanna puke. I hate your brother." Alex said as she grabbed the letter from Emma's hand and scanned the lines and winced. It went like this.

~~~

Dear Logan,

You know, they talk about a kind of love that is forever be. Yet can never be. Mine is one such kind. I will always remember you, but we will never meet again, if I have a say in that.

I wasn't willing to love you with an expiry date. So I tried. I really did.

But I am helpless. I can't not fall for you.

It is destined to happen, just as it is fated to end.

So I didn't try to escape it, I embraced it. Enjoyed it. I didn't challenge anything, not fate or you, I just chose to love through it all. But it is almost too much for me now. So I think it is about time I said goodbye. Goodbye Logan.
~~~

And also, thanks. For the memories and for this first love. They say first love is supposed to come too young. It came to me way later. They are wrong. They also say first love fades away. I am hoping they aren't wrong about that.

-Alex. ~

~~

Eww. Eww. Just eww.

"Nah, you love him, and this is all cute and heart-touching and poetic, but Logan doesn't want this. Logan wants A shock. A big, big shock."

"God, I don't know what the hell I was thinking when I wrote this. I wasn't even drunk."

"You are drunk from love." Eliza smirked. "But as Em said, Logan needs A shock. A heart attack kinda shock." Eliza smirked evilly.

"If me kissing Leo wasn't shock enough- nothing is." Alex shook her head, looking dejected.

"You dating Leo will be."

"I am not going there, El. That is not fair to Leo, as well. I can't ask him to help me to get Logan jealous. I mean, I can't use his feelings."

"You are right. So Leo won't work. But maybe somebody, somebody who will not love you or fall for you."

"Daniel?" Emma suggested.

"Won't do. Logan would never trust that." Alex said. "Dan is kinda like an annoying big brother to me. And Logan knows."

"Then we will find someone else."

"I don't think it is going to work out. I rather think walking away is the sensible option here."

"Alexandra Annie Steele, you *aren't* sensible. If you are, you would never have agreed to this God forsaken plan in the first place. So... We know this is going to work. Do you want to know how Emma got Mark in the first place. Deke and I were so in love, but Markus, he never looked at Emma like that, even though Emma practically attached herself to him every chance she got, until one day Emma stopped mooning over him and got herself a brand new boyfriend. "

"And tada, we are married and we have two kids." Emma laughed as she pushed her blonde locks behind her ears, looking so self-satisfied. "So trust me, this is a fool proof plan."

This is stupid, Alex thought.

"It worked for Emma because Mark was in love with her, but I don't think it will work for me. Logan isn't in doubt or wavering. You should have seen how bewildered he was when I

said *that*." Alex said doubtfully. "He was shocked and guilty for putting me through this. Nothing more."

"Trust me when I say this, Alex. All men are the same. They are all about friends with benefits and no strings attached when they are with you, but then when you want to break those strings that aren't even there in the first place, they have all this sense of possessiveness and what not. It is messed up, of course, but it is almost true."

"In some cases. But not every time. Logan is not like that. He is- he doesn't love me." Alex said with a frown. She was beginning to doubt it more and more as she was talking with Emma and Eliza, and it felt like she was trying to grasp at the straws. That was so wrong.

She couldn't hope again. To get crushed again. She had had enough of that to last a lifetime and some.

"So, what if it failed? At least you would have tried."

"Yeah, not your heart that gets a beating. The second time and it feels so wrong. I don't want to trick-"

"Not tricking him, just –"

"If you don't like it, we will come up with something else. A new plan. But Alex, you are not running away. We know Logan. You do, too. He is in love with you and he is an idiot about all of this, because Barbara messed him up a little too much than she did us. We always thought Logan was alright, but apparently he isn't, right now. But we need to make sure he will be and only you can help us make sure of that." Emma squeezed Alex's palm. "You want to help him, right?"

"Of course. I do, but-"

"I know we almost sound selfish, but we are not. We care about you and you are like our sister and we don't want to let you go, either." Eliza said as she hugged Alex.

"I do want to fight for him and all that, but it hurts, it hurts when he avoids looking at me because he is guilty or when he looks at me with pity. It hurts right here." Alex rubbed her chest with a frown.

"I know, darling. I know. But I promise it will go away."

"What if you guys are wrong?" Alex asked, her brows wrinkled in worry. She didn't want them to be wrong, she hoped, prayed they were right. But she was also afraid to hope or pray.

"Then we will owe you forever. But I am almost sure we aren't wrong. Just close your eyes and tell me what you think. Don't overthink. Just tell us what your gut says." Emma said.

"My gut says- I don't know."

"It is alright, Alex." Eliza said with a small reassuring smile. "Okay. Now pick your bags and let us get going. You are staying with me."

"But you just said I am not running away." Alex asked with a confused look.

These women were confusing.

"Of course, you are not running away. But Logan needs his first dose of shock treatment. And you are not running away, you are staying with me and Logan will know you are, he will see you during family lunches and all and he will freak out. God, I am already enjoying this." El smirked.

"You are evil."

"That I am." El smirked.

"And write him a note, but something that makes him a little bit crazy. Be indifferent, be casual and be *friendly,* like really, really friendly."

"How confusing?" Alex furrowed her brows as she looked at the twin troubles in front of her.

"Very confusing."

Alex grabbed the sticky notes they usually used to scribble back and forth and started writing.

"Is this okay?"

"It is exactly what he needs. You are a genius." Eliza said as she glued it to the refrigerator.

"Let the fun begin."

My home just doesn't feel like home without you in it. - Logan ~~~

Chapter 33

32. Confusing notes and confusing behaviors

(Logan)

Logan could not sit still at work, but they were starting a big construction project to build a high raise for one of the most prominent IT guy, Gregory Thorne, for his new company, and they were a little behind on the dates and schedules and so Logan had to stay. And had to talk to every contractor again and again until he got the right price. And the right time.

There were some kinks that he needed to iron out, some ears he needed to sweet talk and he did everything as he was supposed to, but even as he worked and talked and charmed, like a well oiled machine, he was still thinking about Alex. Deep, deep inside. About what she said.

"You getting this, Amelia?"

"Of course, Mr. Forte. Sebastian called form the site. They are bringing in the cement and bricks and sand supplies. He said that we can probably start in two to three days."

"That is good to hear. Ask Donna to call Mr. Throne's secretary and tell her about the schedule and all. Okay. We need to keep them in the loop, and we need to hurry up."

"Yes sir."

"Okay, I will be leaving now. I will look at the site before I go back home. You will finish up here and ask Tom to close. Okay?"

"Yes."

It was around six when he walked in his house. He felt thirsty and sweaty and he smelled like muddy soil from standing too long in the site.

He wanted to see Alex, but the house was dark.

He stared at the house and something felt cold. The warmth in its edges, the one Alex had bestowed to the walls in his home, to every edge and nook, it was now filled with heartless coldness.

There was an emptiness in it that he hadn't felt for a long time. A void that loomed around him, grabbing him with its grimy fingers. Even before he knew, he knew.

She is gone. He thought as he switched on the light

He walked inside the kitchen and his heart sunk when he noticed the sticky note. *Their note*. He grabbed it and his brows wrinkled when he read it.

Hey Logan,

I am sorry I kinda went crazy on you. I mean, this year, it was too much for me and you were always there for me, so... I kinda want to take it all back, but since I can't, I wish you can forget about it. You know. The crazy stuff. I think I exaggerated it by a mile or so. I feel like I am totally wrong about it or something.

And, yes, Logan. Yes. I will be your friend. I just hope you will forget everything I said and did. I was slightly drunk and very, very tired. See ya! Take care.

-💙Alex.

He shrunk his nose as he read it and reread it and reread it again just to make sure he wasn't hallucinating or something. But the words were still there. Exactly as he read the first time and the next one and the next one.

What the hell did she mean by she was drunk?

Buzzed, intoxicated? The voice mocked.

He crumbled the paper with a frown.

"Where did she go?" He muttered to himself as he took two stairs at a time and pushed the door open.

Her room was stripped of everything that was Alex. It was just as freezing as the rest of the house.

His heart did this weird thing. He pressed a hand against his chest as he looked around the empty room.

Oh, God, she was really gone.

There were no traces that it had ever been inhabited by an amazing woman who lit everything around by just being.

The half dry towel that she would always throw at the table after she was done washing her face wasn't there. The book she would leave upside down so that she wouldn't miss the page because she was just too lazy to bookmark it -- it wasn't there. The empty cup of coffee or chocolate she would forget to wash -- not there, as well.

She wasn't there. It felt like she had never been there. Like she was all just a part of his weird, vivid imagination.

But she was not his imagination. She was real. She was so real.

Her favorite perfumes and creams stacked against the dressing table mirror was gone, but instead he found a box sitting there.

"She left the damn ring. It was supposed to be her ring, A promise. She knew what it meant, she knew I bought it for her and she left it."

He could still remember that day when they went to buy it. She was so hesitant about it, and he said it could be her payment and she snapped at him and he promised he would be her friend, forever and the ring was a promise and she had smiled. That smile. The smile that could fill the whole room with its warmth.

He shook his head as he stood up. He wasn't going to sit and cry about this. He wasn't four years old.

Now he could do anything and everything to bring her back here. He wasn't helpless, now.

He wasn't helpless.

I am not helpless. I am not four.

He grabbed his phone. He was going to call a private detective he used sometimes, but the voice at the other end wasn't of a private detective.

"Logan, hi, what is up?" It was Daniel.

"I told you not to say anything to my sisters."

"I know, and I am sorry, but also, I am not. You need to wake up, dude."

"She was my friend."

"So why can't friends be lovers? I mean, you are already lovers, dude. You just need to see-"

"She is gone."

"What do you mean she is gone?"

"It means she is not here. She packed her dresses, but she left the things I bought for her. She is gone, just like that."

"Well hell. I asked you to step up your game and stop wasting-"

"Shut up. She-she can't do this to me. The contract is not over. Oh, I will find her and she is going to-"

"Stop. Logan, stop. Don't mess it more than it already is. This situation is screwed. You are going to leave her alone. Okay?"

"Okay. No, not okay. Daniel, she isn't here and she didn't say goodbye. She ran away, like a coward and she left me a stupid note. A fucking note? Is she kidding me?" He sounded rather freaked out, even to himself and it unsettled him.

Why was he so worked up?

Now he could stop feeling so pressured, he could stop feeling guilty. He could relax a little without worrying about Alex and her feelings. He should be freaking dancing in happiness.

But instead, here he was, talking about bringing her back here. For what? To torture himself and her?

"What did the note say?" Logan could almost hear Daniel's body shaking in laughter. He fisted his palms.

"Oh, it said that she is probably wrong, that she would love to stay as my friend. I don't understand half of it. It is like a big puzzle or something. What did she mean by she is wrong? Did she mean that she is wrong about loving me? Or is this about the kiss? I can't understand that damn note, I can't understand her."

"Logan, take a deep breath, dude. And so what if she is talking about when she said she loved you?! I mean, you should probably be cheering about that. It is all solved, like a miracle and she agreed to be your friend. You wanted that, yeah, right?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Right." He grumbled.

"Why do you sound doubtful? Wait, don't tell me you are second guessing your feelings."

"I am not. I am fine. This is fine. I am just worried where she was. What if she went back to the motel? I should probably go and check."

"Umm, if you want, sure."

"Do you know something I don't?"

"Okay, she is staying with Eliza."

"Eliza? Really? Why would she stay with Eliza? And you knew it all and are you just-"

"No, I didn't know. I just got a message from Emma about that, just now, as we were talking."

"At least she is safe, right."

"Yeah, don't worry about her. Emma said she is doing fine."

"Yeah, I am *so glad* she is doing fine."

"You are alright, right?"

"Oh, I am good. Very good. Bye, Dan, I will see you when I see you." Daniel chuckled and hung up and Logan stared at the empty house, pulled a book and sat down the couch and stared at the front door.

She didn't come.

*** *... (A week Later)*

(Logan)

It had been a week. One hell of a week.

Logan was trying to act like it was all good, but it was getting harder, not just going to Eliza's door and banging against the damn door until it broke and see Alex and bring her back him.

He almost drove to Eliza's house ten or fifteen times in the past seven days, but he didn't. He was trying not to be pathetic and clingy.

He wasn't that kind of guy.

He should probably be happy as Daniel had said. At least she had agreed to be his friend.

And then she didn't call me in a week and ignored my messages. What kind of friend would do that to you? That is not a very friendly behavior. He sulked as he opened the file in front of him.

"Boss, you alright? I heard you and lady boss are having a fight or something. Boss, what did you do this time?"

"I did nothing. You said you saw the damn picture and you are still blaming me?"

"Tch, that picture. Leo's PR team released a social media response to it. It said it was Leo's mistake and he was drunk from the charity fashion gala and he shouldn't have done something that impulsive. Actually Leo owned to his mistake like a champ." Tom shrugged. "And she is kinda amazing and I always thought you lucked out. I mean, you are *so you* and she is-"

"Stop. What do you mean by '*you are you*' huh?"

"No offense, but, she is way out of your league, boss, and fortunately, she fell for you. And she made you smile and laugh and you were almost bearable for a year and now, you are back to being grumpy and angry and it is just- we all miss-"

"Shut up, right now and go do your damn job." Logan snapped at Tom as he closed the file with unnecessary force. "I don't pay you for standing around discussing about my marital problems."

"This is what I am talking about." Tom muttered as he walked away, leaving Logan seething.

This was all Alex's fault. She was the one who made him all soft and sunshiny and now people kept expecting him to remain the same.

She is such a nuisance. I knew it from the very first moment I saw her.

She looked like a firecracker as she talked back to that Server that day. She looked angry and red and so cute as she defended her honor. And then he said that he should pay for her troubles and God, she was fast to put him in his place.

But then she agreed to his insane plans. And she came to his home and became a part of it and now she was gone.

She walked away.

Like -

His phone rang, cutting him out of unwanted thoughts. "Hello? Dan?"

"Hey, you wanna meet for lunch. Tom said you are in a mood and I think it will relax you or something."

"I am not coming."

"Oh, come on. Don't you want to hear about how Alex is?" Dan knew exactly how to lure him out, but he wasn't going to give in.

Logan felt like he was shocked by electric wires or something.

"How is she?" He muttered.

"Oh, she was miserable-"

It almost made him happy. Happy that she was miserable, just like him.

Selfish, wow! The voice sounded cranky.

"-the first few days, but she is alright now. I mean, Eliza said Alex is finally laughing again, wait, a lot. You know, with Deke's brother. They are almost around the same age, and he is fun and it seemed they both just hit it off and-"

The knowledge that she was laughing, and that with someone else was too unbearable. Logan grabbed at his tie before he pulled it off.

"Deke and Markus's brother? When did he come back from Greenland or wherever he was holed up on?"

"It is not Greenland, Logan. He was in Iceland."

"Yeah, Iceland. When did he come back? What is his name, again?"

"Chad, I think."

"Umm. I need to go."

"Where?"

"Just- I haven't seen Camille in a while and she called me for a project we are going to do together and-"

"Dude, you aren't going there because you are jealous, right? Come on, I know you are going to make a mess of things. God-"

"No, Camille called me the other day. I am going to see Cam."

"Oh, I don't believe you, but whatever." Dan said. "Just don't- don't do anything stupid, okay?"

"I am not going to do anything stupid. I am not a child, Dan. I am not a child and you don't have to go and tattle to my sisters. Bye now." Logan hung up.

And then he went all the way to see his niece, who wouldn't stop talking about her amazing uncle and his adventures.

"He is so funny, uncle Logan. Uncle Chad spent a year in the ocean studying about Dolphins and whales, you know, studying their habitats and -"

"Hey, hey, it is all good. Now, about the project-"

"And mom said Aunt Alex is getting along nicely with Uncle Chad. I mean, I was so sad she wasn't gonna be my aunt anymore, you know-how you and her-"

"You are just a kid, Cam. You don't need to worry about things like this." Logan said with a frown. He couldn't believe his sister. Why the hell would she tell a kid about all that?

"I am not a kid, uncle Logan. And of course, I don't want to stop seeing aunt Alex after you guys get divorced or anything. She is kinda amazing, so is uncle Chad and mom said if they keep going with what they are doing, then I don't have to stop seeing aunt Alex. How amazing is that!"

"What in the world is your mother telling you?" Logan glared at his niece and realized he wasn't supposed to show his anger towards a kid. She was just a kid, even though, she talked like she was freaking forty, she was just ten.

"Hey Logan, what are you doing here?" It was his sister. That damn woman. She was the one who was filling Camille's head and probably Alex's head with all these nonsense.

"No, I am just here to hand over this to Camille. I am gonna go, now."

Before I kill you, or something.

Of course, he did want to go, but he hadn't seen Alex, yet, so he waited for his sister to say something about Alex, but being a thickheaded daft, she just smiled and waved at him.

"Okay. Day after tomorrow is lunch at Mom's. Don't forget to be there. You can bring a date."

It was just a week ago, Eliza was talking about how he was in denial about loving Alex and now she wanted him to bring a damn date?

Was there something wrong with her head?

Logan narrowed his eyes at his sister. "I don't- I am not bringing a date. I am still married, if you know what I mean. And why are you harboring my wife in your house? What are you up to?"

"Me?" She gave him an innocent look, which did nothing to ease this big hole of fear forming inside his stomach. "I did nothing. All I did was listen to you. I mean, you were right. You don't love her and we tried, we tried to force you and it is all so wrong. That isn't how love is

supposed to work, you know. So we just backed off. I thought you would be glad about that." She gave him a confused look.

"Of course, I am glad, but why is Alex staying with you?"

"Oh, Logan, of course, I support you, but you know, Alex is my friend and what kinda person would I be if I don't help a friend out? And also, she and Chad is kinda hitting off."

"She is in love with me. She needs time to move on. I mean, are you kinda being a little hasty? She isn't ready to move on yet and don't-"

"Oh, God, she is so ready. You know, after we talked to her- Logan, let me be clear about this. This is all kinda new to her, you know and you were there in the hardest part of her life and you had this incredible chemistry and you were her first and all that and she fell in love. It happened, it is supposed to happen. I mean, you are a kind and amazing guy. You are also not that bad to look at, so the feeling is normal. Love or attraction or whatever Alex had felt for you, it is normal. And she was so hung up on that detail, because it was all so new to her, but we explained it to her."

"What the hell did you explain to her? Don't you guys have your own lives to live or something?"

"You know, how I was so in love with Ashton Murphy when we were in college. When we broke it off, I thought I would never be alright again. I also though that he was '*the one*.' And then I met Deke and he is my the one. So... First love is all so beautiful and whatnot, but it is not going to ruin Alex life. We are not letting her be miserable. You don't need to worry about Alex anymore, Logan. She is doing fine, okay? Just take care of yourself." Eliza patted him on his shoulders and he jerked away with a scowl.

If only I can punch my sister in her stupid face! Can't she keep her stupid stories to herself? Why is she filling Alex with all these crap?

"Yeah, whatever." He said as he walked out, only to be greeted by a fantastic sight.

Alex was laughing and talking and as he looked with wonder --she could always make him forget everything-- the car door opened and out came a guy with grocery bags on both hands, and he had a matching smile on his lips as he said something to her.

And the sight of it, the sight of the two of them joking and laughing, it made this weird flip in Logan's heart and his stomach twisted like he had just eaten a crap load of spicy foods he really, really disliked.

She stopped as she saw him standing there and he was waiting, waiting for that smile to fall off --of course, he felt like a bastard thinking like that, but he really needed to see her stop smiling, because yes, he was that selfish-- and turn sad, but it didn't. Instead, she walked to him with a bounce in her steps, still with the same smile and gave him a freaking hug.

Like they were all buddy-buddy or some fucking shit like that. His body melted at the touch, but before he could wrap his arms around her and pull her closer to him, she pulled away, leaving him empty and cold. Like his house.

"Hey Logan, how are you doing? I was gonna call you the other day and then Chad was telling this time when he was petting the dolphins and then Camille wanted to make Apple Almond Streusel Loaf and hot coffee muffin for the bake sale in her school and I totally forgot to call you."

"Man, Alex, you bake one hell of a hot coffee muffin. You promised you would bake a dozen just for me." Chad said and then he gave a nod to Logan. "Hey man, how are you doing? I am sorry to hear about you guys and the divorce, but Alex said it is all amicable and mutual, right? So that is cool, dude. Hey, Alex, you coming to Lion King this evening, right, with A, B and C?"

"Of course, I am. Or A would stop talking with me and B would electrocute me or something. I don't even wanna talk about C."

"A, B and C?" Logan frowned as he looked at his wife and the man standing next to her, a little bit too closer than he was supposed to be and Logan hated it all. He hated his sister for doing this to him and he hated Alex for treating him like he was just a damn-damn-

Damn what? Friend? But that is what you are! And you wanted to be her friend, no? The voice smirked. He hated that damn voice. If it could just go and die, already.

"Oh, that is how Chad calls Andrew, Brian and Camille. I mean, I never realized it is all Alphabetical and-"

"Oh, it is not like this guy just found a cure to some terminal illness. So... " Logan said with a shrug. "Bye. I don't have time to stand around and talk about stupid things or watch Lion King." He gritted the words out.

"Do you wanna come with us?" Alex asked, looking freaking calm and happy.

He just wanted to pull her close to him and kiss her and see if she would still be so damn calm. What the hell was her problem?

Just a week ago, she was crying all over him and telling him how much she loved him and here she was, being all chummy with a guy who looked like he was- he was a freaking male model or something.

It is good I didn't love her back.

Tch, Tch! It was that stupid, stupid voice, he so hated.

"Didn't you hear me? I don't have time to sit and watch Lion King."

"Your loss, dude."

"Yeah, whatever." He looked at Alex and she shook her head with a good-natured smile.

"Grumpy. Whoa, missed that for a while." She gave a smile that could strike him blind.

Why was she smiling so damn much? It was hurting his eyes.

"Hey Log, you didn't have lunch, right? You can stay." It was his dear sister.

"Yeah, Logan, stay. Chad makes great fish fry." Alex said as she gave him a wide, puppy dogged look. He knew she knew he couldn't say *no* to that damn look.

"Okay."

Alex stood on her tip-toes and gave him a kiss on his cheeks. It was totally platonic, and it still felt like his whole world was tilting.

He saw Chad frown and he wanted to gloat. He was a grown-up and he was mature, so he didn't give into his temptation and poke his tongue out.

He gave a stoic nod. "Come on in." Eliza said and he followed her in, regretting his decision to stay all the while, as he heard Alex laughing to something Chad said.

My heart feels like a thousand pounds of unwanted muscles when I see you with someone else. ~ Logan
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Chapter 34

33. Heart to hearts, denials and heartaches

(Logan)

"He is everywhere. Wherever I turn, he is right there, with his stupid toothpaste commercial smile and his stupid dolphins. And Alex is eating out of his oily hands."

"Dolphins are cute." Daniel said as he sat in the table with the streusel Loaf Alex had taken time to pack for him.

"That is mine." Logan grabbed the box of Streusel Loaf and put it aside. "Of course, dolphins are cute. But he is not."

"You were friendly with Chad before, you even liked him. So? I know what changed now. It is Alex."

"No. It is not. And he keeps talking about dolphins and whales and his expedition and Camille is starstruck. But at least Camille is ten. Alex, she looks just as starstruck and it is irritating. First Leo and now this guy. She is so-"

"Man, are you listening to yourself right now?"

"I can hear myself, alright." Logan grumbled as he scowled at his friend.

"Hear, yes, but are you understanding what you are saying? You look so green, Logan."

"Don't start this again. I already had this lecture from Tom and I am tired." Logan rubbed his pounding head. It was torture, listening to people telling him how stupid he was being.

He wasn't stupid. He hadn't been, since his biological mother. He had stopped being stupid. He had learnt to be on his own, to do things in an order and to be versatile, persuasive. He had reached his goal, not by being stupid, but by being extremely smart. And it was maddening to listen to people telling over and over how stupid he was.

"I am sorry, but I really don't know how to make you understand your own feelings. You have to stop being so dense, dude. You need to come to your freaking senses before it is too late. You can't do anything if Alex has already moved on." Daniel said with a frown.

I don't care.

Oh, don't you? You think you can lie to yourself? Do you think the lie will start to sound like truth if you said it over and over again?

"Looks like she has already moved on." Logan grunted as he stared at the apple almond Streusel loaf cake in front of him. It was coated with thick layers of Almonds and pistachios and just

thinking about it made his mouth water. The honey brown tinged loaf smelled like roasted almond and the touch of the aroma of cinnamon made him sigh in pleasure. And the taste, oh the taste. Everything Alex made always tasted like sin, but this one was beyond anything.

But still... he hated the fact that Chad had helped Alex with that, that he had laughed with her as she waited for it to be done, that he had helped her cut the almonds and pistachios, that he had seen her with flour on her nose and smile on her lips... It was torture. Pure and simple.

Can you smell that along with cinnamon? That burning smell? Not from the cake. It was that pestering voice. He needed no one else to tell him how stupid he was. This *voice* was enough.

"Are you going to keep staring at it or eat? If you don't want it, I am happy to take it out of your hand." Daniel said with a smirk.

"You are no help. Why are you here? To goad me into doing something stupid? Something I would regret later?" Logan said as he closed the box with a thud.

"No, I am here to talk some sense into your stupid brain, so that you won't regret anything later."

"Shut up and watch the damn movie, okay."

"Logan, dude, I really, really want to kick you until you can see straight. But since you are my friend, I won't do anything like that. But when time comes, I will say *I told you so*." Daniel said with a glare at him, before he walked out and banged around and after a while Logan walked out.

"You won't need to say 'I told you so', okay?" He said as he slouched down the couch.

"We will see."

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... (Two days later)

(Logan)

Logan stopped the car in his Parents' small driveway exactly at one, like clockwork. But something felt strange. The place looked silent. Moody.

Andy and Brian weren't running around with Bruno. Bruno wasn't bounding all the way towards him and colliding against him.

Everyone looked like they were doing something else. He felt like an unwelcomed guest as he knocked on the door. His dad opened the door and waved him in.

"Logan, uhm, you-come on in."

It looked like his dad was nervous or something. Logan frowned as he took his dad in. He looked agitated, but more than that, he looked really, really nervous.

"Is everything okay, dad?" Logan asked as he looked at him, his chubby and wizened old face. His dad shifted on his feet before he nodded with a grunt.

"Come on in, it is just- I want to warn you. Alex is here, and so- and El and Em said you are having a break or whatever, but Logan, do you think this is- I mean, she is your wife and you two were perfect and Beth said you two were going through a rough patch, but she is a nice girl, Alex is and you two deserve a nice life and giving it all up-" His dad went on without a pause, his words coming over each other, as if he was afraid that Logan would cut in.

He did.

"Dad, stop. Take a deep breath, and don't worry about it." Logan said.

"How can I not worry? You are my son and I want you to be happy. Always. After your mother-I mean-"

"Dad, Beth is my mom, so... And I am happy. Even if we get divorced, I will be happy." Logan said, feeling like the biggest liar. He couldn't imagine a life where he lived without hearing her laugh. Couldn't imagine it without her making fun of him. Or bantering back with him.

His dad shook his head with a frown. "No, you won't be, you won't be, Logan." He looked was. "I know you. I can- she made you happy, and you had never been that happy before, before Alex. She is- how can I say it, she is *your Beth.* After Barbara, I thought love is for fools, love is painful and selfish and cruel, but Beth made me see it isn't. And you, you boy, you were always about money and goals and big dreams. It is not wrong, dreaming big, but you were only about that. So mechanical. And everyone saw that.

"Of course, you are the best son anyone could have asked for. You loved us, your family, and Daniel, but other than that, you had nothing in your life. Emma and El have their own family and the kids and you were so alone and I was worried and then one day you came in with Alexandra and I can finally stop worrying about you. Finally believe that your moth-Barbara hadn't completely wrecked you. You were only four, but you had been a smart and intelligent boy even then and I-"

"Dad, stop, okay. I am fine. We are fine. That is the only thing that matters, okay? Nothing else is." Logan shook his head.

"She matters, too, Logan. She matters so much to you, but you are denying yourself of that happiness and I want to know why?"

"I am happy, dad, I am happy, so-"

"Okay. If you are happy." His dad shrugged as he waved him in. "Go on, and be happy. That is all I want."

Logan walked in, determined to prove to himself and his dad that he was happy, that Alex wouldn't be a factor that affected his happiness, but the moment he saw her, helping his mom in the kitchen, the smile he tried so hard to put on his lips felt like a bitter medicine. He swallowed as he turned away and came face to face with his dad.

His dad gave him a small smile before he shook his head and walked away.

"Get me the butter, Andy. And Brian, cut the spring onion like I taught you." Alex was ordering his nephews and his sisters were sitting in the table sipping on orange juices and his mother was bent down the stove, stirring a pot and Alex belonged. Even without him, she belonged in his family.

"Eliza, please stop sipping on your juice and come cut these carrots, please." Alex glared at his sister and she shrugged.

"Hey Logan, don't just stand there. Come here and cut these carrots." Eliza said as she noticed him standing there, staring. "Here, Alex, you can use Logan. I am too tired to move my body."

"Hey, when did you come? Didn't see you there." Alex smiled at him as she pointed to the carrots next to Eliza. "If you can move your body, cut those carrots. They won't cut themselves."

"I can move my body, Alex, and I will cut it for you." Chad said with a wink and Alex threw a lettuce at him and he caught it before flexing his arms.

"Show off." Alex grinned.

"That is a perfect catch, Alexandra Annie Steele." Chad said before he grabbed a cutting plate. "If you want to throw the knife-"

"I don't want to kill you." Alex said with a smirk. "Though sometimes I do want to." She winked back.

And Logan seethed as he saw them talking to each other like they had known for a decade and some-- like, like how she talked with Logan when they first met.

"But she asked me to cut the carrots, you know." His voice came out all whiny. Logan almost wanted to body block the guy as he reached for the carrots.

"Oh, if it is all the same, you can cut these potatoes." His mom said with a twinkling smile on her face. It looked to him like she was secretly enjoying something.

"Sure." He grumbled as he started cutting the potatoes.

"I am done, Alex. Do you want me to do something else?" Chad said as he handed the carrots to Alex and he stood too close to her as he watched her mixing vegetables like it was the most interesting thing on the world.

"What is that? Ssh, go and bother someone else." Alex chuckled as she pushed him away and he pretended to stumble and fall and she laughed, laughed like she was really happy and the laugh was so distracting for Logan, that he cut his fingers instead and hissed. "Shit, shit." He groaned as he watched the potatoes turning red.

Alex turned to look at him and winced. He was almost sure that she would come to his aid, but she waved at Emma, looking nonchalant. "Take care of that and put a band aid or something." She said before she turned back to Chad.

Logan's ears were filled with static, loud, loud static and he felt his head spinning as he stared at them. Alex and Chad. She continued to toss the vegetables in the bowl, as carefully as she had once cleaned his wounds.

He remembered that day when he had cut his finger with the broken glass vase and how concerned she was. Now she didn't even have time to look twice at him.

She doesn't even care. He thought. *How the hell can she change just like that?"*

He saw her saying something to Chad, but he couldn't hear what it was. Chad shook his head and pressed his hand against hers.

Logan stood up from the chair and walked away, too furious to sit in a place. Too furious to watch them be happy, without him.

Emma found him pacing along the Hall and she asked him to sit.

"Just give me a band aid. I can do it by myself. I am not a kid."

"Oh, just sit. I can do it." Emma said as she stared at him. "Sit, now."

He sulked as he sat down.

"And you do look like a sulky little kid, Logan. What is the matter?"

"Nothing." He grunted.

"If you say so." Emma said as she wiped the blood and put the band aid on. "Do you want me to kiss it better?" She smirked, and Logan jerked up.

Alex had exactly asked that and she had kissed it, as well, and it really made him feel better.

And now she doesn't even have the time to-

It is not like you are dying. The voice said and he shook his head as he walked out the backyard. He needed to be alone, to collect himself. His thoughts.

Because when he said to his dad that he was fine, that he was alright, he really meant it, but then he had seen Alex looking so perfect and he had doubts about his claims, his words.

She is made of chaos. She made me into a big bundle of chaos. He thought as he watched Bruno chasing a butterfly. Bruno could never catch it, but still he chased. And chased. Every day.

"Hey dude, you okay?" It was Chad. Logan gave him a big smile.

"Yeah, it is just a cut."

"Cool, so can I ask you something?"

"Go on."

"Are you over Alex? Of course, she said the divorce is going to be amicable and all, but I just want to-"

"Why do you want to ask that?" Logan asked with the same fake smile stretched along his hurting lips.

"You would be cool if I ask her out, right? I mean, not now, of course, but after the divorce. It won't be weird or anything for you, right?" He asked with a smile. "Eliza said it is actually between me and Alex and all that, but I just want to make sure you are cool with it, dude."

"Oh, I am very cool with it, but I don't think Alex will say yes, I mean-"

Chad cut him off with a chuckle. "Oh, don't worry about that. I can be very charming and persuasive if I want to be. And I really want to date her, so I will try my best to charm her socks off or whatever."

"Yeah, whatever." Logan grunted as he saw Chad walking back inside.

He wanted to walk away. This didn't feel like his place. It almost felt so strange, so alien, like he was transported to an alternative universe or something.

And he hated it. He hated her.

Nah. You don't hate her, dumbhead.

*

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(Alexandra)

"Em, is he alright?" Alex asked as she watched Emma walking in with a frown. "How is his fing-"

"Alex, stop. He is fine. It is just a little cut. He is fine and back to his brooding self."

"I almost feel sorry for him. You know, he was watching you and Chad and there was this little frown on his lips and didn't see he is actually cutting his finger. Poor guy." Eliza said with a smirk.

"El, this isn't funny. I don't- he is hurt and- I think we should stop this madness. If he doesn't love me, he doesn't and I-"

"And so? What? Go on? I would love to hear your awesome ideas? Running away? Or going back to being friends with benefits or whatever the hell he asks you to be?"

"I didn't say that, but lying to him like this, it is not very- I feel guilty and it feels so wrong."

"Oh, you lied to us, remember?" Emma said and Alex shook her head.

"Because Logan-"

"Alexandra, you are a very nice woman, but you don't know half of anything about love or men before all this. You were like this baby bird who can't fly. So please, don't worry about Logan. We are doing all this because we care about him, because we are worried about him. A little blood is okay, along the way." Eliza said as she set the table.

"Where is Chad?" Alex asked as she looked around.

"With Logan." Emma said.

"What is he doing with Logan?"

"Asking Logan's permission to hold your hand or whatever." Eliza winked and Alex's felt her stomach sink. God. This was- everything made her feel like she was making a big mistake and-

"I almost feel like Logan is going to punch Chad in the nose or something. He keeps glaring at Chad and -" Alex muttered.

"Because he is jealous, Alex, and that means our plan is working, but we need to amp it up a bit." Eliza cheered.

"God, he looked like he is going to murder me or something. I am still shaking." Chad said as he came to stand next to her. "The things I do for you three. If he broke me, I am blaming you three. I think we should put a stop to-"

"You know, all those times I have fed you without expecting anything back in return, the time I took care of you when you were sick with stomach flu and you brother refused to go anywhere near you and that time when I found out that your college girlfriend was a no good-" Eliza counted her fingers.

"God, this woman is so cruel. Okay, I owe you for all those times. You win. Even if he kills me, we are not stopping this." Chad said with a scowl.

"Now, you need to go to him, Alex."

"Why?" Alex scrunched her brows as she looked at Eliza and Emma.

"God, you are not a kid. Do something that makes him angry. Do something that makes him snap. He is already stretched thin, so... We can't continue this for a year and some. Chad is leaving in a month. And we only have a month. You two are the worst pair of -"

"Stop, Eliza. Stop. I am going." Alex said as she walked out.

Her heart thundered when she watched Logan throwing a ball to Bruno. She waited for a while, just taking him in. All of him. It felt like so long since she had seen him and yet it had only been two days since she had last seen him.

God, I miss him. I miss kissing him and touching him. Most of all, I miss just talking with him.

"Hey, Logan." She touched his shoulder and he looked startled before his eyes went cold as he saw her.

It is because he is jealous. It is not because he hates me. She told to herself as she gave him a cheerful smile.

"How is your finger?" She asked as she pointed to it.

"Why do you care?" He snapped at her.

"Of course, I care. You are my friend."

It looked like he wanted to punch her as she said that. His knuckles turned white and his jaws went rigid.

Oh, he deserves it. How he made me hate that one word. Friend. I am just feeding him his own nonsense. She thought as she gave him a shimmery smile.

"The hell you care. You stood there talking with him when I cut my fingers." His voice was hoarse and God, no one can guilt trip you like Logan could. "You didn't even move-"

"I asked Emma to help you." Alex said with a frown.

Jealousy! She actually had a doubt when Emma and Eliza said that this plan would work. *But it feels like it is already working.*

She grabbed his hand and looked at the finger with a nod. "Looks like Emma has done such a good job. So? Why are you complaining?" Alex shrunk her nose and he shook his head.

"I am not complaining."

"Are you sure? You look grumpy. Do you want to tell me something? If you want to say something, please, do it clearly so that I can understand, okay? Don't do it in puzzles and riddles." She said as she let his hand go.

"Oh, alright. I want to tell you to stay away from Chad."

"Why in the hell would I do that? And why in the hell would you tell me that? I am not your wife or whatever I was before."

"Our contract isn't over yet." He said, looking sulky and brooding. His grey eyes held a coming storm.

"This again, Logan? You are a very frustrating man. I don't want to go into details again, but the contract is DONE. Okay? It is over."

"And? So you will go and kiss-" He looked down, and his eyes looked apologetic. "I am sorry."

"It is fine. And so I will go and kiss anyone I want to kiss and you have no say in that. Get it, Logan?"

"Oh, alright." He said as he grabbed her by her arms.

Her body wanted to melt into him and give in. It was such a shameless body. It had no self-respect whatsoever.

She refused to give in, though. At least her brains had some semblance of self-respect.

She looked straight in his eyes, challenging him to do what he was about to do. It looked like he accepted the challenge, because...

He bent down and kissed her on her yearning lips and her whole body started throbbing with desire. She wanted to stay right there, *but I can not. I can't do this to myself again. Not until he comes to his senses.*

She pushed him away and he stumbled back. His eyes were wide as he looked at her, shock written across his face.

"We are *only* friends. We can only ever be *friends.* No more this. No more friends with benefits and other shits, because Logan, I am *not* going back to that." She said and he nodded.

"Sorry, I- I didn't mean-"

"You didn't mean to hurt me, you didn't mean to kiss me. Like I said, you never mean anything Logan. You didn't mean it when you said that you will be my friend, my friend even when I find my happiness with some other guy."

"Do you think Chad is your-"

"I don't know about that, maybe he is not, but I *know* you are not my happiness. So keep your lips to yourself." She walked away.

I wish it is not that hard to say goodbye to you, I wish I can tell you that I don't need you, but... - Alexandra.

Chapter 35

34. Plans, plots and failures

(*Logan)*

It was two weeks since the lunch at his parents' and Logan couldn't stop thinking about what Chad had asked him.

Would she say yes if he asked her out?

Shit.

Sometimes he just wanted to forget everything and go back to living his life as he had been living for so long, but it was impossible to do that. Alex had changed everything about his life, every dynamic and now that she was gone, it showed. He could see her puttering around in his kitchen, see her watering the bushes, see her bending over the oven and it was getting g harder and harder to *not* think about her. He tried.

At nights, when his skin was cold and heart was lonely, he could still see her in his bed, naked and flushed, beautiful and breathtaking and he could feel her all over him and it would bring him the kind of ache only she could relieve.

Everything looked and felt so wrong now that she was gone and he didn't know, he didn't want to know if he could survive another decade without her.

So why is this not enough for her?

Why did she had to have love? He could easily give her everything, in fact, more than any man who would love her would give her. But she wanted love. Why was that so, so necessary? It wasn't a necessity.

What they had, it was special in its own right.

"Logan, earth to Logan."

Logan was startled awake. He looked up to see Daniel leaning against the wall.

"When did you come?" He asked and Daniel shrugged.

"About five minutes ago. Were you planning world dominion or just planning how to conquer Alex back?"

"Neither."

"So are you ready to party? And how old is Ethan Borne? A hundred and ten?" Daniel asked with a frown. "Do we really need to go?"

"Of course we are going. Mr. Borne is only seventy, and still one of the most prominent business magnate in the country. He started off from nothing, and he went to such unimaginable heights. He is my role model. Oh, and also, I need to find some new business." Logan said as he adjusted his tie. "And need to cut some old contractors off without offending them. This is the only way I can do both of that."

"And of course, talk to Mr. Borne."

"And of course. He was one of the few who gave me the first chance I so desperately needed. He was also one of the very few who gave me the push in the right direction."

"The other one was Alex's dad, huh? Don't you ever wonder? It almost feels like a destiny, the connection and coincidences between you and her and yet here you two are, moving in your own direction."

"Is she really moving on?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know. She loved me and then didn't and it is just so-"

"Man, I can't believe you and your stupid narcissism."

"I am not a narcissist."

"Then don't behave like one. You should be happy that she is trying to be happy. But here you are, being a lousy friend, who didn't want *his friend* to be happy, who wishes she is rather hurting. This is just- you know what, I don't want to talk about that anymore. Lets leave." Dan stormed out and Logan stared at his friend before he stood up and grabbed the gift he had packed for Mr. Borne.

He got in his car and Dan got in his with a curt nod. Logan didn't know what to say to Daniel's accusations, because it was the same ones he kept accusing himself of.

Why am I so selfish? I told her I would be happy for her, would be her friend even if she found someone. Now that she has found someone, why can't I be happy?

Because-

He stopped the car and handed the key to the valet before he walked inside the party Hall. It was lavish and decorated with golden balloons and golden lights. Chandeliers hung from the top, the light a little too bright on the eyes. Gentle violin music filled the whole Hall, as the violinist sat in one corner, making beautiful music.

There were women dressed in ornate and elegant and pricey dresses, men dressed in equally pricey suits that almost looked the same, but Logan could see the way they were cut, they way they fit, and he knew why they were costly. It was as much about the material and brand as it

was about the way it would make you feel-- like you are invincible, like you can stand amid the wolves from the business background and still feel tall and confident.

He walked in greeted friends, chatted with some chatty women who wanted to know about his wife with the secret smile, and he knew they had seen the pictures. And wanted gossip.

But strangely he didn't feel angry or mad at Alex because she was the one who put him in the situation. He didn't feel angry that she had spoilt his reputation. He just felt like he was surrounded in vacuum. An empty, empty vacuum.

He finally found Ethan and handed him the gift and Ethan smiled at him as he shook his hand. "You are going to go big places, Logan. I can see it." He said with a nod. "And that is my son, talk with him when you have time. He has new business proposals and you and he will be a good fit."

"I will do that, Ethan. So how are you?" When someone else cut in to talk with Ethan, Logan discreetly moved away with a nod to the man and was instantly stopped by someone grabbing him by his arms.

"Hey, Logan, I must say, good riddance." It was Pamela.

He grunted.

He didn't know why he was ever friends with Pam. After Alex, he could see how wrong she was, how wrong she treated people beneath her. Without Alex, he would have never seen it, never would have seen the hungry glint in her eyes when she noticed people flaunting their money, never would have noticed the way her eyes shrunk in disdain when she met someone who was beneath her station.

Without Alex, you wouldn't even have become human. And there she is.

He looked up almost instantly. He knew the moment she walked in. It was as if he gave a new meaning, new scent to the scene.

She was wearing a pink chiffon gown that hugged her body and fell down in waves down her knees. Her cheeks were flushed the same pink from the cold --*or maybe it is from laughing so hard with the guy next to her*-- and she looked radiant. Magnificent.

His fingers itched to touch her, his lips tingled.

She did not even see him, though. She was busy talking with Eliza and Chad.

He loved seeing her, but he almost wished she hadn't come. Or at least hadn't come with Chad.

He walked up to them, ignoring Pamela's shrieks of protest and Alex finally looked up from Chad, her eyes shining and her lips still wide with laughter from whatever Chad was telling her.

"Hey Logan. How are you?" She asked as if he was some stranger or something.

He grinded his teeth together before giving her a shallow smile. "Good. And you?"

"Very good. I found an apartment." She told Logan. "It is a nice apartment."

An apartment. *So she isn't ever planning to come back to our house.* He thought with a scowl.

"No, I found you an apartment." Chad said with a smile and Logan growled under his breath.

"Won't you just shut up about it? It is not like you own the building or you bought the apartment for me. So, Chad..." Alex poked her tongue out and Logan wanted to push that tongue back inside her cherry painted lips. He could smell the familiar lip gloss on her lips. And could see how her cupid bow pushed against her lips looked delicious and he didn't like the fact that Chad was looking, as well.

"But I was the one who gave you the tip about it when it become vacant."

"Because it is opposite to yours, silly." She said to Chad and Chad grinned at her.

Logan's body went rigid.

*

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(Alexandra)

Alex didn't know why, but there was something in her gut, some disturbing feeling. Her tongue felt like a thousand bitter lemons.

She shrugged the feeling off as she looked at the guy in front of her. *I miss you.* She thought.

He had been silent the whole conversation between her and Chad, but she could see the flash of anger in his eyes. And the stubborn press of his lips. If she could just lean in and press her lips against his...

Eliza would murder you.

She smiled and shook her head. "Excuse me, guys." She said as she walked to the restroom and fiddled with her purse for a moment then before she walked back out.

She was stopped by a familiar face. Alex sighed. She did not have the strength to deal with Stacy Weston.

"What do you want, Stacy?" Alex asked with a frown.

"Nothing much. I am bored and I saw you."

"I am very happy that you found me interesting enough to come and stop by, Stacy, but-"

"I heard that you and Logan are not together anymore or something like that?" Stacy narrowed her eyes. "And you two were still talking?"

"Yes, we aren't together, and we are friends and-"

"Bullshit. So, you and Logan, what happened to you, other than Leo kissing you?"

"It just didn't work out. I thought you would be jumping in joy or whatever." Alex grunted and Stacy chuckled.

"I- I don't know. I just don't feel like it. I mean, now that you are not in the *rat race*, I don't feel like competing." Stacy shrugged and Alex frowned at the woman in front of her. Beautiful. Aloof. And totally wrong in the head.

"You are one sick person." Alex said as she took a bite of those finger sized sandwiches, that didn't seem to fill her up no matter how much she stuffed inside her mouth.

"I am not, I am just different." Stacy grinned, showing all her teeth.

"Difficult. And don't smile like that, it is creepy. Sharky." Alex scowled before she pointed to the woman now hanging on Logan's shoulder. "What about her? Why don't you compete with her in whatever rat race you are talking about?"

"What about her!? Gah. I don't consider her worthy enough to be my competition, nor do I want to waste my time or energy competing with her." Stacy said as she wrinkled her nose at Pamela.

"That strangely seems like a compliment for me." Alex chuckled.

"You know, if it is not for all those messy business of my dad stealing your dad's and the lawsuits and Logan, we would have at least been a good acquaintances. You are witty, funny and I don't know, there is something in you that remind me of someone I had known and-" Stacy shrugged her shoulders with an abashed smile, as if she had just realized that she had said too much. "I think I am drunk."

"Oh, that excuse. Did it work? Ever?" Alex asked with a smile. She had never seen eye to eye with Stacy, but the woman was intriguing when she wasn't being a bitch. And okay to talk to when she wasn't threatening about stealing Logan or kissing him.

"Sometimes." Stacy gave a dainty shrug.

"Not working now. So tell me, as we are talking about feelings and all, why did your feelings for Logan suddenly disappear? Because he is available again? You even kissed him that other night." Alex said accusingly.

"Nah, because I can clearly see the way he is looking at you right now and I don't know why you both separated, but I think you two are the dumbest people I have seen." She said before giving

Alex a smirk. "Ah, and the kiss, I saw you walking towards us and I was strangely feeling evil that night, so..."

"Are you right in the head? You felt evil and so you kissed my husband!" Alex said with a frown and Stacy rolled her eyes.

"My head is good. Now, just because I am not an angel doesn't make me a psycho."

"Yeah, whatever you say. No psycho ever did agree that to someone else. So, did it work out with Fabien?" Alex asked.

"Fabien is an ass and his arrogance is something I can only take in small doses. I have said my good byes to him. I think I will be better off without him."

"He is Logan's friend. I don't suppose he will be that--"

"Have you seen Logan? Fabien is only the second most arrogant man I have ever known. First is your husband."

"No, Logan isn't arrogant. He is just so sure of himself, confident, but he is also kind and funny and-"

"Logan, funny? Are we talking about the same guy? Tall, handsome, brooding grey eyes and lips that always stayed stuck in a frown? That guy?"

"Yes, we are also talking about that guy who is so ready to smile at your silly jokes, the guy who gets you your dream job, the guy who tries to cook for you when you are sick, the guy who cares enough to fight for your father's company, the guy who--"

"Apparently Logan had a personality transplant. And this is why, this is *exactly* why I am not in the rat race anymore. The Logan you described, he was never that way with me. If he had, do you think I would have said *No*? I wouldn't have, not even for a big career, because I would have trusted him to help me out with my passion. Like he did with you." Stacy shook her head and her shiny blonde her did this bouncy thing before it settled.

"But it feels like it is all over." Alex said with a sad smile.

"Or is it?" Stacy said. "Don't look now, but he is talking with that woman, but his eyes are on you. Always on you. Or maybe it is on me. I mean, I am still beautiful. So..."

"Woman! You are a very tiresome woman." Alex said as she turned and she could clearly see Logan turning away, all too suddenly.

Or is it, Alex thought with a smile as she waved at Chad and walked over to him.

***

(Logan)

Logan saw Alex walking away from Stacy and joining Chad. He gritted his teeth as he saw them talking and laughing.

After a while, Chad was busy talking with a man and Alex said something to Chad before she walked away and Logan followed her. He found her standing in the balcony, staring at the half hung moon. She looked like a marble statue, so beautiful in the moonlight.

The vines creeping around the balcony were braided with violet flowers and it all smelled so, so romantic. And exotic. Like Alex. The ache in his body intensified.

"Lex." His voice came out hoarse. Needy.

"Hey, Logan, what's up?"

"Don't talk to me like you would talk to some casual acquaintance or something."

"What are you talking about?"

"You know what I am talking about!"

"Okay, I know. But you are the one who wanted to be my friend and-"

"I want to kiss you." He hadn't planned to blurt it out, but it just came out.

"No. If you want to be friends, we need to be-"

"We need to be just friends. I know. You told me. But maybe-"

"Maybe what?" Her green eyes were so intense on him and he gulped.

"I mean, Lex, I-I can-I-"

"You can what? You what?"

He didn't answer. He couldn't answer. He just leaned close and pressed his lips against hers and it felt like home. Like he has finally arrived, after wandering in the wilderness for so long.

But then she was pulling away and he didn't want to let go, but he did.

She didn't say anything. She gave him a small smile. "You can what, Logan? You didn't answer me."

"I don't know."

"Find me when you knew." She said before she walked away. He followed her and was instantly stopped by Pamela.

It almost felt like Pam was stalking him or something. *What the hell?*

"Is that Alexandra? Who is the guy she is with? You haven't still divorced and she is already dating someone, and he is not Leo. So... "

The woman was talking his ear off and Logan almost wanted to pluck his hair or punch her. If she wasn't a woman, he would have.

If Pamela's father hadn't been one of his oldest business connection, Logan would have said something rude and walked away.

"Excuse me, I need to go. I see my sister-"

"Oh, how is Eliza, or is that Emma?" Pamela giggled and Logan wondered what the joke was.

"Eliza. See you." *Not.*

He followed his sister and saw her going inside a room. He was going to follow her inside, and that was when he heard another voice.

He stopped.

Chad.

And then he heard another voice.

Alex.

What were they doing here? Like having a secret meeting or something?

"Did you see him? He is certainly jealous." It was Eliza.

Were they talking about him?

"Man, I don't want to lose my teeth or my nose. I want to go back to my dolphins intact."

"Your dolphins won't care." Alex said. "He kissed me, you know."

"Again?"

"Again." Alex's voice was satisfied. Logan fisted his palms.

"He is getting antsy, and he wants you back. He just doesn't know how to beg you to come back. That guy is proud."

"I don't need him to beg. I just need him to admit that he loves me." It was Alex.

Logan's heart was pounding. His palms were sweaty and the nerve in his forehead throbbed.

Plans. Plots. Ploys.

To manipulate me into doing something I didn't want to do?

But you did want to do all that. You wanted to kiss her, you wanted to-

Because she to me.

He walked in. Eliza gaped. Chad gulped and Alex looked like she wanted to flee. Her once pink face was now pallid.

"Logan, this is-"

"Not now, Eliza. Can you give us some privacy?" His voice was cold. Even he could hear it. His heart clenched.

"It is not Alex's fault, I mean, we are-"

"I said not now. Get out." He gritted out and Eliza muttered *sorry* to Alex, but she didn't leave.

Loyalty. Logan thought with bitterness. *Where is her loyalty to me, her own brother?*

"Go, I will be fine." Alex said and Eliza nodded. She then looked at Logan, her eyes pleading.

"Don't do anything you will regret later, Logan. Please. I beg of you."

"I asked you to get out." He said coldly and she flinched before she nodded.

"It is our fault." Eliza tried again.

"I didn't ask you anything. Go. You, too." He pointed the door and Chad hesitated and Alex gave him a surreptitious nod. He gave one back before he walked out.

"So he is a tool, huh? To manipulate me into doing what I didn't want? To force me in to loving you?"

"Force you to love me? You make it sound so dirty, like-"

"It is dirty. What you were doing was dirty. Manipulation. Tricks. Games. Flirting g with other men to trick me. I thought you were different, that you were straightforward and honest, but here you are. Just as good as a player." He smile.

"Please. I didn't want to-"

"But Eliza and Emma forced you to? Huh? You think you can hide behind them and-"

"I am not going to hide behind them. I know what I was doing. I also felt bad doing it, but I have to-"

"Because what, you can't take *no* for an answer, huh? You accused me of that, often, but at least when Stacy said no, I didn't manipulate her into-"

"Yeah, you just got a new toy. Me. I know."

"I can't even look at you now, you -you make me so angry I feel like I will-"

"Do you want to punch me, Logan? You can do that, but realize one thing. I did all this shit to make you see Logan. To make you see what you can not see." Her eyes were wide, fragile and he avoided looking at them. He was afraid that he would give in if he stared any longer.

He couldn't, he wouldn't let another woman manipulate him. Or broke him. Or lie to him.

"I can not see because it is not there. It was never there. You lied to me, you played me, to make see something that isn't even there. So how does it feel?"

"So, for the second time, you are telling me you don't love me?" Her voice had lost its strength and she looked like a wounded deer. "Is that what you are telling me?"

He didn't say anything. He was too angry to say anything. He nodded.

"I didn't want to lie to you or play games. I was ready to give up, to get away, to say goodbye, but then Eliza and Emma said-"

"You are not going to blame them." He gritted his teeth.

"I am not. I am blaming myself. Because I stayed when they told me that you are actually in love with me. I wanted, I needed it to be true and so I stayed. I shouldn't have." She said with a sad smile. "I am an idiot. I shouldn't have done so many things."

"You shouldn't have. You are a liar and I don't think I can ever forgive you for this. You played me like a damn puppet and i-I"

"You are more angry that you fell for it, right? That you let me play you like a puppet? But why did you become the puppet, Logan? Why?"

"Because I lust after you and you know what lust can do to a man. Wars we're fought for women and their beauty. I became a puppet because you are so *fucking* good in my bed, because I am still not bored of making love with you, not because I am in *love with* you."

She chuckled as she flinched back. She rubbed her chest. Her smile was dry, slowly dying.

"Yeah, okay. I get it."

"And we would have stayed friends had you -"

"Stop. Just stop." She looked fierce as she looked up at him. Like she was fire. Logan swallowed as she waved a hand at him. "You know what, I am done with loving you, Logan. I am tired, so *tired* of loving you. I don't feel good, I feel like my lungs are frozen and I am suffocating and my heart, my heart has this weird ache that is not going away. My tongue feels dry and my throat is clogged and I feel like I can not breathe properly.

"I was wrong and I am sorry I lied, but I was trying to make you love me, I was desperate enough to try. Pathetic, even. But you are right. I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have tried to manipulate you into loving me. That is not right and that is my mistake. So sorry, Logan. But your mistake is, that you are easy enough to be manipulated. Why is that? Why are you angry when I am happy with someone else? Do you think of me as some sort of property? Your belonging?Some prized possession? You should be sorry, too, Logan. You should be."

"Don't try to-"

"If this is how love is supposed to make you feel, then you are right, right about not loving. I am going to follow your example and stop loving." She sounded determined even as fat tears rolled down. She blinked and he could see how hard she tried not to cry.

"Why are you crying?" He spat. Even when he was angry at her, even when he felt like she had betrayed him, her tears did something to him. Her tears made him feel guilty and bothered. It made his heart twist and stomach roll. "I don't believe-"

"You wanted honesty. You did not want me to play games. This is as honest as I can get, Logan. You don't have to believe me, but this is me being honest." She said and looked up with tears in her eyes before she took a step closer and kissed him. "One last time." She said as she kissed him again.

He couldn't pull away. Even when he was angry, even when he was raging mad, he just couldn't and it made him angrier still.

She was the one who pulled back first.

"Goodbye, Logan, I hope I never see you again." She whispered almost to herself as she left. But he heard.

He could taste her tears on his lips for a long time, after she left.

One day you will regret letting me go, but I won't be there that day! - Alexandra. ~~~

Chapter 36

35. You, me and everyone else

(Alexandra)

The kiss tasted bitter and salty. Her tears. His anger. He did not pull away, though, maybe because he still lusted after her.

Even when he hated her!

This was all new to Alex. Lust without love. Hatred mixed with desire.

She was still a beginner when it came to love and Logan wasn't exactly a great teacher. He was a very bad, very arrogant and hurtful teacher. And that made her a bad student.

He didn't love her. He just wanted her, because she was good in his bed.

That thought was like a violent shake. She pulled back from him even when she didn't want to. But she couldn't want him anymore.

This shit was finally done. It had to be.

"Goodbye Logan. I hope I never see you again." She whispered almost to herself, but the thought of it, the thought of never seeing him again was so painful it almost physically hurt her.

She turned away from him as she wiped her eyes, but the tears kept falling, as if they didn't know how to stop. She blinked rapidly and walked away.

She was afraid that if she waited, she would beg him to let her stay with him. After all this, she couldn't do that to herself. If she stayed, if he accepted, it would give him all the power in that relationship and she didn't want that kind of relationship.

What kind of relationship would that even be? She, in one side, giving and giving. And he on the other, just watching.

She couldn't beg. She couldn't live like that.

Even when everything had fallen apart in her life, even when she had to run away and stay in a dank motel with creepy men watching her every move like a hawk, she never begged.

After she lost her dad and her wealth and everything her father earned and built, she only had one thing then.

Her pride. Her self-esteem.

She would gladly give up her pride if it meant Logan could see how she had loved, but she couldn't destroy her self-esteem.

It would annihilate her and then she would become someone else. Someone even she couldn't recognize. What life would that be? Living as a stranger, looking at a stranger in all your mirrors?

She would rather take a life without Logan.

It was her fault that she had hold onto hope. It was her fault that she had wanted to believe it. To trust it. Trust everything El and Em had said.

"Alex." Eliza looked concerned as she saw Alex leaving. "Alex, wait." She called out.

Alex wiped her eyes and refused to turn back to look at Eliza. She hated feeling weak, feeling like her whole world was collapsing. But Logan wasn't her whole world. He had never even been a solid part of her world.

He had always been a temporary rest house in her long, troublesome journey. He has given her happiness and home for a short while, but she had always known she had to leave when the stay was over. Now she had to continue on in her journey without him. Alone.

"Alex, please. Just wait." This time Alex couldn't pretend that she hadn't heard Eliza.

She wasn't angry with Eliza, but she couldn't face her like this. With her puffy red eyes and battered heart and pride.

It was demeaning and painful. Distressing.

"Please, El, I need to go. I don't-I can't-" She said as she looked at Eliza.

"I am so sorry, baby, I am so sorry I did this to you." Her eyes were sad as she looked at Alex.

"Stop. You didn't. You didn't do anything. I wanted to stay. I wanted, I needed to try once more. Now I won't ever have to wonder, ever have to think about what if I have tried again. Now I can actually-" Alex wiped her eyes and shook her head. "'I need to go. Please."

"Let me drive you, Alex. You are in no condition to drive alone and I can-"

"No, no." Alex said almost vehemently. "I need to be alone." Alex said as she pulled her gown up and stepped out into the cold and freezing night.

The chilly air swept past her skin, leaving cold burns on its trail. She had forgotten her coat inside and she didn't want to go back in and face all those faces.

She looked around for the valet.

The whole place looked like fairytale, with all those small golden lights strung to the tree, but it almost fell like a nightmare. Her nightmare.

"Here is your key, ma'am. Do you want me to call someone?" The kindly valet asked as he looked at her.

"I am really not drunk. Don't worry." Alex said with a small smile.

This kind of kindness, the small act of generosity towards a stranger, maybe that was what kept the world from actual destruction.

"Are you alright ma'am? Did anyone hurt you?"

"No, at least not in the way you are concerned about. My husband and I, we broke up." She didn't know why she was talking to a stranger, but she felt like she would explode if she left her words and feelings bottled up. "He didn't love me and I am irrecoverably in love. You know, fate, it is kind of a bitch."

"Pardon me, ma'am, but your husband is a bastard."

Alex chuckled at him as she stepped inside her car with a wave to the man. "Yeah, he is." She said as she drove away.

Her car. It was the one Logan had bought for her. He had said she could have it as a part of her payment or something, but she had said that she would pay for it in installment, when they had agreed to stay friends.

Friends. Psh! Now we are nothing.

She thought as she drove and drove and she realized...

She had nowhere else to go.

***

(Logan)

After ten minutes, Logan could finally breathe properly and think.

God. What did I do?

He could now clearly think without anger pumping through him. Or pushing him. His anger had always been his downfall. And this time wasn't the first time. Beth had always, always asked him to check his anger and kept his words inside when he was angry. And he didn't.

And now Alex was hurt because of him. God. Her eyes filled with tears, it still sawed on his heart. He was the reason for her tears. He had never wanted to be the reason for that.

Once he had prayed that she would always smile and here he was, the sole reason for her pain.

You are a bastard. His voice scorned. *You saw her cry and you didn't stop her. You just let her walk away. You watched her walking away.*

He stood up from the couch and rushed out. Maybe she was still here. Maybe they could talk like sensible adults, instead of hurting each other.

I hurt her more than she hurt me. He thought and the voice in his head readily agreed.

He looked around; the party had dwindled to some people lingering here and there. Ethan was gone, but his son was still here with very few guests. There was no sign of Alex, but Logan saw Eliza walking out of the front door, a frown twisted on her lips. He hastily followed her to her car.

"Where is she? Eliza, where is she?" His voice was urgent as he looked at his sister.

"She went away. What do you want to do now? Wasn't that enough already?" Eliza scorned at him as she rummaged through her purse, looking for something.

"Alone? Did you let her go alone? Are you that stupid?" Logan glared at his sister. She wasn't in the position to drive a car. For God's sake, she was crying.

And you are the reason for that.

"What do you think I should have done? I was the one who asked her to stay and fight for you and she had agreed to all our stupid plans. Now, here we are, again and I am also the reason she is crying. God! What have I done?"

"Did she go to your house?" Logan ignored his sister's monologue.

"She can't even look at me. I doubt that she is coming to my house anytime soon." Eliza sighed and she looked so tired. Logan almost pitied her conundrum, but he didn't have time to be sensitive about all this.

He needed to find Alex, he needed to know that she was safe. And good.

"You and Emma, you should have minded your own business. You didn't have the right to meddle in to our relationship." Logan complained. "You guys are the reason for-"

"What relationship? The one conjured by your contract?" Emma scoffed. "But you are right. We should have minded our own damn business. We really should have. Even after knowing you, we thought there is still some semblance of Beth left in you, some semblance of US. But *you* are Barbara's son." Eliza nodded as if it all made sense. Her eyes, those amber eyes were alert and aware. It made Logan nervous.

"What do you mean?" Logan grunted with frustration.

"You blame Barbara for making you like this, don't you?"

Eliza chuckled drily as he nodded.

"She left. And people leave. You can't blame me for-"

"I don't blame you, Logan. I blame Barbara. She is to blame, not because she left you --us-- but because she gave you her genes. You are like our birth mother, Logan. That much is proven now." Eliza shook her head with dejection. "You can not be saved. We tried. And we are sorry we tried. Now Alex is hurt."

"I am nothing like Barbara." Logan spat at his sister. She didn't back off. She stood there, tall and angry and he had never seen Eliza that angry. "And I don't need saving. I don't need you guys to save me. I am rich, powerful and I can save myself."

"You are. Rich and powerful and all that shit. Yes. The way you chase after money, after success, doesn't it sound like someone you knew? She wasn't wrong to chase after money and fame, as well and you blamed her for leaving you. Us. You are doing the same thing to Alex, as well, Logan. Exactly the same." Eliza said.

"Alexandra and I, we are different. Our marriage wasn't real and I didn't leave her for money or fame, I already have enough."

"That makes you worse than Barbara, even. Not better. And let us hope you have enough money to fill your empty heart, Logan, when you become tired and old. Enough money to love you back, to take care of you, to talk back to you." Eliza sighed as if she could not bear to talk anymore. "Wait, you have money and you can buy someone to talk to you, to take care of you, maybe even love you." She shrugged as she pulled something out from her clutch.

"My heart isn't empty. Just because I can not love someone doesn't mean-" Logan started, only to be cut off by his sister again.

"You can't love someone other than yourself, and it is not a mistake." Eliza shrugged as if she had profiled him or something. "You can't keep blaming Barbara for your shortcomings. It is cowardly way out. If you can't love, be a man enough to admit that. Don't keep whining about Barbara. She left us, too. She hurt dad more than she hurt any one of us and look at dad. Dad is happy and I have never seen anyone as happy as he and Beth is. So..."

Logan stayed silent. He didn't know what to say to that. Maybe his sister was right, maybe she wasn't. He didn't know anything anymore. It was all one bit blimey mess.

"It is not my mistake I can't-" Eliza shook her head as he started.

"Your mistake, Logan, is that you wanted Alex fall for you, even when you knew you can't love her back. You wanted her to cry and grieve and be miserable when she left you and that is the worst thing you could ever do to anyone. When you heard she was happy, what did you do, Logan?" She looked at him, eyes accusing. He looked down. "You were angry. Angry that she was happy without you. Sod the plans and whatever, if you think Alex had betrayed you, let me tell you something. You have betrayed her trust and even her friendship more than she had."

"I didn't betray her. I am sorry I can't love her but you can't-"

"You are selfish and arrogant and it is obvious that you can't love anything more than your need to be at the top, your desire for success and fame and as I said, I don't blame you. I can't. You are predisposed to be like that. Thankfully Emma and I, we got dad's DNA. It is sad you got Barbara's." It looked like pity, that emotion in her eyes. Not anger. Not hatred. Just plain pity.

Logan wanted to turn back from it. He had never liked that reaction when it was shown to him. He wasn't someone to be pitied. He was someone to be admired, respected, revered. Not pitied.

"I love you, Logan, you are my little brother and so I pray you never stop running after money, because I can't imagine how you will feel or what you will go through if you ever stop running." She shook her head as she handed a folded paper to him.

"What is this?"

"That was Alex's letter to you when she first decided to leave you. We should have let her leave you, because it was right for her. I forced her to stay, because I thought it wasn't right for you. I am sorry we meddled. It will never happen again. And Logan, Alex will always be our friend. So we are not choosing between you and her."

"Are you insane? Nobody is asking you to choose and don't keep blathering on and on. Just tell me where she will be?"

"I don't know, but do you think I will tell you even if I know?"

"Why the hell won't you?" He spat at his sister. "What about this new apartment she was talking with Chad?" He asked.

"She hadn't still signed on the rental agreement and the old owners hadn't still left."

"Would she have gone to Chad's apartment?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. Okay? I am leaving now." She said as she stepped inside the car before she sped away. After staring at her car for a minute, he opened the letter.

He read it and for a while he couldn't comprehend it. She was planning to go away. To disappear from his life. To say a permanent goodbye. He couldn't even imagine that! Imagine that just weeks ago, she was ready to leave him completely.

Can you still blame Eliza and Emma for trying?

"Could you have lived without me, Alex? You said you loved me and yet you were planning to leave me? Barbara told me the same. Told me she has never loved anybody like she loved me, that I am her special little baby boy. She told that every day, even *that* day when she walked out on me." He closed his eyes as he leaned against his car and rubbed against his chest. It was hurting right there. He didn't know why.

Logan drove to Daniel's house. He did not know who else to talk to. Daniel opened the door and didn't ask anything as he walked inside.

"Come on, I have some leftover lasagna." Daniel said as he opened a box and microwaved it.

"What happened? You look like death warmed over." He asked as he pushed a glass of water towards Logan.

"Here." Logan pushed the folded letter. It was now almost worn out. Logan had read it well over twenty times in the past one hour.

"She was planning to leave me. So tell me, how can I-"

"Logan, but then she stayed."

"She was leaving. She was planning to completely disappear from my life, like Barbara."

"No. Not like Barbara. Alex was planning to leave because you didn't love her back, you couldn't love her back, but still she stayed. Even knowing that you didn't love her, she stayed. For you. Barbara left you all because she didn't love you enough. I don't know why you can't see the difference, Logan? Normally you would have been the first one to point all this out. To note all this. But you are a mess now."

"I don't know. Okay, she stayed and then she pretended to be happy with Chad and manipulated me into- into... I was angry, really angry, and I said some things I didn't really mean to her and she is gone now, really gone." He shook his head, looking crestfallen.

"I don't know why you keep messing this up. She is *the one. The one for you.* You were the only one who couldn't see it. We all saw it. Eliza and Emma tried for an intervention, because you needed it, because they thought you both deserved a happy life. But now, I don't know."

"Is she really gone? I mean, the hearing for her father's lawsuit is only two days away. Maybe she will come back."

"Of course she will come. But I don't think she will want to talk with you or anything."

"I can explain to her- I mean, I can talk to her and make her-"

"You should not make her do anything, not anymore, Logan. Just stay the hell away for a while."

"I- I was wrong and I made a mistake and I know it is all wrong, but I can't just sit and fiddle with my fingers and-"

"I know. You can't sit and fiddle, but still, stay the hell away. Okay. You have already done enough."

"Not you too, Dan. Don't tell me I am a bastard or money-chaser or whatever. Eliza had already told me all that."

"I am just asking you to stay away. Nothing more."

"Why should I?"

"Do you have the answers she wants to hear, Logan?" Daniel quirked his brows. "Tell me, Logan and maybe I will tell you you shouldn't stay away."

Logan looked down guiltily. "I don't know."

"Then stay away. If you at least considered her a friend and wants her to be happy, stay away."

***

(*Alexandra)*

The security guard recognized her and opened the door for her without another question.

She stopped her car and stepped down. Every step she took felt heavy, mechanical. Felt like an uphill battle. She just wanted to sit down and bawl.

She felt like a machine. She felt Robotic. As if she had lost the power and feelings in her heart and mind. As if there was only a machine in her chest that was keeping her alive by just pumping blood.

When she looked, she was shocked. She suddenly realized where she was. She hadn't realized it even when she drove all the way inside.

She did not know why she was here. She hadn't been here in a while. She did not even know if he was here or gone.

A strong gust of wind made her shiver as she walked along the rocked pavement. Hoping he was here. Hoping he wasn't here.

She didn't know what she was hoping, or why she was here.

She was a mess. A chaos.

Her teeth was beginning to chatter in the cold. The wind was vehement.

It was a cold, cold night. Cold like Logan and his unfeeling eyes.

She stared at the massive door. She didn't want to knock, she was almost sure this was a mistake.

She did not have the strength to knock. Or stand. She didn't have the strength to do anything.

After another two minutes of hesitation, she decided it was better if she did not knock.

She whirled away from the door only to be stopped by the sound of the heavy oak door opening. Her whole body went rigid.

Shit.

"Alex, what are you doing here?" Leo opened the door and stared at her.

"I don't know." Alex whispered as she looked into his familiar blue eyes. Calming blue eyes. She wished she could just burrow into him and cry her heart out. But since *that kiss* nothing had been same between them. She hadn't even talked to him in a while.

She stared back at him. He felt like a stranger. Not the friend she had spent months, months decorating this house, months fine tuning his songs.

"You want to come inside? It is freezing and you don't look good." He muttered as he looked down from her. She could see it in his posture, his awkwardness.

Why did he have to mess their friendship?

Why did she have to mess her and Logan's friendship?

It was all some strange and twisted plan in fate's game book. That was all Alex could think of.

"Hey?" He called her. "Coming?"

She nodded.

"Come on in then. I will get you something warm to wear and there is food in the kitchen."

She followed him inside.

You. Me. Us and then Nothing. Sometimes I can only think about the unfairness of it all. But then, that is life. Isn't it? ~ Alexandra. ~~~

Chapter 37

36. Friends in need and the exes you don't need

(Alexandra)

After Alexandra ate whatever Leo had placed in front of her, she could finally sense a little bit of feelings returning to her numb body. But her heart, it still felt kinda void. Like there was only a hole in the place where it previously was.

And she didn't enjoy that feeling. Like something was gone. Like a part of herself was broken and permanently gone. She didn't like to be only half of who she was. That wasn't her better part.

How could she have let this happen to herself?

I can, I can make myself whole again. Even without Logan. Even if he is a part of me, I can become whole without him.

She avowed to herself as she wore the pajama Leo had picked out for her and walked to the dining room with a determined step. She would not back down or back out. She could face all of this like a big, brave girl.

Of course, this was hurtful, but she knew who she was before Logan and of course, after him --she had to thank Logan for that, again, because he made her everything she could have ever become, he made it possible for her to find her true potential -- and she could survive it, survive losing Logan.

"Here, drink this." Leo handed her a mug filled with hot chocolate and she accepted it with a small smile as she sat down.

"Thanks. I am sorry to -"

"It is fine. You okay?"

"I don't know what I am. I just feel like everything is tilting and my head is spinning. I have nowhere else to go. But this doesn't mean-"

"I know, Alex. I know. So don't worry about what I think about this. This is one friend comforting another and nothing else. Okay?" He gave a comforting smile as she took a gulp of the rich hot chocolate. It was warm and everything she needed at this moment. So was he.

"Okay." She nodded.

"Come on, stop moping. It is not you. Do you want to watch a movie?" He asked with a cheerful smile on his face. She knew he was trying to pull her out of this morose pit, but it didn't work. She couldn't muster enough strength to even smile properly.

"I just want to sleep." She said feeble.

"Okay then. Go on and sleep it off. Maybe you should have the room facing the lake. That is your favorite view." He said as he grabbed the mug from her hands. "Alex, it will be alright, and I am not telling it to comfort you. I don't know what is going on with you two --I really hope it is not me who messed-"

"Don't worry, it is not you." She assured.

"If anyone can survive all of it, it will be you. Okay? You are strong and you are You."

"Can I just-" She stood up and hesitated. She wouldn't have hesitated before *that* kiss. It looked like he knew that as well. He gave her a shrug and opened his arms. Wide. Welcoming.

"We will forget all *that."* He said with a nod.

She readily took the next step and buried herself in his embrace. His arms came around her, like a safety net and she felt comforted. Felt good.

But it didn't come anywhere closer to how she would always feel in Logan's embrace.

That is my curse. She thought with a frown. *Logan, Logan, damn Logan. He is like a plague.*

"If you want to cry- I won't laugh." He chuckled and she could feel the vibration of his heart in her cheeks. She nodded her head and looked up.

"Nah, I am all out of tears." She pulled away and gave him a pout and he shook his head.

"If you want to talk about it, I am here. Okay. No judgements, no nothing. I will be just here to hear you out."

"Thanks, Leo." She said as she walked to the room she had decorated just recently for Mathilda.

It was all warm, comforting and blue. She felt like she was swimming in the dept of a cool ocean when she walked in. The tall canopy bed with blue blanket looked like sin, looked welcoming. The drapes she had chosen with Leo danced in the wind, showing off the misty window panes, and the distant lake shimmering under the moon light.

She opened the window and she could immediately smell the scent of the flowers that ensnared the walls of the mansion. She inhaled the cool air dampened with mist and scented with the perfumes of blooming buds and closed her eyes with a prayer on her heart.

"I can be strong." She whispered to the air. "I can forgive myself for doing this to me. I can forgive Logan, as well."

The trees rustled as if they heard her. She closed the windows and went back to the bed. When she noticed one of her favorite classical novels laid out on the mahogany bedside table, her lips pulled up in a small smile. But it was a smile.

This was why she could never hate Leo, why she couldn't stop being his friend. His thoughtfulness.

She took Gone With The Wind and laid back in the bed. She knew she wasn't going to sleep, so she was ready to finish the book, all over again.

While she was engrossed in the book, Leo knocked. She frowned as she put the book down and stood up.

"Yes?"

"I am sorry, but Logan is calling. Do you want me to-"

"Don't pick up." She said as she opened the door.

"I tried that for the last two times. He is persistent if anything. And I don't think he is going to stop if I didn't pick up."

"Oh yeah, I know all about his persistence." She said with a frown as she plucked Leo's phone from his hand and switched it off. "There. All done."

"Now I don't know what I should do if he decides to come all the way here."

"Just tell me I died or something."

"What the hell are you-"

"Leo, listen. I don't have the strength or patience to think about what Logan is thinking or what he is going to do. I am angry at myself for thinking about him way longer than it is necessary for me. So, now leave me to my book. Okay? I need some peace."

"Okay. If he did come, I will lie that you aren't here."

"Good, good. Good night to you."

"Now what do I say to that? Bad night to you?" He said and she chuckled.

"You shouldn't have said anything, stupid. Now, go away. Shoo." She said as she slammed the door and slumped down on the bed.

Logan, why won't you just leave me alone for once? Why do you keep pulling me after you push me away?

If only Logan wasn't a dumb asshole, he would have known why he did that. But then he was the dumbest when it came to the matter of hearts and he would never know that and Alex would forever keep wondering.

But I don't have the strength to keep wondering. She thought.

"Then for God's sake, don't." She said loudly, to *her dumb heart,* as she pulled the book back up.

(Logan)

(... After a week)

Logan hadn't slept, not much in the past week since Alex had left.

He had spent the first night calling everyone he could think of that Alex might have called to say where she had gone to. He even called her best friend Stella who was very angry with him, of course, before she hung up on him.

Then she called him again to scream at him all over again, after Alex hadn't picked up her call.

He even decided to call Leo Shine, but the guy didn't pick up for two times and then his phone was switched off and that had made Logan really suspicious. What if she had gone to Leo?!

He was almost ready to drive to Leo's apartment, but then Leo called back and told that he was busy with something and asked what Logan had wanted. Logan had hung up.

Now a week later, here he was. He still didn't know where Alex was and he was going insane, to put it mildly. He couldn't think, he couldn't do, he couldn't be.

This looming house looked monstrously alone and huge without her. It looked large, empty and bewildering. It looked like a stranger, like a shell of what it had been, without Alex's presence. So was he, if he was honest with himself.

Alex, Alex, damn Alex. I should just stop thinking about her. He thought as he walked to the kitchen with a yawn. Even when he felt like he would swoon any moment now, he couldn't sleep. Not at all. He kept turning and thrashing all through the nights.

Logan rubbed his burning eyes as he poured a tall mug of coffee for himself. He needed that. This large dose of caffeine to pull him through what would be an equally tiring day to match the restless nights.

As if Daniel could hear his mental scream, he walked in, whistling, and he had a thick envelope in his hands.

"Stop whistling." Logan grunted. These days he was mostly grunting or grumbling.

"Cranky much." Daniel said as he waved the thick brown manila envelope. "This came for you."

"What in the world is that?" Logan stared at the thing with suspicion.

"I don't know. Do you want me to call the bomb squad or something. I mean, there are people who want to bomb your stupid head. So?"

"Haha. Hilarious. Give that to me and stop being a headache. I already have a massive one."

"You have a massive headache in your massive head, huh?" Daniel laughed at his own *stupid* joke. Logan gritted his teeth as he opened the envelope and he blinked.

He couldn't believe his eyes.

"What is that?" Daniel's voice felt like a background noise to Logan.

Logan's heart thundered. His breathing hitched as he read it again. And again.

Shit... She can't...

It was panic. For a moment he didn't know what to do. And then there was only urgency to undo it. Undo everything.

You deserve this.

His tongue tasted bitter as he stared at the words that twisted and turned like a noose around his neck and he couldn't breathe.

It was so hard, so hard to do the thing his body would normally do without any extra effort. Breathe.

There was not enough oxygen in the world that could make him breathe. Not right now.

"What is that?"

Logan stared blankly at his friend. He could not understand what he had asked. Everything and everyone was incomprehensible. Utterly ridiculous puzzles that Logan couldn't solve even if he spent a lifetime.

You are not going to solve it but staring at it.

"My divorce papers." He said weakly and Daniel nodded as if it made sense. It didn't make any sense, not to Logan.

After weakness and hurt, came the usual bout of anger. His downfall.

"A week. She disappeared for a week without a trace and now she is sending me this bullshit." Logan grinded his teeth together. "What the hell is she thinking?" He said as he threw the documents down. They settled on the table --*her table*-- with a soft thud.

"This is coming for a long time, since your contract. Just sign it and let us all be done with this melodrama. It has been a lot for my blood pressure. I have to stay happy and calm, doctor's order."

"I am not in the mood to talk about your freaking BP." Logan said as he scowled at his best friend.

"You are never in the mood to talk about anyone else other than you." Daniel said as he shook his hands. "Okay, but we are going to talk about Alex, now. And what Eliza told you that day at Ethan's party."

"Eliza was being a big pain in my ass. Like every other time. That is inconsequential."

"It is not. Have you ever wondered if that might be the case? That you can't love because you are Barba-"

"Shut up."

You have wondered that, haven't you? You have always wondered that.

He could say shut up to his friend, but how could he say the same to his conscience.

Of course. Since that party and the fateful night, Logan couldn't stop thinking about what Eliza had said to him --but really, he had been thinking about it for a long, long time even before El-- and he wondered if what she said was true. If he was as selfish and cold like she had told him.

He told himself he wasn't, but there was *that voice* in him, that always, always talked back. Told him that maybe he was incapable of love, incapacitated to love, because he was exactly like Barbara.

But how could it be true? How could he become someone he *truly, really* hated? How could he let *her* affect his life, his mind again, after all this time?

He didn't have any answers. Logan, the one, who always, almost had a solution to every problem, an answer to every question was befuddled and confused. There were no answers. If there was, it was hidden somewhere deep inside, inaccessible to him.

"I can't shut up. We need to talk, now."

"I just don't-"

"Then let me talk. Okay!" Daniel said as he grabbed the papers and read it. His brows wrinkled before he put it back down. "Are you going to sign it?"

"Why the hell would I do that?"

"According to subclause 4, party A and part B have no right to dispute/contest the terms of the contract. The separation should be hassle free. So... You should sign that, Logan." Daniel said and Logan regretted ever showing that *fucking contract* to Daniel in the first place.

But he is right. You have no right to dispute the terms.

"It is my terms and I can freaking dispute it if I want to. And the contract isn't over yet. "

"Does it mean you will change the rule if and when it suits you?" Daniel had an incredulous smile on his face. "And the contract will be over in fifteen days. Notice the first sitting with the lawyers and for filing the petition? It is exactly sixteen days from today. God. She is a genius. She knew exactly how your brain would work."

"You are my friend. You can't- she can't leave like-"

"I am your friend and I will tell you exactly what I think. I think you are confused and you are confusing everyone else. Let me clear it for you." Daniel said.

"Suddenly everyone has so many unwanted advices to give." Logan frowned.

"Because you have always believed *only* you know everything. You don't, okay?"

Logan grunted as he looked away from Daniel's accusing eyes.

"Alex loved you. You did not. She fought for you, and the funny thing is that she fought for you, with you. You called her a liar, a hypocrite. Now she needs to look out for herself. She needs to stop this madness and move on. I get where she is going with this, but I don't get where you are going with all this untoward anger, dude. You are becoming bigger and bigger asshole with each passing day and I don't recognize you, anymore. You are not this guy, Logan. You can not be. Either you love her or not. Either you want her or not. Make up your damn mind. Don't complain when she wants to stay and complain when she wants to leave. What the hell do you think she needs to do?"

"She is supposed to-"

"She isn't supposed to do anything, not for you, Logan. Just sign the damn thing and send it back. Don't hurt her anymore, Logan. Even you won't forgive yourself if you do that and at least, I am sure of that."

Logan stared at the papers in front of him, as if they were vile and poisonous snakes. As if they would bite him if he touched it. Maybe they would.

He could already feel the pain of its bite.

"If I sign this, it will be over. I can't-"

"It will be over and good for her and for you, as well. I sincerely hope that you will stop confusing yourself and her. You kept pushing and pushing and when she is finally ready to be pushed away, you are selfishly trying to pull her back. Always. This has become a game to you, Logan and if you aren't my best friend, I would have kicked you in your shin and punched you in your nose. But since you are my best friend, I ask you to think again. Do not put her through the pain of staying with you, knowing that you don't love her. That you can't *ever* love her."

"But-"

Daniel's phone rang. He picked it up and after a minute he nodded.

"Sorry, I have to go, Logan. I hope you will think about this." He left, leaving Logan in confusing pile of emotions.

He couldn't think. He didn't know what to do with these papers, with these words. They were the promise that their journey had come to an end and he wasn't ready.

I am not ready.

But she is. So you have to do this for her. You have already wasted a year of her life. So...

I don't want to sign these.

It is not about what you want. She wants this.

"She wants this." He muttered as he pulled the paper closer.

Logan Adrian Forte.

He scribbled his named under.

It was done.

*

**

(... 16 days later)

Irreconcilable differences. Mutual divorce. No-fault.

These words had been the proper fixture of Logan's life for half a month now and finally here they were, face to face. For the first time.

Her lawyer and his lawyer were bending over the files, debating things Logan had no interest whatsoever.

Alexandra walked in, after five minutes, head held high, tall and elegant and breathtaking and there was no hesitation in her walk or her eyes.

You are going to lose all that. The voice crackled like a wicked witch.

Alex gave him a nod when she saw him with his lawyer. Her lawyer was a woman, who looked like a strict teacher. She had a perpetual frown on her face that made Logan swallow.

They talked about property division, alimony and what not, and Alex simply watched before she shook her head.

"No." She said.

"What do you mean No? Alexandra, this is-" Nora Rovell said with a concentrated frown.

"I know, Nora. You have already told it all to me and I have already said no. I don't want anything from him. I just want to file the divorce papers as soon as possible and be done with it."

Done with you, she hadn't said that, but Logan could hear it underneath all those carefully spoken words.

His distant eyes hurt him. Bothered him.

They couldn't be over, just like that.

"We have a prenuptial agreement that states I have to pay you ten million dollars and-"

She shook her head.

"I don't remember ever signing any prenuptial agreement. No thank you."

"Are you insane?" Her Lawyer asked Alexandra angrily, before she masked her face in to a cool, stony mask. "I need to talk with my client, before we proceed with all of this." Nora said to his Lawyer.

"I am willing to pay the amount and also-also I will agree to any terms related to property divisions and alimonies too."

"Why, because you are guilty and you need to assuage your guilt? Because you need to tell yourself that you have saved me again? I don't need you or your money, okay?" Alexandra said in a voice that was clear. Honest. There was no game here. And it cut him. "And Nora, you are the best lawyer and I know it, but if you don't want to do what I ask you to do, I will find a new lawyer."

Nora grumbled. "We will talk about other details during the next session and we will file the papers after that." Nora Lovell looked down at her watch with a frown. "I need to go, but Alexandra, we are not filing these papers just yet. We need to talk about details. Do you two want to go for marriage counselling or something, I can-"

"Maybe we can-" Logan started only to be cut off by Alex.

"No. Nothing can save this marriage. It is over. So, Nora, please find a date to file the papers." Alex stood up and grabbed her handbag and then she stopped and looked at Logan with unreadable eyes.

Logan stared at her like she was a stranger --he couldn't recognize her-- as she pulled an envelope from her bag.

"This is the payment for the car."

He opened it and found the full amount there. "You said you will pay it in instalments." Logan said, hoping they would get some time to talk. Just talk.

He did not like the feeling that they were strangers. They were not. They had never been.

They always had so much to talk about even when they first met.

And he knew her, every bit of her.

"I would rather not be in debt to you." She shrugged before she turned and left.

Forever?!

I wish I can go back in time and tell you every thing you want to hear from me. Or is it too late already? - Logan. ~~~

Chapter 38

37. Almost ex-wives and very ex-mothers

(Alexandra)

Alexandra had known that it would be very hard to face Logan, again, after all this, to talk to him like nothing mattered, but it was not as hard as she had imagined. It had been manageable, though the pain still assaulted her.

Yes, it was a bummer that her heart still thrashed when she saw him sitting there, all handsome and grumpy, and it was also very pathetic that she wanted to lean in and kiss against those pouty lips, but she was almost sure she didn't give anything away. She was cool, calm and stoic --she was *practically* Logan!

It is hard to love you and it is hard not to love you. She thought. She did not know what to do with that.

After she handed him the check for the car--the money she borrowed from Leo, another debt she had to pay back-- she walked out of the long room, that was made of so many glasses that it reflected their failure from every angle.

Alimony. Tch! She thought with a scoff as she stiffly walked down the stairs. The whole place was lavish --they were thriving from the divorces.

It was generous that he wanted to give her alimony and a share of his properties --which wasn't in the *contract*. But she didn't want any of that now.

She had wanted his money before, only because she thought it would help her to win her father's company back. But now that *that case* was going exactly in the right direction, she didn't need anything. If she won, she would be rich in her own right, but even if they lose the case, she wouldn't be exactly homeless and hungry. Not again.

She was standing on her own legs, now --and yes, again, all thanks to Logan. But she was growing also because she was extremely good at what she was doing. Now she was earning much better than what she had earned serving tables. So that was that!

She had started working on the Condo of Avery Carlos -- the friend Mathilda had introduced to Alex after she had finished Matilda's mansion-- and Mr. Carlos was liking her job, and so was his daughter. The daughter, Delilah Carlos, was excited with the way Alex's mind works and she had promised Alex that she would give away Alex's business cards to every one of her friends.

And the work was getting much bigger than she could handle by herself these days, that she had hired an assistant after Leo continued to bother her about it. Leo was also pestering her to hire

a man, to help her out with all sort of things and she was looking, still and she needed to find the second one soon, because she just got another job lined up to decorate a new art gallery.

Emma's new house was almost done, before all this ensuing mess, and Alex was sure Emma could buy the covers and drapes and a few coffee tables by herself. She had talked with Emma about it on the phone, and Alex knew Emma didn't want to talk about her house, but they had pretended that there was nothing else they needed to talk about.

Alex hadn't still talked with Eliza since that night, not because she was angry, but because she was just so tired. Tired of facing anyone else.

She rather liked living in the solitary confinement of her hotel room, like a hermit crab, holed up in her own cocoon.

After two days of staying in Mathilda's house with Leo, Alex had decided to leave and she had found a room in Hotel LeBauss. And it was a nice hotel, not totally luxurious, but just right for what she was earning. And not creepy with creeps.

I am doing well on my own and I don't need his money to buy my food. Not again. She though angrily.

It was all she was feeling these days. One day she was angry and then there was the grief lining over her heart muscle, like thick bike oily remains. Amid them, the happiness came only in a short burst, very rarely, very occasionally.

"Alex, wait." His voice still had the ability to shatter her defenses, but she couldn't let that happen.

She sighed and turned back to look at him, putting back on the mask of calm indifference. It had become easier with time. To put it on and to take it off as she pleased. Logan was the one who taught her that as well, what with the contract and the constant lying.

"Yes?"

"I want to talk with you, Alex. We can't just end it all like-"

"We just talked. What else do we need to talk about?"

"You think we have nothing to talk about? Without the presence of the lawyers?"

"Ms. Lovell asked me not to talk with you without her presence, so..." Alex shrugged.

He took in a deep breath. "I know you are angry, but-"

"I am not angry with you, Logan, not anymore. I am just angry at myself and I can't run away from myself like I can from you. It is a dilemma, but..." She shrugged.

"I am sorry for that day." He looked truly sorry and she knew he was. But it had become too late to apologize, because she had already forgiven him. For that day, if not for everything else.

"It is fine."

"It is not fine, Alex. I was hurt and I was feeling like you have betrayed me and I said all thes-"

"I did betray you and I know, it was underhanded and duplicitous and I just, I still don't know what made me stoop that low. I told myself that it was for love, even when I knew it was unscrupulous and manipulative. But now that I think of it, I feel like I shouldn't have wanted that kind of love. I was so wrong to want that kind of love. It made me do things I would have normally hesitated to do and that is my mistake. My mistake was not falling in love with you, Logan, because you are amazing, but my mistake was to stop treating myself with the respect I deserved, for you. I now know all that."

As she spoke, it became clear. Everything that felt so hazy and obscure. It was like she could finally see behind the cloud of smoke.

He flinched back as she stared at her, silently.

"And I finally feel like I can become myself, Logan. I don't want to jeopardize it again. Not even for you."

"I am sorry I made you-- leave that, but I agreed to pay you, and it is in the contract. So just- let me do just that." He almost pleaded.

She smiled. "We both broke the contract all the way up and down, Logan. It was invalid from the very first moment we fell in bed together. And then I crossed the line when I fell in love with you and I don't feel like you should pay me anything. But if you are worried that I will be homeless again, don't. You might have heard from Mr. Marino that the case against my dad's previous partners are going great and also I have projects lined up to take care of myself. So don't feel guilty, Logan. I am fine and you are the one I should thank for that. Twenty million or whatever, it is nothing when compared to all this you have given me to stand on my own and that is the honest truth."

He stared at her for a while and then shook his head, and he looked like he had lost the game. She knew how he hated losing anything.

It made her feel bad, but she couldn't keep feeling bad for him. And hurting herself in the process.

She had to come out of all these past addictions and patterns. That was the only way she would survive this heartbreak.

"If that is what you want, then okay."

"It is what I want."

"I can give at least that." He said with a sad smile that twisted a knife deep inside her heart. "At least that. Bye, Alexandra. Have a happy life." He whispered before he turned away from her.

"Bye, Logan."

She blinked her eyes as she walked away. ***

(Logan)

Logan felt defeated as he walked back to where his lawyer was seated in the long conference room of the biggest law firm in NY. The glass table reflected Logan's face and he didn't like the look on his face. Like he had lost his whole world. Or something equally as drastic.

He couldn't stop thinking about everything Alex had just told him.

She didn't look angry. She didn't look hurt. She just looked relieved. Like she had figured out how to make the best of this life without him. Like she had learnt the way to stop wanting *the kind of love* that made her into something she was not.

And it was like a punch in his solar plexus, a knife in his heart.

He wondered if he could ever learn a way to stop wanting her, to make the best of this life without her.

She was the best thing that had ever happened to him and he had broken it, destroyed it, because he was...

Afraid. Scared to love her. To give in.

"Mr. Cordero, you can agree to whatever Ms. Lovell asks for, I have no intent to fight for anything. And you can call me after you file the divorce papers. I don't think I need to be there for all this. Michael Marino suggested you to me and he told that you are a very competent lawyer and so I trust you to do whatever you can to make it easy for her."

"Sure, Mr. Forte. That is my job, and you are paying me a lot for that and I will do whatever you want. But can I ask you one thing?

"Go on."

"Why are you getting divorced? I can see how much you care for her and about her comfort and everything else. Is is because of her? Did she not want to be with you anymore?"

She didn't. Want to be with him.

"It is not like that. I am the one who messed up and so I don't want to put her through anymore hardship than is necessary. I will see you, Mr. Cordero." Logan turned back from the man and walked out.

He didn't want to go back home, he didn't want to sit in the silence and go crazy with all these loud voices prodding and poking in his head, so he drove to the restaurant he usually would dine with Alex. And sat there in the table they had always sat, reminiscing about her, about what made her who she was, about how she made him feel all alive and vivid.

Before her, he was black and grey and then she stormed in, with all the rainbows in her smile, in her soul and he had changed. For the better.

Now that she left, he felt like the greys and blacks were catching up with him again, that his scowl was becoming more and more pronounced, that his anger was becoming uncontrollable. And he hated all these changes in himself.

But I can't ask her to stay for all the wrong reasons. I can't.

When the waiter came, he ordered for a bottle of white wine and ordered one of her favorite dessert to eat.

He would say goodbye to her in his own way.

Just because he couldn't love her didn't mean he wasn't in pain. He hurt. Everywhere. And it was the God's honest truth. He hated himself for being Barbara's son. For never learning to forgive Barbara or himself.

For being this insensitive and unfeeling jerk.

But he was afraid to love Alexandra. Afraid that she would hurt him like his mother. Afraid that he would hurt her like his mother.

It was all so mixed up. All these bottled up feelings weren't doing him any good. He felt like he would blast like a bomb if he kept on with it. And yet, he didn't have anyone he could tell all these things to. He was afraid to open up, even to Daniel about this.

Logan wanted to cry and scream. But he wondered if he would be able to stop if he did cry.

"Logan."

He jerked up in his seat.

Think of the devil and here she is.

There was a man standing next to her and she turned back and whispered something to him. The man looked down at Logan before he nodded and walked away.

"What do you want?"

"Can I sit, Logan?" She asked as she looked at him with worry and question.

"You can't." He said and she nodded.

"I think I must sit. I know you are angry, but you need to stop being so angry with yourself and so..."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Where is your wife, Logan? Don't tell me. I know and I also know you are doing a big mistake."

"What do they say about Satan reading holy words?" Logan scoffed.

"As long as it is the holy word, you should heed to it even if Satan is the one who is reading them. It is the words that matter, not the who." Barbara said as she pulled the chair out and sat down.

Logan grunted. He couldn't just physically drag her away and he also hated making scenes. It would be bad for his reputation. So he just stared at his hands as she sat there for a minute. And two. Maybe she would go away if he stayed silent.

"I met, no, I accidentally ran into Emma the other day and she told me-"

"She had no right to tell you anything." He scowled.

"More like screamed --Emma had always been the calm one-- that I am the reason for all the mess in your life and how I made you into this cold and insensitive jerk and whatever, who can't love anyone, but I don't believe it. Not for a second. You are not cold or insensitive, you can be guarded, yes, stoic, of course, but you are not cold. You are the most sensitive person I have known even when you were just-"

"How do you know who I am now? You haven't seen me in what, 24 years? Don't talk to me like you know me."

"Yes, but I have also seen you with your wife on various occasions, and the look in your eyes when you were with her, it wasn't coldness or indifference, Logan. I know how indifference would be like. My eyes were like that when I looked at your dad. Your eyes, not that. Anyone can see how much you love her."

"You think you can come to me with all your wise words and I will believe that you weren't the same greedy woman who had left us? No."

"I am- I don't want you forgive me, Logan, but I want you to stop giving me enough power to destroy you. Or do you still love me enough to let me break you again? Break your life?" Her cold grey eyes-- his eyes-- glinted as she looked at him.

He swallowed the lump in his throat. Those eyes, it made him think twice. He knew where he had got that look from, now.

"I don't love you. I have stopped loving you the day you left."

"So why are you letting me affect your decisions, Logan?"

"I didn't-"

"If you want to hurt me, you have to hurt me, Logan." She pointed to herself with a frown. "But, no, you are hurting yourself. What I did was wrong, Logan, so wrong, and reading about your success--my baby's success-- and never have the courage to approach you, it was my

punishment. And then meeting you and being ignored and seeing how much you hated me, it is my punishment. So don't punish yourself for what I did to you all those years ago."

He sat there, silent, as he looked at the woman in front of him. She looked thin and wrinkled and as he had once said, time hadn't been kind on her face. But it looked like it had been kind on her heart. Almost.

"I don't give you enough thought to-"

"You are lying, Logan. I knew I was wrong when I left you, but I always knew Beth would be better for you and she loved your dad and-"

"And so you are telling me that you sacrificed it all for Beth?" He chuckled wryly. "Are you telling me that you could see the future where we all would be happy with Beth and you were big hearted enough to leave us? God. I can't believe your audacity to come and sit here and talk about this." He spat the words out with vengeance.

"You are like me in that way, at least, Logan. We both are audacious enough to ask for things we don't deserve."

It hit right on the mark. He didn't know whether it was what she intended, but it was so right. So on point.

God. She is so, so right.

He was audacious enough to sat there and ask Alex to give him everything without giving anything right back. He was presumptuous enough to call her a hypocrite when he was the hypocrite all along.

I am so sorry, Lex.

"But to be honest, I wasn't that generous to leave you all for Beth, I just told myself it would be alright. That she would not just sit there and watch you becoming a train wreck. She loved you all too much to let it happen. She was always the better one out of us two."

"She still is." Logan said as he took a gulp of his water. The wine bottle and the chocolate pastry sat in front of him, untouched.

Barbara nodded.

"I wanted success, it was like a burn for me, Logan. It was a burn underneath my skin. I see you all and you are all *obstacles* in my path. I didn't love your dad anymore and I couldn't stay. I was suffocating. But even then, I wanted to bring you with me, I promise, but I knew I can't give you anything that you deserve. You were my special boy, Logan and I - I am sorry I broke you, I hurt you, but I won't let you hurt yourself, not on my account. Not after all these years."

Logan shook his head. "Like I said, I don't care what you want to do or don't, just don't come back into my life with all these-"

He wasn't finished yet, when she waved a hand at him. It looked like a twig, but paired with her eyes, it made him shut up.

"After I met Emma, I am planning to come to your house tomorrow-- it isn't that hard to find out where you live, I mean, you are Logan Adrian Forte-- but then here you are, today, and it almost feels like God's plan. I think he doesn't want you to waste another day of your life by your stubbornness."

"I am not stubborn." He felt like a whiny kid as he said that and she gave him a look-- the one she gave him whenever she found his hand in the candy box and it made him feel all these wierd things in his stomach.

"You are pertinacious and willful and it is all good when you want to succeed, Logan, and you did. You have reached heights, but it is not good when it comes to love. You have all these made up ideas in your head about love and you are adamant, almost perverse to allow yourself to see that you are indeed in love with Alexandra, that she is *the one*. You are afraid to realign all your ideals, to ness it upcand it is okay to be afraid. But it is not okay to let fear destroy everything you want."

"You don't know what I want. None of you know what I want and talking like this, like you all knew. Daniel, Emma, Eliza, Dad and now You. What-"

"Because we all knew, Logan, just by looking. Why do you think we all keep saying this? Because we can see it. It is strange that you don't know, that you can't see. Or do you? I am almost sure you keep pretending not to see it yourself, your own heart." Barbara said as she grabbed a glass and poured a wine for herself. "I think I need this, but you are already foggy and confused, so don't drink your wine." She said as she corked the bottle back.

He grumbled. "Make yourself at home in my table."

She chuckled. "I will." She said. "Let me tell you one thing I really did know, Logan. If you let her go, you will regret it forever. Like I regretted leaving you all. Not your dad, just you three. Especially you. God, how I regretted it." She whispered, her eyes cloudy. "Emma and Eliza had always been Daddy's girls. But you, you were mine. My little boy, and I regret it to this day. I knew I couldn't have given you anything, I knew I would have made your childhood bad if I brought you with me, I knew I did the right thing by leaving you and still I regret leaving you. I regret not having the courage to bring you with me."

"You did a favor by leaving me. You are right. Beth is the right one for us. For me. For our family. You are not. You wouldn't have been."

Barbara flinched back before she gave him a nod. "Yes. I deserve that. So tell me, tell me you won't regret this years later, tell me you won't regret *this decision* when you see Alex with a new man next to her, holding her and she, holding his kids. Tell me you will be okay listening to her

saying how you did a favor to her by leaving her, how the new man, he is the right one for her, that he is her family. Because I am not *okay* hearing all this." She said with a dry smile.

Now it was Logan's turn to flinch back.

Sometimes, at the edges of the nights, I sit with the darkness and wonder about all these hopeful beginnings and heartless endings. I think about you. How we could have been everything and yet became nothing.- Alexandra. ~~~

Chapter 39

38. How to heal the broken hearts

(Logan)

Logan closed his eyes as Barbara's words echoed in his head. It kept ringing and ringing until it was the only thing he could hear.

You won't regret... Tell me you won't regret... another man... Kids... His kids... Her kids..

Logan could imagine Alex sitting in front of him, her summer lake eyes cool and aloof --and strange-- as she looked at him and told him thank you for leaving her.

"Thank you... Did me a favor... He is my home..."

God.

His heart clenched at the thought of that, thought of her ever looking at him like that. He couldn't understand why it felt like someone was ripping his heart away. It wasn't even real.

It could only mean one thing.

I will regret it. Years later, I am sure I will regret this. Regret letting her go. But...

"Just promise me you won't regret that, Logan and I won't pester you again." Barbara said again and he looked down at his fingers as his heart thumped closer to his ears.

How could he tell her that when he knew he would?

The images running wild through his head, of Alex with another man, it was a torture. It was something he couldn't bear, even if it's only unreal.

For now. But years later.... She won't be waiting around for you. Around for someone who used her and then rejected her over and over again.

God... No.

He hated the phantom man standing next to Alex --he almost looked like Leo, a older version of him-- his arms around her and the two little blonde girls jumping next to her-- who looked exactly like her and they were supposed to have black hair, not blonde, they were supposed to be-

What? Supposed to be yours?

Yes. Mine. Mine.

"Why don't you finish your wine and go away. The man looks like he is waiting. And he didn't look like that director." Logan said. Even after years, Logan knew the man Barbara had walked away with, and this wasn't that man.

"I am not that easy to divert, but still... He is not that director. I left him when I -"

"Met this one? Is he richer than the director or something? Did he promise you a lead role in French films?" Logan asked with a sarcastic smile.

She winced as she looked at his face. "No. This man is very poor, but when I met him, I knew, I finally knew what love would feel like with the right man. How ambitions and all those other things are secondary when you find the love of your life. How it can open your eyes when you had been blind for so long, how you can become the best version of yourself. I wasn't a nice woman, Logan."

"I know. You don't have to tell me that." He said with a vicious smile.

She nodded solemnly.

"I had never been a nice one. I loved you, of course, you were my baby boy, but my ambitions were bigger. After I left, I secured secondary roles in six or seven movies and it is almost going okay for me, nothing large and vibrant like I have wanted, but okay and I could almost feel the victory coming. Feel the taste of the fame. That director, he promised me a lead role after two years and and then one day, I met Warner. He was working as an extra in the film set and we got to talk and I fell in love. The director, Salvio, he threatened that I wouldn't get the lead role if I left him, but strangely enough, it didn't deter me and that was when I knew-- knew how it felt to be truly in love. It is liberating and it almost makes you breathe right. Don't you want that, Logan?" She looked at him with warmth in her eyes.

"I do want that." Logan was shocked when the words came out. His eyes widened in shock and she smiled reassuringly.

"Then why are you destroying your choice to have that?" She looked inquisitive and then she nodded. "Because you are afraid to hurt her. More so than you did hurt her now."

He didn't know how she knew that, but it was almost a solace to know that she knew that. Nobody had understood that before. Barbara might not be his favorite person, but knowing that she understood it, it was almost comforting. A relief.

"I have always told myself that I can not love, not just because I am afraid to be hurt, but also because-"

"You believed you are like me. Too selfish to love properly, too selfish *not* to hurt even the ones you love. Like me. Like how I hurt you, because you knew I loved you more than I loved anything. And I hurt you, so... "

"I suppose." He shrugged. "Yes. I am afraid that I would hurt her, that I would grow tired of her once this--whatever this is--fade off. I don't want to make her go through the pain of losing me after years, I am afraid to love her and then stop."

"Then don't leave her. Don't stop. It is as easy as that, Logan. You and Alex are not me and David. If you think that you are like me, I can assure you *you are not.* But if you still think you are, then I will tell you one good thing about me. I can love. I can love, too.

"You can see how I am with the man who is made just for me and you will know that you will be that way with Alex, no matter what. I might be selfish enough to hurt you all, but I have never hurt Warner. I could have stayed with the director, I could have made it to the lead role and become famous. And then I could have left him. But I didn't do any of that because I knew it would hurt Warner. So... I can love, too. I might not love like Beth, abundantly, selflessly. I can't love just anyone, not just like that, but I am not incapable of loving. I am not as cold and frozen as you believe. So, you are not, as well." Barbara shrugged.

"So, if I am like that, does it mean I will only love Alex. What if she wants a kid? I don't think I will be a good father to that kid and it will be so wrong to put a kid through that."

"Because I am not a good mother? You and I, we are not alike, Logan. I don't know why you keep thinking like that."

"Because Eliza told me... She told me that I am incapable of love, that I am just like you. And I don't blame her, I don't even question her, because I have always felt just like that. Too hungry for success. Too ambitious and-" Logan shrugged, almost carelessly, but he cared. He cared that Eliza thought of him like that.

"It is not wrong to hunger. To thirst for things you deserve. Without ambitions, life is just a boring cacophony. You want symphony, you have to work for it. But you wouldn't hurt them for those ambitions like I did, Logan. You love your sisters, even after all these years and I suppose you love their kids-"

"Of course. They are my world."

"See, then how can you be a bad father?"

"I can be a good uncle, but good father? I don't think I am capable of that or-"

"You should blame Eliza. You didn't because you have made yourself think that you are like me, after you shielded your heart against love. And Eliza was mad and you know how Eliza and you can be, when you become angry. You both say things you didn't mean."

"I don't think-"

"Stop thinking and just feel, Logan. Because it is all there. You know it is. You just have to admit it. You hate to just imagine her with another man. You can't put her through hurt and

heartbreak --even though you are doing just that by denying her of your love, and your twisty logic. So just think why that is!"

"I don't know what-"

"Just close you eyes. Just imagine a life without her. Now how does your world feel? Empty? Cold? Or bearable?"

"I can't even imagine a world, *my world*, without her. She is like a permanent fixture or something."

"Now imagine that she is far, far away and she is married to someone else and you are not her friend or lover anymore. How does it make you feel?"

"Angry. Empty. Sad. Hurt." He whispered.

"Betrayed. Bothered." Barbara finished. "So why do you feel all this if she is just your friend, if she is just another woman you have met? If you are just attracted to her? Think about that, Logan. You would be hurt when she become someone else's, not just jealous. Jealous can mean many thing. But hurt will mean only one thing. So why would you get hurt? Why did you?"

"Because I do love her, don't I? In my own stupid, broken, crazy way, I do love her." He said in amazement as a tear rolled down his cheeks. He rubbed the tear away with a sad smile.

What if it is too late now?

"You do love her. In your own stupid, broken, crazy way. And she has loved you in all your stupid and broken glory. You two are destined, Logan. So don't waste it. Because not everyone finds their soulmate in this life. Not everyone is as lucky as you and I. Some are saddled with mediocre love and that is only what they will ever have and feel. But you, you are blessed and you would be a fool to waste it."

"But I have hurt her so bad, so bad that now everyone tells me she is better off without me. Even my best friend." Logan shook his head, feeling dejected.

"I suppose it was because he wanted you to understand yourself and then when you couldn't, he might have wanted to protect her."

"I don't know. I have hurt her a lot and I am sure she is ready to move on. She told me she loved me, over and over again and I was adamant about not loving her, even when I loved her. How stupid is that? I have never thought I could be this stupid. I messed up. And she will never forgive me."

"Love isn't always easy for everyone, Logan, some makes blunders, some doesn't and some needs to cross oceans and mountains, and others will slide across it with ease. But in the end, it is the love that matters."

"You are right. For once in your life, you are right." He nodded

"For once in my life, I am right when it comes to you." She said with wistful smile. "For once in my life, I could do the right thing for you." She looked sad.

He didn't know what to say to her. Of course, he was thankful that she did what she did, but still, he didn't know if he could forgive her for the past or put it all behind him.

"Thanks." He stood up. "I need to call Alex."

"She would rather prefer seeing you face to face, don't you think?"

"Okay. Yes. Yes. You are right. Bye, Barbara. Thanks, again."

"I was the reason for this problem and I am happy I can make it right for you." She said before she hesitated.

"What?"

"Can I- can I call you somstimes?" Her eyes, those eyes that looked with determined steal was now wounded and fragile as she looked at him. His heart gave a slight twitch.

"I don't know, but you can give me your number. We will see."

"It is not exactly a no."

"It is not yes, either."

"I can live with a maybe. Now go get your girl."

"I will." He smiled as he walked to his car, a whistle in his lips.

***

(Alexandra)

Alex stared at her hand the second time and it was still there. It was like a ticking time bomb and she feared it would explode in her life, leaving a bigger mess. A mess she couldn't clean up.

She felt bad thinking like that, but she couldn't believe how this could happen to her. Did God hate her so much?

Shit, shit, a boat load of shit. She cursed at herself as she looked in the mirror with cursory eyes.

I don't look-

Alex jumped up in alarm when the bell to her room rang. She wrung her hands together as she stared at it again and then shook her head.

She splashed water against her flushed cheeks before she walked out and opened the door without even waiting to see who it was.

"Darling."

Alex almost fell down in surprise when Stella hurled herself .

"You are here. Why are you here? How are you here, Stells?"

"Because I can stay away when you are happy, but I can not, not when you were hurting. Not again. I wasn't there when you lost your dad and everything else. I could never forgive myself if I am not here for you, again. What kind of friend would I be, then?"

"I didn't tell you about dad, so... And you will always be the best kind of friend."

"Why didn't you call me, Alex? I am still so angry you didn't tell me, but that is for another day."

"God. God. I needed you." Alex said as she stared at Stella's beautiful face. Her light blue eyes were like a deep pool of kindness and warmth. "I missed you." Alex said as she wiped her eyes.

"I did too. I am almost ready to murder Adam and escape in the next flight." Stella winked as she walked in, dragging a large suitcase in with her.

"Where is he?"

"He is not here. He has a conference in Beijing and then one in New Delhi about starting a new authentic Texan hotel. So..." Stella shrugged as she slumped down the couch.

"You telling the truth, right? You didn't kill him, right?"

"I don't know. I am not sure." She smirked. "The details are hazy, dear friend."

"So tell me, what is this hocus pocus about Logan and divorce and whatever? The first time I talked with you two, you were so in love. I hope you are not rushing into this divorce or anything."

"You don't know the half of it." Alex muttered. She didn't have to keep the contract a secret now that he had disclosed it and they had dissolved it.

"I was just fired and he was just dumped. We kinda needed each other. So... I agreed to a contract marriage."

"What the hell is that?" Stella looked bewildered.

Alex explained everything to her, from the day they met, about his ex girlfriend, about how she helped him to maintain his reputation and how he helped her.

"A marriage for a term of one year, and then parting ways. And he would pay me... It was all supposed to be easy. Simple. Straightforward." Alex finished with a sigh.

Except I messed it up by falling in love.

"So, let me get this clear. You are telling me the marriage is a scam? That everything is a damn scam?" Stella wrinkled her brows as she stared at Alex. "And you agreed to all his stupid plans. What were you thinking?"

"I did and I probably wasn't thinking much. I was alone and afraid-"

"You should have called me then, you idiot."

"I know, but I lost my phone and couldn't contact you, but even if I had, I am not sure I would have wanted to interfere with your happy honeymoon days."

"God, it is mostly work for Adam. Even if it is all so glorious, I would have come for you, Alex. You know that." Stella sounded angry and frustrated. "How could you not call me? I am your best friend. I am supposed to help you."

"You are still my best friend, and I am sorry. Don't be angry, okay."

"You didn't *even tell* me after the marriage." Stella grumbled.

"I couldn't. One of the finer point of the contract is the NDA." Alex shook her head. God. Logan was one strange man.

"Wow. That guy is something else."

"He is." Alex chuckled and Stella wrinkled her nose.

"And then you went and fell in love with him." Stella pointed to Alex. "Your eyes shine with love and hurt, both, when you talk about him."

"Yes. I did. A big stupid mistake."

"If you fell in love with him, he might not be that bad." Stella said with a twist of her lips. That was her thoughtful pose. Alex missed it so much that she couldn't look away from her best friend.

"He is not bad." Alex agreed.

"He might even be amazingly extraordinary." Stella said with an inquisitive stare that made her eyes all squinty.

"He is."

"So why do you want to divorce him? Why not stay?"

"Because he did not fall in love with me. My love, it is all one sided and pathetic."

"Oh, God, this is *soo* unacceptable. He didn't fall in love with you? How the hell did he accomplish that? Maybe there is something wrong with him?"

Alex knew Stella was 100% serious when she said that and that made Alex glow in happiness. Maybe happiness would not be so hard to attain now that Stella was back.

She always had that extraordinary magic to make Alex feel happy when she was down. It was her magic. A best friend magic.

"I know I am your best friend, and you love me, but not every one is supposed to fall in love with me, Stella."

"No, it just can't be. He wouldn't love you back only if there is something wrong with him." Stella said, looking unconvinced. "Remember all those guys in our college days. They were all so besotted with you, but you never gave them any chance, because as I have once told you, you have some pretty *high* standards. Impossible ones, even. Any ordinary guy just won't do for you. Now that you have found an extraordinary guy, for you, there is just one teeny-tiny hitch." She paused with a dramatic look on her face. "Alas! He also has a teeny-tiny brain problem. Wait, he didn't have teeny-tiny weeny problem, as well, right?"

For the life of her, Alex couldn't still understand how Stella's mind could be so random at times.

Alex chuckled as she shook her head. "Just the opposite." She said and Stella whooped and then she scowled.

"Maybe I should call him and yell at him again."

"Again? When did you-"

"Weeks ago, he called me to ask if I know where you would be." Stella waved her hands with a frown. "All of that and I can't believe he isn't in love with you."

"He called you too?"

"Who else did he call?" Stella asked with a scowl.

"Leo." Alex smirked, knowing that Stella would go ballistic when she realized who this Leo was.

"Leo?" Stella narrowed her eyes in question.

"Leo Shine? I worked on Mathilda Shine's house and Leo and I, we became *kinda* friends." Alex waved a hand.

Stella's eyes widened as her mouth hung open. She gaped and gaped before she could finally compose herself and talk. "Why is this the first time I am hearing about all this? Where have I been living? You- you didn't tell that to me?!"

"In the cold depth of Switzerland."

"You couldn't have inserted it into many conversations we have had?" She looked indignant and Alex smiled.

"Oh, but when we talked, I have so many things to ask about you and the beautiful places you have been to, so..."

"Yeah, stupid inconsequential things. I would have rather talked about this pretend marriage, about Leo *freaking hottie* Shine. Your work."

"I know. I am sorry." Alex said with a placating smile.

"You should be. You really should be." Stella pointed her with a frown. "God, I shouldn't have agreed to Adam and his stupid six-months-that-then-became-a-year of boring business trip cum honeymoon. I have missed a lot. A LOT!" She sighed dramatically. "My best friend is a freaking stranger to me now."

"Oh, don't be so dramatic."

"Tell me everything."

"Leo kissed me." Alex said and Stella jumped up from the bed.

"Wait, he kissed you? I feel like I am in a nightmare and a dream. God. Alex, you are killing me with this. You loved Logan and you kissed Leo. You fox!"

"Idiot. He kissed me. I might not have pulled away, but I didn't kiss back."

"What did Logan have to say about that?"

"Logan was very angry. We both said some things and that was when I confessed my love to him, you know, I was very angry I let it slip and he said he is sorry. God. He looked pained and uncomfortable when I said I loved him." Alex shook her head with a sigh. It still stung. No matter how hard she tried to repress the feeling of pain and hurt, it always poke its ugly head right back whenever she even just thought of him.

I hate myself for doing this.

"I don't know what to say to that, babe." Stella said as she patted Alex hand. "Except that he is a real moron. And it is *his loss."*

"I am just happy you are here."

"Of course I am."

"Today we met with the lawyers, you know to talk about filing the divorce papers and all that shit." Alex muttered as Stella took Alex's hand in hers.

"You sure there is not even an itsy bitsy possiblity that Logan loves you back? Do you want to divorce him?"

"I don't want to divorce him, of course. But I have to, Stella. I have to, for myself and my--I have to try to move on, to put it all behind me. A part of me will always be broken and it will be with all these crooked scars to speak of the time I had to mend my heart, but I need to stay strong. Not just for me, but for my..." Alex stopped as she looked at the bathroom.

"For your?" Stella looked with confusion.

Alex stood up and walked out with the plastic kit in her hands.

Positive. It read.

"My baby. I am pregnant."

I have been suffocating in my own brokenness for so long. You are the breath of fresh air I have always waited for, yet have never known. - Logan.

Chapter 40

39. How to break the healed hearts

(Alexandra)

Alexandra and Stella sat in the overwhelming silence as they stared at the pregnancy kit in front of them, as if it was about to explode any moment now. Their eyes were glued to the words written across the plastic kit -- it was so harmless a word, yet it was also the sword staring straight at them.

Stella was twitching her fingers as she avoided looking at it and then inevitably her eyes would be drawn back to it. Like it was a magnet.

Alex's heart was a mess. She couldn't stop looking. It was as if her eyes were glued.

And she was so very afraid, so very angry.

She knew what it meant. It meant more Logan. It meant more pain of seeing him on daily basis and she could not...

She was a coward that way.

Of course, without interacting with him frequently, she could put his memories to rest, in a kind place in her heart. A place that wouldn't feel like twisting knife permanently stuck inside.

As years passed, he would mayeb fade into a sepia. This fond photograph people took out once in a while to look at, to reminisce. To feel the pang of nostalgia, but never the pang of hurt.

But seeing him over and over again, it would keep those memories in bright, vivid flash of colors. He would forever stay as the knife in her heart.

She didn't want that. She hadn't wanted this.

Alex didn't know why this happened to her. Alex had even used the pills Stella once told *she* was also using and she used it regularly, because she knew the end was coming. And she didn't want anything to happen in between.She hadn't wanted to bring a soul into *this broken* world, in this *broken* way.

So...

Why did this happen to me? Why me?

"Maybe it is a false positive?" Stella asked as she licked her lips. A drop of sweat drifted down her forehead and she wiped it away.

Alex chuckled wryly.

"Oh, I am sure it is not. Things like that don't happen to me." She said as she pushed the thing with one finger with a scrunched nose. "I used your damn pills."

"Maybe you forgot?"

"I don't remember ever forgetting it."

"Hmm." Stella mused. "What happened happened. So what are we going to do now?" Stella asked as she blinked harder and harder. Alex shook her head as she noticed her best friend's crazy eyes.

"No matter how hard you blink, it is not going to read anything other than positive. So, stop blinking, Stells."

"Do you want to keep it?" Stella hesitated for a bit as she asked it.

Alex felt a strange twitch in her stomach. The answer didn't come instinctively, didn't come in a snap. And it made her guilty.

Do I want this baby?

If I don't want it... Then what?

But I could never hurt a baby, could I?

"I don't know. I know I don't want to hurt it, but... I also don't want it to hurt me. I am scared, Stella. So scared. And I feel so selfish, so heartless to think like this. I feel guilty and bothered that I am thinking these things. But... I can't not stop these thoughts popping around inside me and-"

"It is okay, babe, to feel selfish once in a while. You are scared and it is okay to think anything you want to think."

"I just feel guilty to even think about this baby like... Like it is a bomb or something."

"I know. You are afraid because you just had your heart broken and you are carrying that man's baby, the man you are trying to unlove. So it is okay."

"I don't know if-"

"You can *unlove him?*" Stella finished her sentence with a frown.

"Yes. I don't think I will ever stop loving him. Maybe I am not made for *unloving* someone. Him. A part of him will forever be with me, Stella, those little bits of him he had unknowingly given to me and a part of me will always be with him. Even if he didn't love, he had given me everything, Stella. Everything. He had taught me how to stay strong, taught me how selfless he could be for a *friend.* Taught me courage and weakness can coexist. Taught me not every mask is worn in the intention of tricking others. Some are just for protecting yourself.

"He taught me that confidence can't ever interfere with kindness and generosity. He made me realize there is a much, much bigger world for me, if I just dared. He showed me everything my dad hadn't. And that is the sad truth. So I can never stop loving him. Maybe the pain will not be as new, as raw as years go. It will heal and form a scab and the skin will stop being so pink and broken and throbbing. But stop loving him? I don't think so." Alex rubbed her eyes.

And if I am going to see him always, the pain will stay pink and raw and throbbing. The skin will keep peeling off and there will be no time for the scabs to form.

Oh God! What am I going to do?!

Stella sighed as she bit her lips, a thoughtful look crossing her eyes.

"You don't deserve to live without him."

"Nah, I don't, but he doesn't deserve to be forced into living with me. So I have accepted this. I know the consequences and yet, I was stupid enough to fall for him... "

Stella shook her head. "Hmm... What you feel for Logan, I have never felt this. Sometimes, I feel it was mistake when I married Adam. I was too young and he was-he was rich and I hadn't been rich in so long and -"

"You are not a gold-digger, you idiot. So what if you don't love like I love Logan? I am sure you love Adam in your own way. It is just a different kind of love. That doesn't mean it is any less."

"Different kind of love. Maybe you will learn to love someone else differently, as well." Stella said thoughtfully.

"Yes. Maybe I can learn to love someone else, too, but yes, I also know it will never be the same way I loved Logan."

"But it would not mean it would be any less." Stella said with a stubborn look in her eyes. "First love is always special, Alex and he is your first love. He was your first everything. So? Who knows. Maybe one day you will find your person. And you will feel like... *Whoa there*!"

"Yeah." Alex nodded, just to console her friend, but she was sure that wouldn't happen to her. She wasn't that lucky.

Of course, she believed that she would stop hurting so much whenever she thought of Logan. She believed that day would come on day.

As Stella said, she might come to love another man, a different kind of love, but it would never match anything to how she felt for Logan.

Her *whoa there!* was and would always be Logan. And it was such a pity it was that way, too.

Because her *whoa there!* was not ready to be anyone's love.

A friend maybe. A best friend any one could have asked for. But nothing more than that.

"Are we calling Logan?" Stella asked when she saw Alex picking her phone.

"No. Doctor first. Baby daddy second." Alex said.

"So?"

"We will be fine, Stells. I have you and many good friends who care for me and the baby will have all of you plus its daddy. I am sure Logan will want to be a part in the baby's life. So.. We will be fine. Fine." Alex said, assuring herself, mostl,y as she picked up her bag and locked the door.

We will be fine, baby!

***

(Logan)

Eliza didn't know, neither did Emma. Logan had tried to cajole the details out of them, but it looked like they really didn't know about Alex any more than he did.

Emma told him about the time Alex had called her the other day to inform her that she would not be coming to work at her house anymore.

Eliza went as far as accusing him of being the reason for why Alex hadn't called her. Logan nodded to her without any response and walked away. If she was angry, so be it. He didn't have time to listen to her barbs right now.

He needed to find his wife. His best friend. And his love.

It was strange, she could be all that, but it was also easily plausible that she was all that. She was amazing. Refreshing. Beautiful. So... There was no wonder she had become an integral part of his life.

He did call Alexandra, but she didn't attend the call when he called her. It rang and rang until it went to voicemail.

He had already wasted so much of their days by being a stubborn fool and he didn't want to waste more time without saying to her that he indeed loved her. That he was a fool not to accept or admit it. *I am in love with you.*

But he couldn't find her no matter how hard he tried. It was like she had vanished or something.

It was almost impossible to not do anything, to wait for her to either pick up the phone or someone else to tell him where she was.

Neither didn't happen for 24 hours and 27 minutes and then as if Alex could hear him screaming inside, she called.

He was surprised that she had called. She hadn't called him in so long.

He placed the book over the sticky notes --*her sticky notes*-- and the letter he had been reading since morning, as he picked up the phone.

If only I can kiss her through the phone. He thought as he cleared his throat.

"Hey." He said. He wanted to say more, he wanted to hug her and kiss her until he could memorize every pane of her body, remember every scent. Until she was printed on his skin, until he was suffused with her scent.

God. I miss you. I am a fool, fool to have wasted all those precious days.

"I need to talk to you." She said in a voice that was so alien to him.

"You can come here." He almost wanted to say '*our home*' but as Barbara had told, he needed to see her face when he told her he loved her. He wanted to see the shock and surprise and he hoped she wouldn't be too angry to feel the happiness.

Because, he wanted to see her happiness, as well. Something in her transformed whenever she became happy. It was like a light was switched on inside her and it reflected in her beautiful green eyes. Those light, in turn, would light up his world. Always.

And he was an idiot to not have realized why everything about her made him happy, made him a better man. He had been so blind, and it was strange that Barbara was the one to open his eyes, but he didn't want to look *that gift horse* in the mouth.

He was just happy that he could finally see. Finally believe. Finally stop being so scared to do and say what he had always felt, deep, deep down.

"No. I am staying at LeBauss. I will meet you in the outdoor dining area. Okay? Evening. At five."

He wanted to say *now*, but he decided he didn't want to be overbearing. What is another 5 hour of waiting.

She had waited for him half an year to notice her, to notice that she loved him and he had willfully stayed blind.

As she had accused him once, he had known, deep in his gut, and yet he pretended otherwise. And he would wait for her, *maybe not all his lifetime,* because he wanted to be with her, NOW. He didn't want to waste another second. But yes, he could wait until she could forgive him, until she could accept him and his stupid head.

"Okay. I'll meet you there, Lex. Bye. " He said as he mournfully looked at his watch.

He heard her took in a deep breath and realized he had called her Lex.

She stayed silent for a minute before she hung up.

Five hours of looking at the boring files Tom had sent home for him to look at, Logan slammed them closed when the clock showed it was 4.

He stood up, walked to the room and picked out his red shirt with a smile as memories of the last time he wore it filled his eyes with overflowing happiness. If anyone could have seen him then, if Alex could have seen him then --utterly open and vulnerable and filled with the glow of happiness-- they would have seen how Logan loved.

Even in his own broken way, how he had loved.

He pulled on the shirt as he thought of that day.

"*You look* relaxed when you are wearing this shirt. Like you would love to kick a ball or tumble down the grass field. You don't look so intimidating any more."

"You have never been intimidated by me." He said as he folded his sleeves.

"True." She agreed. "And also, you look delicious. I wanna take a bite."

"You can."

"I know. But we are late for lunch at your parents' house and I -"

"They won't mind." He had coerced her into being naughty with him and she had given up finally with a chuckle.

"You are such a troublemaker, Logan. Who would have thought! Behind the stoic mask of maturity and single mindedness, lived a bad boy."

"Girls love bad boys." He had winked at her with a smirk and she had nodded.

"They do." She had said before she removed the shirt from him, and they had missed the lunch, totally.

He hadn't known then, that she was talking about herself.

He shook his head with a small nostalgic smile as he combed his hair with his fingers and then messed it up and then combed again and he felt like a teenage guy getting ready for the first date.

His stomach was twitchy and he was as nervous as a kid getting his first kiss behind a closed door as he walked inside the open dining yard.

There were only few people milling about and he searched for her, and found her sitting behind a tall potted plant, her fingers folded together, a faraway look in her beautiful eyes. She looked like a sad, dejected statue.

"Alex." He said as she looked up, a thoughtful frown on her pale lips.

He wondered whether she was alright. She looked thin, pale. She had dark shadows under her eyes and it made him guilty.

She waved a hand and he sat down.

"How are you? You look so thin." He asked with a concerned frown.

"Good. Good." She said almost absently. "You?"

"Okay." He said as he filled his hungry eyes with her. God. How long had he had wanted to look at her like this. With no guilt or frustration. With simply happiness and relief. "Alex, I have to- I mean, I really-"

For God's sake, get a grip, man! I love you. Is that so hard to say, you idiot? It was that voice. But strangely enough he didn't hate what it just said. It had always been the *truest* part of himself. Even if he never chose to believe his *own damn voice.*

"Wait. Don't say anything now. I need to say it or I am afraid I will never say it to you. I really don't want to, but I am not that kind of woman. So... Don't interrupt me. Don't say anything until I have- I mean, just listen." She took in a deep breath. Her eyes looked nervous as they flitted away from him.

He looked at her tired face and just nodded. He could give her a lifetime. If she was just there, it was okay. And he would listen to anything she had to say. He could.

"I- I didn't... I am not sure how to explain this, but, please. Don't, don't for a moment think that this is some kind of plot, or anything like that. I didn't really- this is not a trap. I don't want you, anymore."

He flinched when she said that. It was like a physical blow and he could imagine how it would have been for her when he said '*I am sorry*' after she had handed her heart to him in a fragile glass platter. He had let it slip from his grasp, let it break and hurt her in the process.

He was such an ass. And he hated himself for all of those moments where he had chosen to hurt her by refusing to love her.

"I am- I don't. God, please, I-" He started only to be cut off by her. He stopped as he gave her a go on.

"No, don't interrupt." She shook her head with a tired sigh. "I just- I have practiced this a hundred times and still I don't know how to say it. I just want to say, Logan, I won't get mad with whatever you decide. It is your choice. You can decide not to-" She stopped and pressed a finger against her right eye. "I didn't expect this, Logan, so just remember I am just as shocked. Remember that this is not me manipulating you into anything you didn't want."

Her face was stuck in a painful wince as she said that and he wanted to go to her and hug her to him and say sorry, over and over again until she didn't hurt anymore.

"What? What happened? You okay?" He asked as he looked at her bent back and placid face.

What the hell was she talking about? He was getting more and more worried as she talked and he couldn't still get a sense of what it was.

Is she dying or something? Fate wouldn't be that cruel, right?

No, she can't die on me.

His stomach was doing weird flips with each of her mysterious words. It was like a puzzle and he had no patience to solve it now. He only wanted to kiss her, to hug her.

"Just- no one will criticize you if you want to opt out. Maybe it will be-"

"Alex, I can't, for the life of me, still get what you are coming to say, and my mind is running a million miles per second and I keep imagining all these bad *bad* scenarios. So please, stop these prologues and just tell me." He said, finally losing it.

"I am pregnant, Logan." She said in a single breath, but he could hear it all right.

It was like a bomb. Dropped directly above him. He blinked and pressed a hand to his heart.

Can I be a good father to this baby?

He couldn't believe it. God. He wanted to stop his heart from beating so loud from exhilaration.

I will be an amazing dad. I can be. I can be as good a dad as mine.

"Oh baby, I am so-"

It felt like she was a million years away from him. Her eyes were vacant as her lips muttered words he didn't want to hear.

"If you want no part in this baby's life, I will be more than glad to take care of the baby and you can-" She kept talking.

"You want me to walk away? From this? From a baby? My baby? *Our baby*? Do you really want that, Alex?" He asked with a pang in his heart. "Do you really think I am that much of a bastard?"

She didn't want him in *her life* anymore. It looked like she was praying that he wouldn't want to be in the baby's life anymore than he was in hers, as well.

But how could he walk away when he wanted to see how this baby would look like, the moment she told him about the baby. How his heart immediately expanded to hold in another little soul, who was the miracle of life, her and his life. Their life.

Eyes green like its mom, little tuft of black hair like him--and she or he wouldn't have blonde hair-- holding his hand, learning to walk.

God. How he wanted to be there for all of that. And more.

He wanted to threaten her boyfriend if she was a girl, walk her down her aisle after they finally found a perfect guy for her. He wanted to wrestle in the mud, teach him soccer and how to properly treat a girl, if he was a boy.

"I just-"

"You just don't want me in your life?" He asked as he leaned back against his chair.

She didn't say anything, but the silence was answer enough for him.

"It is not that, Logan. It is just... I don't want you to feel any obligation to be in this. Again, this isn't your mistake."

"So, how did you get pregnant? All by yourself?" He asked with narrowed eyes. She shook her head, looking miffed.

"I didn't want to fight with you, Logan." She said.

"I know. You don't want to do anything with me. But you are going to have to deal with me. I am gonna be there for the baby, Alex and- I am gonna be there for you." He said as he grabbed her hand in his. She jerked up and he watched as her eyes widened in what looked like recognition. And denial.

"No." She whispered as she pulled her hand away. "You can be there for the baby, but no, not for me, Logan."

"Why not?" He grabbed her hand again and she pulled away, again. "Alex, I-"

Shit. Why can't I say it?

"Because I don't want your misplaced obligations and sense of duty. I don't want you to be there for me because you feel like you have to. I am not weak, not anymore and I don't need you to look after me. So..." She said with a look of indignation.

"No, I am not going to be there for you because I have to. I am going to be there, because I need to, I want to. Because I love you, Lex, I love you, so damn much." He said as he looked into her eyes.

She shook her head as her green eyes flashed with thunder. They clashed against him and his breath hissed out.

Oh, shit, it is too late! She is not happy at all.

She stood up from the chair, calmly, coolly.

"Shut up, Logan. Just shut the fuck up!"

"You bewilder me. Befuddle me. Astonish me. Keep me on my toes, always guessing and wondering. And maybe that is why I love you so much. Because you are still a puzzle to me even after I have solved you." - Logan

Chapter 41

40. Ex husbands, sex services and slumber parties

(Alexandra)

Her body was burning in anger. She couldn't focus on anything, except on his words. On how wrong they sounded, even if those were the words she had wanted to hear for so long.

It kept ringing inside her and the words she had always wanted to hear... They felt like burning acid at the base of her heart.

She couldn't believe how every ideals he ever had, how everything he had always rejected changed with just one word from her.

Pregnant.

Is that such a magical word that it can elicit confession from him, when her tears and heart break couldn't?

"Lex, sit down. Don't make a scene." He said as he stared up at her, his gray eyes full of warning.

As if he has any right to warn me! She thought with a belligerent frown.

"Oh, don't worry. I won't make a scene and spoil your so called reputation." She bared her teeth at him, feeling the need to attack him... She was so hungry for some blood. His blood.

He chuckled at her with an amused smile.

He chuckled. *The pig!*

Her anger was so magnificent that she wondered if she would explode along with him if she stood there any longer.

How dare he do this to her!!!

"I don't damn care about my reputation. If you want to make a scene, let's make one together." He said as he stood up from the chair. When he waved to the waiter, Alex grunted at him.

"I can pay for my cake. You don't have to pay for me." She said as she pulled her hand away from his grasp.

His touch still stirred feelings she would rather not feel.

This wasn't becoming.

Ah... I know. But still...

I am an idiot. I know!

"Oh, it is alright. And Alex, stop eating so much sugar. It is not good for the baby." He said in that know-it-all tone she so hated and Alex wanted to dump the remaining cake over his stupidly sexy face.

But she wasn't that impulsive.

"Now, you are a baby whisperer? Eh? Very well. You know what else is not good for the baby? You. Getting. Me. Angry." She said as she turned back from him and started towards her room.

She didn't have patience to deal with his arrogance today.

She had puked the whole morning and ate the whole noon. It was one rigorous cycle of eating and vomiting.

Somedays she even puked for the whole damn day, and wished she could live in the bathroom.

Whoever named it as morning sickness was so damn wrong.

And also, she had terrible mood swings that drained her. It felt like an emotional rollercoaster that sometimes even she couldn't understand herself.

Must be this baby is taking after its daddy.

The cake felt uncomfortable in her stomach as she walked. She would rather not puke in front of him. She would rather if he just went away.

But it looked like he wasn't going away.

After a while she turned back with a scowl as she looked at Logan.

"Don't follow me, you creep." She spat at him.

Two waiters walking around with a tray stopped and looked at them, worry in their eyes. Alex felt strangely evil as she looked at Logan.

I love you. Hah! He loves me?!

Yeah, when did that happen? Under the Peepal tree *(Bodhi tree)* where Buddha had attained his enlightenment?

Where had been this tree hidden before when she needed it? When her heart was tearing apart and aching so much?!

What a big, fat liar.

Or maybe the baby is his Bodhi tree.

So he loved the baby even without seeing it and suddenly he wanted to be there for it and for her by default? She wasn't going to be anybody's second choice.

She didn't know why it made her strangely jealous and angry and it was stupid to be envious of an unborn baby. Her baby.

But getting angry with Logan, it wasn't stupid. It was sensible. It was the right thing to do, or she might give in to the temptation of seeing him in that wicked red shirt.

She had always loved him in that damn shirt. It showed his toned arms and his beautiful body and he looked sinful and deliciously tempting.

She could remember one lazy Sunday noon they had made love when he was wearing this shirt in vivid details and it made her pulse race.

This red shirt made him look like red velvet cake draped in her favorite cream cheese. Sinfully mouthwatering and forbidden. Full of calories. Bad for your health. Bad, bad.

And she wanted... Still, she wanted.

Even when she was angry... She yearned.

She almost knew what he was talking about that evening in Fabien's gala when he kissed her after accusing her of betrayal.

Lust. Must be this!!!

"Please don't follow me, Logan." She sighed. "I will call the security. This is a public place. You can't-" She said with fake panic in her voice and the man who was in the corridor sstopped walking and turned back to look at them.

"Stop." Logan muttered under his breath. His eyes flashed and her heart thundered.

Alex blinked innocently up at him.

God. He looks hot. She thought and dissed herself for thinking like that. She couldn't - she just couldn't.

It is the hormones. And I am feeling strangely horny.

Really? What about all those time before the baby? It is not just hormones. It is Logan. The irritating voice said and she shook her head. She didn't want to listen to its words of wisdom. Or derision. Gah!

You shut up.

"Madam, is this man giving you any problems?" He asked.

She looked at the man and realized he was one of the receptionists, Evan.

"I mean-" Alex started.

"Sir, if you don't leave, I will call the manager." Evan said to Logan and Logan gave him a cool smile which was not anywhere closer to a smile.

"Call him. Whatever." Logan said with a smirk and a wave of his hands.

"Jerk." Alex whispered.

"You are the one who is being a jerk here." He whispered back.

Evan, the receptionist, didn't hesitate.

Must be a dutiful guy.

He called the manager and Alex wanted to stop him, but she was feeling strangely vindictive today and she needed to vent it somehow, or she would just wrap her palms around Logan's neck and squeeze. Or bite right there.

She licked her lips.

She wasn't a violent woman, never had been, until Logan.

She hadn't been many things until Logan.

Stupid Logan. And his stupid face.

"Mr. Forte, hello, hello. Welcome to our humble place. So what are you doing here? You should have called me the moment you were here." He said to Logan and turned back to Evan. "Evan, where is the man who is harassing this young lady?" The manager asked with a grin in Logan's direction.

"It is this man." Evan pointed to Logan with a frown. He didn't look impressed, not at all.

"Nonsense. Mr. Forte is a respectable man, Evan. His company built this hotel, and he is the one who drew the plans." The man said with an apologetic look in Logan's direction. "Sorry Mr. Forte, he is new here and he wouldn't do these mistakes-"

"So what if he is rich? Most rich men are creeps these days. And I didn't do any mistake. You can ask Ms. Steele." Evan pointed to Alex with a small worried frown. Alex felt bad for the guy. He was a good guy.

"It is okay, Evan, you can go." She said and turned to the manager. "And he is not wrong. He is right. We are fighting and he wanted to help. So..." Alex shrugged.

"Husband and wife fight." Logan said as he wrapped an arm around her, like she was his property ornsomething and she pressed her shoe against his. He winced before moving away.

"Sorry." Evan said with a regretful look on his face and Alex smiled.

"No, you needn't be. Thank you." Alex said as she turned and walked away and she could feel Logan following her.

She sighed.

So it is going to be like this. Okay.

She opened the door to her room and she didn't bother closing it. He was going to come in no matter what and she had to deal with it. He knew how to come in through closed doors.

After all, her heart was closed once before, too.

"Can you stop being childish now and listen to me, Lex?" He sounded tired.

She sat down and crossed her legs and looked up at him with a nod. "Go on. Enlighten me."

"I said I love you."

"So you said."

"And you-"

"And I said shut up. I know."

"Alex, I know I was wrong, but being stubborn is only going to hurt us both again and again. I have lost a lot because I was angry and afraid, afraid to love you, afraid to accept I loved you. You can't do that now, not after all these times I have wasted. I-"

"Okay then, you can love me. I am not angry and I can't ask you not to love me. That is your right. But I don't love you anymore, so..."

"Bullshit." He spat as he grabbed her hands and pulled her to him.

"Your ego is only a million times bigger than your arrogance. I have never seen a most infuriating man in my life. I have--"

"Shut up, Alex." He pressed a finger against her lips and she stopped. Her heart did, too.

She stared into his familiar eyes and her body throbbed with want and need.

It was like an ache deep in her bones and her core. Ans only he could satiate her. Fill her.

Okay. I need him. I am so- so going to hell!

No, don't do th- this..

She was as shocked as he when she pulled away from his finger, grabbed him by the front of his shirt and kissed him.

He tasted like *red velvet* too. And she wasn't full yet. She was still famished, still starving.

So she kissed and kissed and kissed.

(Logan)

This was unexpected, but still so nice. She looked like she was possessed by some debauched devil. And he liked it.

God. I missed it.

Her hands were all over him and her lips were taunting and teasing and biting and he lost the sense of everything.

Except her.

It was always like this.

She looked flushed when she finally pulled away from him. His shirt was crinkled and her bodice was pulled down, exposing creamy skin to his starving eyes.

He licked his lips.

She stepped closer to him and ran her fingers down his thighs, tauntingly slow.

His breathing hitched and she gave a moan. A low, breathy moan that wrapped around his nerves, sending blood spiralling downwards.

His head was spinning. His eyes were blurry. His breathing was hard and fast.

It was so long, so long since he was with her and his body was starving for her. A touch. Just a touch.

And she was bestowing him with everything he could have asked for.

Touch. Kiss. And more. And more.

Everything was too much for him. He felt like he was drowning inside her, but he would gladly drown. He wasn't complaining about that, not anymore.

He wrapped his arms around her back and pulled her closer until her body touched his. It was sweet relief.

They both gasped together and she opened her lips, sucked in a deep breath. His heart walloped.

He watched mesmerized as her pink lips formed into an O before her teeth bit her side lips. She looked at him, her eyes clouded with desire. It was a mating call. And he desperately needed to see that. He bent down and kissed her. And she parted her lips when he bit it gently, seeking permission. She gave in, and he surrendered.

Her tongue tangled with his and he could breathe her, every bit of her. Feel her.

And it was such a nice place to be that he never wanted to move away from her lips. Or her.

I love you.

She pulled away and pressed her lips against his neck in a warm kiss. It made his body tingle.

It was sweet, hot and his heart overflowed with emotions. Emotions he had never thought he would feel for a woman.

Love. Friendship. Adoration. Respect.

Yes. She was his best friend. And she was also the woman he was in love with. He could finally understand how love and friendship aren't miles away.

There was only one Alex for him, and he had been an idiot to have never realized it. To have not seen it.

He had almost lost her.

And he couldn't imagine losing her. To never having her in his life.

She pushed him down to the bed and sat on top of him and he moaned. She dragged her fingers on his jeans clad legs before she popped open his button.

He gasped when she opened his zipper and she gave him a small smile, one full of wickedness.

And then she was taking him inside her, all the way, and they belonged.

Like that. Just like that.

Like a puzzle fitting right in. Like a jar and a lid made exactly for that.

It was love making. Not sex... Not just sex. It was much more.

It was lust, but love, as well. So much love.

He moved along with her, filling himself with the essence of her. More, more. And more.

She bit her lips and threw her head back with a moan as he slid inside her.

He sucked her neck and she arched back with his name a slight whisper on her swollen lips. Her brown hair fell messily down her back and her head was angled upward, showing pale throat. Her eyes were closed, but he could see how her green eyes would look-- a shade darker-- and the gold flecks would gleam.

She looked like a witch in the twilight hour. A sexy witch. And he was bewitched.

There was no escaping her. No running.

He had lost. Yet it was his success.

"Oh Logan." She moaned and he pressed against her and she gasped in pleasure as he pressed inside her.

He shattered along with her.

It was beautiful. They burned. Like the last of metorites. Together.

His heart was content. "I love you, baby. You are-"

"Oh, shut up." She wrinkled her nose as she pulled away from him and stepped down. She pulled her skirt down and top up, covering everything he tried to uncover.

He groaned.

"What?" He asked stunned as he lied there, pants half down, shirt half opened, feeling totally exposed and she shrugged casually.

Like this was something very casual. Usual.

"You can go now." She said, looking cool as cucumber as she combed her fingers through her hair and Logan, the one who was always cool, always so calm wasn't cool or calm anymore.

And he was still trying to pull his damn pants up, which was adamant about not moving up and it was not a very appealing situation. Or a flattering one.

He looked like a clown, trying to wriggle himself back inside his damn pant.

And she was standing there like a queen, looking down at her measly servant, ordering him about.

Sex slave? His own mind was an abomination.

He finally zipped his pants and stood up from the bed. Now he could finally see her eye to eye.

"You did all that to me and now you are asking me to go?" He asked as he stared at her. His body ached, still. He wanted more of her.

Evil woman!!!

"Yeah. Sorry."

"Sorry? What the hell?"

"Sorry. I mean, I was horny, you know. It is the hormones, and it feels like I am always horny these days. And you were available and I am still not tired of having sex with you. So why not have some fun?" She said as she stared at him and licked her lips, like he was one of her favorite chocolate cakes that she would love to swallow.

It made him horny, as well, but still...

"What are you coming to say, Alexandra Annie Forte?" He couldn't believe his ears or his eyes.

This was not his Alex. She was never this brave or brash. This woman was possessed.

And you like her, still...

Okay, I like her. It is hot as hell.

"Steele." She corrected him. "I am saying... Really. I never wanted to see you again, but fate has other plans, that *stupid* thing and since we will be seeing each other, anyways, why not merge the business with some pleasure?" She asked and he couldn't help but gape at this strange woman in front of him.

He confessed and here she was...

"You are saying that you will be using my body whenever you please and there will be nothing else between us. Is that right?" He asked with a frown.

"Yeah. Exactly. You have always been a sharp man. You will be my escort service for the time being, until I get bored anyways. This time, I can even promise you, there will be no feelings. Not on my part. It will be purely no string attached-"

"And yet the baby is the biggest string between us." He grunted.

"So you are saying no?" She shrugged. "It is fine. I will find someone else."

"You won't be finding anyone else." He growled as he took a step towards her and she gave him a dainty shrug.

There was something wrong with her head!!! Or she was getting her revenge.

"Says who?" She said in this strangely singsong voice that grated against his nerves. He gritted his teeth as he stared at the infuriating woman in front of him.

Of course. He never believed that she would accept his confession just like that. He had imagined a hundred scenarios and nothing came close to the reality.

There was a possible scene where she would be angry and yell at him, like she first did. Or the one where she would simply reject him. Or the one where she would be hugging him in excitement.

But this... Asking him to be her sex service?This was beyond his imagination. This was bewildering and confusing and he couldn't understand this. No matter how hard he tried to gather his wits and gauze the situation, he simply couldn't.

His brain couldn't solve this.

This woman was one of a kind.

She bewildered him. Befuddled him. Kept him on his toes, always guessing and wondering and he loved her so damn much. And it was all so beautiful and amazing except when it wasn't, so much.

He could have promised anyone that he knew everything that was to know about her, and yet, he would never know her.

And he loved her, still, because she was amazing.

"Me!" He said with an exasperated sigh. "Me."

"And I care why?" She asked as she opened the door for him with a smile. "That is the way out." She pointed the door to him. "Tata, Logan." She said before she disappeared inside and he stood

there, his eyes wide with shock as he stared at the place where she previously stood and the opened door in front of him.

"Aren't you going yet?" He jerked up to see a woman walking inside the room.

"Who are you?" He wrinkled his brows.

"Stella, Dumbo. And from the state you are in, you are Logan." She said. "I would shake your hand, but then I am afraid I would break it. So... Bye." She said as she threw the bag in her hand in the bed before her eyes widened.

"So that happened." She muttered to herself before she sat in the ottoman at the side and crossed her legs and then stared up at him.

"He is still here?"

"Yes, he looked electrocuted. What did you do to him, Alex?"

"Nothing new. So, did you buy me peanut butter and pineapple." Alex asked as she grabbed the bag from the bed.

"Yup. Please don't put the peanut butter over pineapple."

"So, is he going to stand there all day?"

"I don't know. The man looked shocked to his bones. So? You shouldn't have done that." Stella's voice was reprimanding. "You know you shouldn't have."

"What? I was horny and he is still sexy, even though he is a moron with mozzarella as brain. I mean, you should see him when he is angry. Smoking hot. The one the girls in the novels talk about, what is that..."

"Eye candy." Stella said before she scanned him up and down. "I don't know. He kinda look like he would break with a touch or something."

"He isn't buff like Adam, but he is still sexy in his own way."

"Nerdy way?"

"Yeah, but still... It is kinda distracting. And it is the baby."

"You are blaming the baby now?"

"Yup. And I need to relieve all this pressure. I can't just pick a man out of nowhere and jump in bed with him. I am not like that, you know. Better be the devil you know than the angel you don't... All that. So this one has to -"

"You can use him as your man toy."

"I tried. He was very offended. I don't know why he is acting like he is some saint or-"

"I am still here, you know. I can hear you." Logan grunted, finally, finally when he could form a word. He was beyond words by this point.

"Why are you still here?" The two infuriating women said together as they looked up at him. "Get out."

"I am not going anywhere until you get some sense back."

"Not happening anytime soon."

"You can stay, though. We are having a slumber party."

Logan blinked at Stella.

He could see why Alex and Stella were best friends. They were both as weird as they came.

"And I am eating pineapple sandwich with peanut butter." Alex said. "Don't invite him."

"Eww." Stella said. "But he looks like a kicked puppy dog or something, babe. So Logan, you like pink or navy blue?" Stella asked him with curiosity.

"He likes blue." Alex said.

"I can paint your nails and-" Stella stood up. "I will bring the nail polish."

Logan blinked again.

"I will see you later."

He left.

He could see the two woman laughing as he closed the door behind him.

Stupid Alex and her equally stupid best friend.

He took his phone out.

"Barbara. Hi. I need a small favor."

I learn something new about you every time. And it is beautiful. How you can still be new and exciting even after you become my old, safe place. - Logan. ~~~

Chapter 42

41. Love, loving lies and appointment orders

(Alexandra)

Alexandra and Stella looked at each other in the deafening silence that was followed by the loud bang after Logan had closed the door with force and walked away. It was tensed, so tensed Alex could feel it in the tightening of her chest.

Stella shook her head with a pensive look on her face and Alex knew she was going to get lectured. *Dammit.*

Stella didn't lecture, not often. Stella was all about chill pills, but... This didn't feel like chill pill kinda time.

It is all your fault, hormones.

Yeah yeah, keep telling that. But we all know, that it is YOUR fault. The voice retorted and yes, it was her fault.

With Logan, she was nothing but a walking, talking disaster and he brought the worse in her and the best.

Self-restraint was not an option when it came to Logan and yes, she had tried to chalk it off with absurd ideas, but, the reality was that she still... She still needed him. Wanted him.

And then there were hormones, as well.

"Is he gone?" Stella asked as she sat down with a frown on her lips.

"Yeah, I think so. You scared him away with all your talk of slumber party and nail polish colors." Alexandra said as she lied down with a tired sigh. She felt already beaten. All the euphoria of being with Logan had evaporated to leave an empty feeling lingering around her. This morbid cloud of darkness hanged over her head and she couldn't help but feel tired all over. "What was that?"

"I didn't know how to make him leave." Stella shrugged.

"Looked like it worked." Alex said as she stared at the ceiling above her with a hollowed heart.

She felt like the black cloud over her head was constantly growing in size, shadowing her with its miserable existence and she knew it bad, but she couldn't do nothing about it.

"And what did you do here? I left you for an hour and I come back to this-this mess. Do you know what you are doing to yourself, Alex?" Stella said with a scowl. "Do you? You have always been the sensible one."

She was. She was the one who always took sensible, rational decisions. But where the hell was her rational side when she most needed it?

"But..." Alex whispered as she looked at Stella. "Okay, okay, I know. It was so wrong." She said as she curled in the bed with a heavy blanket over her. "I don't know, but I wanted. Even knowing it was wrong. I am insane. This is all crazy and I don't want to be crazy. I am not reckless. I have never been and..."

"And still..." Stella shook her head. "You know this is recklessly stupid. I am not judging you, babe, but I am- I am concerned. You are never reckless. I mean, you were not. But then you married a man you barely knew, fell in love with him, got your heart broken for the very first time and it was all too much and now you are-"

"I know, I know. I don't understand myself. I don't know what came over me." She said before she frowned. "And he said... *I love you."*

"He did?" Stella jumped up from her chair, a hand pressed against her mouth. "Then that changes everything."

"Does it?" Alex asked with doubt in her voice.

"So why aren't you with him right now? And why are you in this bed with that morose look on your face?"

"I don't believe him. It is because of the baby, you know. He did not love me a day ago. And now suddenly-"

"It is you, stupid. It is not the baby." Stella shrugged. "I told you before. You are very loveable and maybe Logan is not the dumb fool I believed him to be."

"No, no, don't fall for-"

"Alexandra, you need to stop being so stubborn. You love him and he loves you and what else do you want? This here is the answer for the problems."

"I wanted him to love me before the baby. I wanted to be his first choice. I wanted- I wanted so many things and I got none of them." She moaned as she closed her eyes. "I don't want him to want me for any other reason other than wanting me. Is that- is that pitiful?"

"It is not. But woman, are you listening to yourself?!" Stella games at her with a look that would have made Alex laughed, if it hadn't been the situation.

"I know. I feel sick and twisted. Like... Who in their right mind would be jealous of their own baby?"

"Apparently you. So what is our next plan?"

"I don't know anything."

"Maybe you should give him a chance, Alex. He loves you, and I know you can feel it deep inside, even when-"

"I thought so, too, you know. That was why I went against all my instinct and stayed. Stayed. Pretended. Manipulated. Fought for him, Us. And look where it ended."

"Maybe it has not ended?!"

"I don't know anything anymore, Stella. Let us live one day at a time. I am too tired of living for the future."

"Okay, baby. You go to sleep. We have another Doctor's appointment in the morning."

"Yeah. Doctor Mitra said she would be taking the scans and all. I want to see how this tiny little thing inside me looks like."

"Like a pea? Button? Beans?"

"Oh, come on. That is all you can come up with?"

"I don't know-how just..."

Alex yawned. "I really need to go to sleep. Now. Good night." She pulled a pillow to her side and closed her eyes with a sigh.

Today was like a rollercoaster ride, with so many warped emotions and she just wanted to put this day to an end.

She just wanted to have one night of peaceful sleep, without overthinking anything.

As she fell asleep, she could hear Stella's voice in the background, saying something that sounded like, 'you need to step up. And be a-'

Alex fell asleep.

~~~

(Logan)

Logan sat in front of his family, a small frown on his lips. His mom was staring at him like he had two heads and four horns.

"What the hell did you do and why didn't I know about it?" Beth turned to look at Eliza and Emma and they both gulped.

It would have been funny if he wasn't also doing the same.

"I- mom, that is-"

"And then after putting her through all this, you said you love her after she told you about the baby?"
~~~

"I can't wait to see the baby-" His dad started and stopped when his mom gave him a glare. "I am shutting up, now."

"I don't know what is the big deal is. Everyone is saying how I shouldn't have told her that after she told me about the baby. Why not? Actually I went there to meet her in the first place to confess. So?" Logan grunted with a tired scowl.

It had been only a day, but he was already frustrated that he couldn't be with Alex and the baby.

He wanted to see the first picture of his baby, but Stella had warned him not to try anything funny. So he was staying put, for now and getting reprimanded for all this.

"The big deal here is... Now she is thinking you are lying to her."

"Why would I do that?"

"Because of the baby, you moron." Eliza shook her head.

"Oh my God. Why didn't I think of that?" Logan groaned with disbelief. He couldn't believe himself, believe how much of a moron he had been.

But then... He really went there to tell her about his feelings and he didn't know about the baby then.

Was this fate and its stupid plans again?

Of course, he loved *his Fate,* when it was all so accommodating. After all, it was the only reason he had met Alex.

Without Stacy's rejection, without his need to prove himself and protect his reputation, without Alex's father's partners and their schemes, without Alex's desperation, they wouldn't have come across each other.

So...

"Because you are dumb when it comes to matter of the heart. Your head is not always right." Emma scowled.

"Ok, if this is over, this marathon of who can call Logan more bad names, can I go?"

"Where?"

"I am meeting Barbara." He said without thinking and his dad gasped.

"Barbara?"

Beth jerked back and her eyes widened. She looked at Dave and then back at Logan.

"You two know..." She whispered to Emma and Eliza and they nodded.

"Emma met her and then-"

Beth nodded. "It is fine. She is your mother."

She looked vulnerable and suddenly Logan felt like she had aged. Her eyes were blank as she gave him a vacuous smile.

"Mom-"

"Please. Don't worry. I am not insecure enough to forbid you all from seeing your mom. That is-"

"You are our mom." Eliza said in a forceful voice. "You are."

"Can I talk to you alone, mom?" Logan stood up.

"It is alright, Logan. I mean-"

"Oh, come on, mom." He grabbed her hand gently and pulled her up from the couch.

"So... You met my sister? And you didn't tell me." Beth said as Logan followed her inside the kitchen.

"It is not like I wanted to hide it purposefully, but-"

"I understand."

"No, mom. You understand nothing. I might be a moron most of the times, but I know that look in your eyes and I am not going to be the reason you feel sad."

"I am not sad. I am just- why didn't you tell me, Logan?"

"Because I didn't want to talk about her. And she- I mean, I hated her."

"Oh baby, you only hated her because you loved her."

"I don't- I didn't tell you because I don't want you to feel-"

"I won't feel threatened, Logan, even if she is back in your life. Our life. I know Dave loves me and Eliza and Emma do, as well. I also know you love me. So... I just want to tell you that you don't have to think about my feelings and you can talk to me about it. You don't have to feel torn by your loyalty to me, and your love for your mother. It is-"

"I didn't talk to you about it, because I felt it wasn't that important to talk, mom. Not because I am torn. And my love for you is much bigger than my loyalty." He said. "And I might not always be vocal about that, but you should know that no matter what, or who, you will always be my mom. I won't forget you gave up everything for us. Even having your own kids. You know mom, when I heard Alex is pregnant, I felt like the tallest man in the universe. I felt big and my heart, my heart is immediately two sizes too large to love the baby. So I know, I know how it would have been for you to sacrifice all that for us-"

"What are you talking about Logan, what sacrifice? I didn't sacrifice anything. I have three babies and so what if I didn't carry you in my womb? I carried you in my heart, from the very first moment you all were born." She wiped her eyes. And Logan smiled. "So don't say stupid things to me, young man."

"I know. I am sorry." He wrapped his arms around his mom and she sniffled.

"But to be honest, I am slightly jealous that-"

"Oh, oh, mom." He said with a smile. "You don't have to be."

"And I want to meet her."

"Oh, she would probably love that." Logan said. "And she is changed. A lot. And she is also married."

"That director?"

"No. This one is a nice man, it seems."

"Good for her."

"Yes. Yes. And good for us." He said as he pulled back. "So, we good?"

"Of course, you big oaf. Now what are you going to do to bring my daughter back home?"

"Whatever I have to."

"Do you have something big up in your sleeves?"

"Umm, I don't know. But she loves me and that hasn't changed. I love her. It might take some time, but we will be alright." ~~~ *(Alexandra)*

Alex stared at the picture of her baby with a smile. As Stella had said, it looked like a weird shaped beans. She chuckled gently as she put the picture down.

She was three months pregnant and she didn't know how she missed missing two periods.

Maybe because she was such an emotional wreck before.

"It is all because of your daddy, baby. I am sorry I missed you for three months." She cooked as she rubbed her belly. "Oh, yeah. It is all his fault. He is such a- okay, I don't want to talk bad things about your daddy to you. I am not going to be that kind of mommy, but still. You dad is one heck of an original piece." She said with a frown and stood up when she heard the bell ring.

"Oh think of the devil and he shall appear." She scowled as she looked at Logan.

"Hello to you too, dear wife."

"I am not your damn wife."

What the hell was he doing here?

"I have something for you." He said as he stepped inside.

"What? I don't want anything from you."

"Not even my sex service?" He asked with a smirk, looking like the devil he was.

She was startled by what he said and he took her momentary distraction to push himself inside her room.

"And..." He opened his suit case with a smile. "Here."

"What is that?"

"My appointment order."

"Are you for real?" She said as she grabbed the bunch of papers from his hand with a scowl. "Unbelievable." She stared at him with frown.

This guy was beyond anything she had ever seen. It was kinda true that her experience with men was very limited, but even then, she knew... He was one hell of a kind.

1: Party A and Party B will engage in sexual activities as long as Party A deem suitable. Party B has no claims whatsoever to null the contract without Party A's consent.

2: party A and B are forbidden to engage in any other extra-curricular affairs in the period they were together. NEVER.

"I can't believe-"

"You are the one who wanted me. So... Take me." He said as he pointed to himself. And she wanted to take him.

But this document was ridiculous. *Omg. Is he for real?*

Logan and his strange affinity to legal contracts!

The man was befuddling.

"Party B should pay party A for all and any of the sexual favors in the way Party A deem suitable." Alex read aloud with a bewildered look on her eyes.

Ok. She was the one who started this game, but he was going too far with this and she didn't know what to do with him.

Don't you? The devil in her asked tauntingly.

Don't go there. The angel warned.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

If she was sane and if her head is intact, she would drag him outside and slam the door in his face. But... Her head hadn't been intact for so long.

"So you are the party A." She muttered with a frown. "Looks like you are having all the say in this weird contract. What do I get?"

"Me." He said smugly.

"What if I said no."

"Oh, you can."

"You look very smug, like-like you know something I don't." She looked up at him and there was that glint in his eyes that made her pause.

What the hell was he up to?

"Do I?" His voice was so self-assured, so satisfied. So was that smirk lifting upwards.

Gah.

"So, in your contract, point 3. What kind of payment?"

"Say... Like dinner dates, lunch dates, doctor dates." He shrugged.

"Oh, you have planned it very carefully." She said sarcastically as she threw the paper down with a frown. "You think you are so smart, Logan?"

"I know I am so smart."

"I hate you."

"No, you don't. But-"

"If this is your twisted way to win me over, let me tell you that it is not working, Logan. I am very sorry."

"Sweetheart, who said I want to win you over?"

She blinked, confused.

She shook her head to clear her thoughts. She felt like someone had just pushed her head inside the water.

"What is this game?"

"Honestly. No game. You asked. I provided."

"Oh, so I have to believe that you don't have any ulterior motives? That you are very altruistic?"

"No. Don't believe that." He said with a smirk. "So? You wanna sign that?" He asked before stepping closer to her.

His eyes were dark as he looked up at her. Stormy. Thundering with passion.

She gulped.

Her body gravitated towards him on its own accord. She looked up at him and he bent down.

His lips grazed against hers. She gasped.

He bit her bottom lip gently.

She opened her mouth and was shocked to found out he wasn't kissing her any more.

"Wha-"

"That is just a sample, madam." He winked. "If you want the full package, you have to sign the contract." He smirked.

"You arrogant, smug-"

"Here, here. Don't teach my baby all those bad words about *her* daddy."

Alex shook her head. "What if it is a his?"

"Anything is fine." He chuckled gently. "I can't wait to see her. Or him."

Alex smiled reflexively. That look in his eyes, it made her heart warm and gooey.

The one of genuine pleasure. Eagerness. Gentleness. Warmth.

She knew he was truly excited for the arrival of this little being.

You are very lucky, baby. To have a dad like him. She thought as she walked to the room and took the picture.

"Here."

"Is this?"

"Your butter bean." She said with a smile.

His eyes were wide with wonder and love. So much love that it stole Alex's breath.

"Oh my god. She is beautiful."

"Or he."

"Or he." Logan said with a bright smile. "But I hope it is a she. I want to teach her to walk. I want to braid her hair. I want to bring her to school. I want to teach her her first dance. I want to sacre off boys who dare look her in her direction." He said with a dreamy smile on his eyes and she nodded.

"You will be an amazing father. I know." She said with a fond smile.

He looked surprised when she said that.

"What?"

"Nothing. Thank you."

"You are welcome."

"Can I have this picture?" He asked as he looked down at it again.

"Sure."

"I- Lex, thanks."

"Please Logan, don't call me that." She said with a wince.

It ached. It literally ached, when he called her Lex, like that. Like.... With so much tenderness and -and Love.

Love.

He was looking at her right now, in the exact same way he had looked at the picture of *their* butter bean.

And she couldn't breathe.

"I love you, Alex. And I know. I hurt you a lot, by being an asshole. But I am not giving up. I will do whatever I can to make you believe in me."

"Logan-"

He smirked. His face changed mischievous as he pointed the documents.

"Take your time, but if you decide to go with it, call me?" He winked at her.

"Really?" She shook her head. "I just don't know what to say."

"Yes?" He smiled.

"Get out, Logan Adrian Forte. Before I drown you in my bathtub."

"Will you be there, naked?" He said with a delicious grin.

"I won't be. Now, get out."

"Ok, ok. But be warned, the offer stands only for two days. If you are gonna decide, decide before that."

"Never."

"Never say never, Alexandra. Don't you know that!!!"

She threw the pillow at him with a groan and it smacked straight on his face.

"Ok baby."

His laughter lingered as he walked away and she pressed her hands to her hot face as she slumped down.

Falling in love, all over again, from the very first day feels just as splendid. - Alexandra. ~~~

Chapter 43

42. Dates, memories and second chances

(Alexandra)

Of course, Alex had ripped the damn documents, but after being coaxed by Stella and Emma and Eliza who came as soon as they heard she was pregnant, Alex has agreed to give him a chance.

She wanted to. She really wanted to. She didn't want her stubbornness to stand in the way of true happiness, if she had a 0.001 probability of reaching that.

She applied lip gloss and looked herself in the mirror, her eyes wrinkles in scrutiny.

Maybe, just maybe, as Stella had pointed out with some pretty strong words added in for extra effects, he wasn't doing it only for the baby.

Oh, yes, she hoped with all her heart that he had feelings for her as he proclaimed and when she wasn't hoping, she was having very naughty dreams about him. Eyes opened and closed.

It was like this pregnancy hormones was making her horny all the damn time and seeing Logan in that sexy shirt didn't help her any when she opened the door for him.

But soon she was speechless when she saw the woman standing next to him.

"You... " Alex said as she looked at Logan with bewildered confusion and he shrugged a shoulder as if it wasn't so out of the ordinary. But it was.

Here he was... With, with Barbara.

"Can I come in?"

"Logan?" Alex said and he gave her a small smile.

"We talked. It is kinda a long story, but she will tell you the short version." He said and Alex nodded.

"Oh, come in." Alex said, feeling guilty all the while. It felt like she was cheating on Beth or something, which was really weird, but what the heck. She was getting weirder and weirder the moment she said yes to Logan and his insane proposal. So...

"Thank you, Alexandra." Barbara said as she walked in. "This is for you." She handed a bag to him and Alex accepted it with hesitation. She didn't want to offend or be rude, but all the while, she kept thinking strange thoughts.

"Coffee, tea, anything?"

"Oh, don't bother. As per Logan's request, I have to tell you this and then scatter." Barbara smiled and Alex saw the look she threw at Logan when Logan wasn't looking. One of yearning. Like she wanted to be in his life, really, really in his life. Alex's heart melted.

Now she understood what being a mother meant, and no matter how Barbara messed up, she deserved a second chance.

Logan did too. You know!

That voice, that stupid voice was back.

Welcome back, Alex thought with a sarcastic frown.

"Nonsense." Alex said as she opened the box Barbara had bought and sighed. "You bought me macaroons?! God, you, you are a mind reader. I have been having this urge to eat them for a day now." Alex said as she inhaled the fresh scent.

"Why didn't you call me?" Logan asked. "I could have bought that for you. For now on, if you ever feel like eating anything, just call."

"What if I want to eat a plate of brownie at three in the morning?" She asked with a smirk and he gave her a look, a look that could break every one of the walls she had built around her heart, against him.

The walls were crumbling already and she couldn't help it.

This was Logan.

And she had not stopped loving him. She couldn't. She was just afraid of showing him how much she still loved.

So...

And you are stupid. It is sad you are doing the same thing he had done. The pesky voice so intelligently pointed out.

I know, but still...

"Ok. Now that we are out of macaroons, I want to start this story. Is that okay?"

"What is this mysterious story you keep talking about?" Alex asked as she sat straight and looked at Barbara.

Barbara gave her a small smile.

"So... The other day I ran into Logan and we talked. You know, about how much of a bitch I was and how I made it impossible for him to open his heart-"

"Uh. It is-"

"Wait. Let me finish this, Alexandra." Barbara said and Alex shut up. She really had by known what to say to that, nothing at all.

"So the short version is, we talked a lot and at the end of it, this guy, this amazing thick-headed guy admitted to me that he had been a fool not to realize how much he loved you and he told me he had been a stupid."

Alex's heart stopped. When did this happen?

"Wh-i mean, when?"

"Way before he confessed to you. In fact, I think he confessed his love for you to me first, I think." Barbara chuckled. "If you really think about it, it is kind of ironic, isn't it?"

Alex did not know what to do or say. Logan kept looking at her and she couldn't look at him.

"And he kept saying how he was worried he might hurt you by loving you, but the silly boy didn't even realize he was hurting you more by not loving you. I am the one to blame for it all, Alexandra-"

"Nope. Not only you."

"I know. Not only her. I was an idiot, Alex, but I wasn't lying. I didn't say it because you are having our baby. I didn't- I mean, I really want to go back and tell that I love you first before you tell me that you are pregnant."

"I think my job here is done. But- Alexandra, I don't know you or much about you, but I think you are an amazing woman just by talking with Logan. So listen him out. And yes, there is no guarantee on love, but then, you know- it is better to use all your chances and choices before giving up."

"I tried- I really-"

"I know baby, and I was a fool to call you manipulative. Fool. I was angry with myself for being so envious of you and Chad and when I heard it was all a plot, how did you think I felt? I felt so damn happy."

"But why-"

"Because I am just that stupid, Lex. Can't you see? It is so wrong to say and I don't want to say it, I don't, but I wish you weren't pregnant right now. I love the baby as much as I love you, but if it comes right down to it-"

"No, don't say it. I know how much you love this baby and I am not cruel enough to make you say it."

He gave her a grateful look. "I do, I do love the baby, because it is ours, Lex. Our love. It is the gift of our love. The precious recollection of all our happy memories and good days."

"I-"

"Please, Alex, I can't play any games, not any more. Games and stupid stunts aside, I really really need you to give me a chance. Let me prove that I really love you."

"Well, Stella said the same. So did Eliza and Emma. Oh, and Daniel. And Beth. Dave didn't say anything, except how you were kinda stupid like him and how he almost lost Beth because he was stupid, as well."

"So?" His eyes twinkles with nervousness and eagerness at the same time as he stared into her eyes.

"I mean, if I say No after all that, I don't know. It might just make me as stupid as you."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

*** It was the day of their first date. Their second first date.

Alex looked at the clock and looked at her best friend with a twitchy stomach.

"Don't tell me he is late for our first date!" She sighed and Stella shook her head.

"Yeah, it is not like this is your first date. You are having a kid together."

"For all the intent and purposes, this is our first date. You know, we are starting over. Clean slate. Shit like that."

"Yeah, yeah, but your slate is already scribbled in one whole side with this baby, so-" Stella stopped when the bell rang and Alex bit her lips. "Don't tell me you are nervous!"

"Ok, I won't tell you."

"Haha, smartass." Stella laughed dryly as she opened the door. "Oh God, too much Cologne. I see that you are trying too hard." Stella rolled her eyes as she moved away and Logan walked in.

He really did look nervous as he handed something in a brown Manila envelope to her. Alex shrunk her nose as she stared at it.

"What? Is this another one of your contracts?"

"Open it."

She opened it and her eyes widened as she looked up at him.

"Logan-"

"Ssh, please, don't say anything. You wanna go?"

"Yes."

As Alex sat down, she pulled out the **menu** Logan had given her in the Manila envelope.

It was the menu of this place they first met and somehow it was more than diamonds and roses combined.

Just looking at that menu made her feel like that this wasn't all hopeless.

"A plate of chicken nuggets, a club sandwich with a side of curly fries, a slice of pumpkin pie, and a cup of extra strong coffee. And Martha, thank you." Logan said and Alex gave him a wide smile.

"You remembered all that." She said as she placed her hand over his.

"I don't know. I can't forget anything when it comes to you." He said as he squeezed her and her heart twisted.

Martha had a sweet smile, which was so unlike hers when she spread the table with food. Their food.

"She looks kinda creepy." Alex said as she looked at the bulky woman who had called her a thief that day when she first met Logan.

"Don't worry, she will bring the right receipt this time, won't you?"

"I am not worrying about that. I can pay my eight bucks, knight in the shining shoes. You know, that was what I thought of you when you first stepped in and defended my honor." Alex said as she bit on the chicken nuggets.

"I like the sound of it."

"And then-"

"You called me a psycho. I remember." Logan chuckled as he took a sip of his coffee.

"Can you blame me?" She asked as she took a slice of pumpkin pie and wrinkled her nose. "Nope. This kid inside doesn't like that. Ugh!"

"I thought you were beautiful and spunky." He said as they paid and walked out.

"Here. Sit here."

"Why?"

"Just sit." He said and she did as he asked. He stood there for a minute before looking down at her with a mischievous smile that made him look so much younger. She could see the hints of the Logan she had very much loved at that moment.

"You look like you need some money and food." He said with a thoughtful look and Alex shook her head with a smile and then bit her lips as she looked up with mock anger.

"You look like you need a slap?" She rolled her eyes at him and he smiled.

"I have loads of it."

"What? Slaps?"

"I have a business proposal."

"Umm? Okay. Go on."

"And it has many finer points, but the main point is... Will you marry me?"

Alexandra chuckled.

"You are one hell of a piece, Logan, one hell of a piece."

She stood up and he smiled at her.

"You are, too."

***

He drove her to the hotel when the date was done. He said goodbye at the entrance and she had wanted to lean in and kiss him, but she didn't.

Stella opened the door as Alex knocked, looking bouncy and sugar high. When Alex sat down, Stella kept standing, looking jittery.

"What the hell did you eat?"

"I was bored. And I had a box of donuts. So..."

Stella looked at Alex, her eyes wide and creepy and Alex shrugged. Stella kept staring and staring, looking creepier with each passing minute.

"What?" Alex hissed, finally giving up.

"Details."

"It is good." Alex said and Stella gave her a penetrating look. "Ok, it is amazing." Alex sighed dreamily.

"You are looking a bit dizzy." Stella said as she jumped on the bed.

"I mean, he is- he is so handsome and he didn't kiss me goodnight. I wanted to kiss him."

"Alex, girl, you are so whipped. Again."

"No, I am not."

"You are fooling no one, freind, no one." Stella giggled as she made weird kissing noises that made Alex's lips pull up in utter happiness.

***

(Logan)

He lied in his bed awake, just as he lied awake the first day he bought her to his house and made it home. He wanted to. But, this time around, he wanted to do things the way every one else was doing.

That meant no Alex at his home. That still, also, meant staying awake, fantasizing about her like a teenager on heat or something.

I miss her already.

He thought as he thought about three days ago when he was handing her the contract for *his sexual service.* It was really funny, the look on her face when he teased her.

Oh, he knew she would never say yes to that and he also knew it would make her mad. He just loved- maybe, sometimes loved too much to make her mad.

No, not for real. Like the time she fought and stopped talking. Not that level of anger.

But the kind of *mad* when she started saying things and calling him all kind of names. That, that was his favorite thing to do.

Just after he came back, he got a call from a laughing Stella.

"Man, you knew how to push all her right buttons." She had said and Logan had been proud.

"That I do." He had said.

"Not a compliment, dumbass."

He smiled to himself as he turned in the bed and pulled his phone.

Are you awake? He typed a text message and deleted it, feeling so dumb and stupid.

He wasn't in high school, for God's sake.

He wished the next day would come already, so that he could see her and if she agreed, brought her out to some of their favorite places.

He had all these planned out, and he hoped it would go without any hitch, but then, if he knew anything about plans and God and fates, he was sure there would be some hitch. *Because my fate hate me.*

He sighed and closed his eyes.

The morning came too soon. It felt like he just closed his eyes and here it was, another day.

Even when his eyes burned from less sleep, he was in a chipper mood as he took a shower. Alex had a Doctor's appointment today and he was going in and then he had to go to work.

He had an important project going on, with a software guy. Gregory Thorne wanted him to build a new office building. The man was a genius, but his ideas about houses and architecture, they made Logan shiver. Logan would almost check regularly to see that the man hadn't made anyone build a gaudy gazebo in the middle of the office building or something. His plans and ideas were that notorious.

"You ready?" He said as Alex opened the door of the hotel room. She was still living in the hotel room, but if what Michael told was true, she would be getting back her home, soon.

Yes, the case. Against Stacy's father and Alexandra's dad's old partners were almost a home run. There were some legal formalities and yes, some more hearings, but Alex was going to come out of it, a Victor and there was no doubt about it.

"Oh yes." She said as she pulled on a jacket. She looked beautiful, even if she looked slightly harried.

"So... Can I see the baby?"

"Wait-" She said and cursed something before she ran to the bathroom.

He knocked at the door and she cursed again. "No, don't come. In." Alex said as Stella made a face at him.

"It is not a baby, right now, you know. It is just a beans." Stella said as she walked in with a big mug of coffee. "Coffee?" She waved at him and didn't even wait for his response as she took a large sip. "If I wasn't married already, I would marry the guy who discovered this."

"If he wasn't already dead..." Logan grunted and Stella shrugged. "So, where is this poor guy I keep hearing about ? Adam something?" Logan asked as he stared at her. He still hadn't seen the guy who was brave enough to marry Stella. He was really curious to see that guy.

"Adam something is doing something somewhere." Stella said. "It is getting harder to keep track. But I will ask him when he calls me tonight."

"Yes, don't forget." Logan said.

"Heya, you feeling well, babe?"

"Oh, yeah, I am feeling very refreshed after I did my yoga inside the bathroom, my face over the toilet bowl."

"Oooo.... Kaay. Not a great morning, I see." Stella said.

"You want something to eat?" Logan asked as Alex wore her jacket again.

"Yeah? Why don't you order me a twelve course meal and then eat it all and do your own yoga inside the bathroom?"

"Hah." Stella smiled. "It looks like one of those days. Enjoy." Stella whispered as they walked away.

"Oh... Okay. Bye."

"Yeah, bye, dumbass."

"Stop calling me that." He said as he opened the door for Alex and Stella snorted.

"Gentleman."

Logan smiled as he closed the door behind him. Of course, Alex's best friend was something else, but she was slowly growing up on him, and he was sure he was slowly, very slowly growing up on her, as well, even though she would never admit to it.

"Hey." He said as he looked at Alex. She was leaning against the seat and her eyes were closed.

"Sorry I snapped."

"It is alright. I just wish I can do something. "

"Well, you can't. So... " She shrugged as he drove to the hospital.

After talking to the doctor, Logan watched as the doctor picked up sonogram machine and started moving it around over Alex's belly and he could see their baby wriggling inside Alex.

It was barely bigger than a tiny fist or something, but still... His heart clenched as he watched with wonder and amazement.

"That is the heartbeat." The doctor said. "And everything looks fine."

He grabbed Alexandra's hand in his and she looked up at him with a smile that was unlike anything. She looked radiant. Glowing.

And... If he wasn't already in love with this amazing woman, he would have fallen for her right then and there. Again. And again.

"I love you."

"Uh-"

It was his fault that she wasn't saying it back, but he had promised himself that he wouldn't stop just because she wasn't saying it back.

Not too long ago, when he refused to acknowledge her feelings or his for that matter, it hadn't stopped her from saying him how much she had loved him, anyways.

"I love you. And our kid and at this moment, I am the happiest man alive."

Because... My love for you is bigger than the fear of broken hearts. I am strong enough to take another broken heart, but not strong enough to not take you. - Alex. ~~~

Chapter 44

43. A kiss goodnight

(Alexandra)

As Alex stared at her slightly bumpy stomach, Stella walked in, a phone in one hand and a muffin in another.

"I really need that muffin." Alexandra said as she pinned her hair back with a concentrated look on her eyes. She fluffed her hair and then stared.

It wasn't like this was her first date. It wasn't like Logan hadn't seen her in her worst possible moments, but still, she felt like dressing up for him. It was strange, the feelings pinging through her body, but she liked it.

This newness.

"God, you are a glutton. What is your stomach made of?" Stella whined.

"A baby." Alex said with a shrug. "A very hungry baby."

It really was.

Alex already ate her fair share, without shying away, but the baby made her more ravenous.

Sometimes she would crave for worst possible food at worst possible moments and as Logan had promised her, he would do everything possible to get that to her.

It was for the baby, their baby, he would say. But Alex knew it was for her, as well.

"But you are going to dinner with Logan, aren't you? Let me eat my muffin in peace." Stella groaned.

"Someone is cranky tonight. What happened?" Alex asked with a concerned smile as she sat next to Stella.

Stella lifted her head with a sad smile and placed it on Alex's shoulder with a sigh.

"It is Adam. He just called me to say he won't be coming this week as he had promised me. I am tired of this, Alex." Stella said as she stared at her phone and if the phone could transfer fire, Adam would have felt the heat of Stella's stare.

"Aw, I am so sorry, Stells. Maybe he have a reason."

"Yeah, reasons. There are many, but nothing good." Stella frowned as she threw the phone on the bed."So forget my miserable life. Please tell me about the dates? Have you kissed him yet?"

Alex knew Stella wanted a distraction, and she was okay playing that game. She didn't like it when her best friend was feeling sad. And miserable.

"Nah, we are taking it slow this time." Alex smirked as she grabbed her purse from the table. "Really slow. It is kinda nice."

"God, you two are one weird pair, really, but whatever. It looks like this--whatever this-- is working." Stella chuckled.

"It is working. He is amazing, he is Logan. You know, he remembers all these tiny little details that would not have mattered to someone else and when he does something, something he should have forgotten, my heart, it just- nah, I can't- I can not-"

"Not fall in love again? But tell me, Alex, did you even fall out of love?"

It was true. Alex never fell out of love, but then again, she was falling all over again and this time, she was scared to do that. Freely. It was the fear. The knowledge of what she had gone through once.

When she fell for him the first time, she was very brave, very decisive and she had braced herself for the probable outcome of the heartbreak and seperation and still, she wasn't ready for that kind of pain.

It was like nothing she had ever experienced. But after realizing that the pain was as physical as it was emotional, she was afraid to go through it. Again.

She would never be ready for that kind of pain and it was so frightening. To be helpless again.

"It is just-"

"I understand. But, aren't you ready yet?"

I don't know. I am ready, and yet I am not.

"You know, tomorrow is the day for the final hearing for my dad's case and I am so distracted and Logan... Logan is there, just always there and I need to think clearly. I can't just drown again, without knowing that I can pull myself up if I did drown."

She needed to find the foothold. She needed to find her solid ground. Simply drowning was not an option for her.

"I don't understand the head and the tail from whatever you have just said, but good luck with all that." Stella said. "God, your life is better than a soap opera."

"It is not."

"It is. You are dating your husband. And that about sums it up."

"Yeah, bu... Okay. I give up. I am dating my husband. And it is nice, you know... Dating. We hadn't gotten chance to actually date the first time around. We married right away."

"With a contract. God! I still don't understand how you said yes for that. To a strange man at that." Stella scoffed. "I really can't believe how my friend Alexandra, list her head?!"

"Yes, yes. Even I can't believe that. Maybe...this was called fate."

Maybe.

It was destined.

Maybe.

Must be.

And she really did like dating Logan.

Alex did not mind the wining (without wine) and the dining experience or the long hours she spent talking with Logan. About anything and everything. Sometimes decidedly nothing. And those moments, those little, seamlessly unimportant moments, they made her remember the Logan she had dearly missed. She had fallen for.

He was still there.

Logan was the mix of rugged and soft. Velvet and granite. And she yearned for that. For everything that was him. But yes, she wanted to learn him, again, and to take it slow.

She loved this new dynamics, where he tried so hard to impress her. Before this, it was all a one way street.

Now he was trying. Actually trying and Alex could see how hard he was trying.

She loved feeling new, feeling appreciated and feeling pampered. He did it all with a subtlety that she sometimes forgot that they weren't even together anymore. That this was his way to prove to her that they belonged. That he loved.

He did not have to try too hard, though, because her heart was already teetering. But she was dead scared of the fall. So very afraid...

Then she would look into his stormy gray eyes when the night was dark and filled with stars and she would forget her fear. Her hesitation. And simply, simply let herself float down the depth of his eyes. To drown. She would allow herself to break free from the restraint she had put over herself. Over her heart.

It was both easy and hard at the same time. So effortlessly easy and unarguably difficult. And she didn't know what to do with all this mixed feelings.

She wished someone would tell her what to do or give her some sign.

God, hear me? A sign will be amazing right now.

He was amazing, he had always been. He was everything she remembered. He was Logan and she was still the Alex who fell hopelessly in love. And it didn't change. Nothing changed, and yet something did.

I am making myself crazy with all these thoughts. She thought.

You are already crazy. In love. With Logan. It was that unwanted, annoying voice.

She shrugged it off.

You love him. Admit it. You are ready to go back.

She was. Almost.

The things he did for her, it was so hard not to want to go back.

In the gentle glow of twilight hour, he would sit in the car with her, looking up at the sky stretched in front and he would whisper things that mattered to her. That mattered to them. And she would melt. How could she not?!

"Look at the sky. Twilight hour. They carry the magic and hope and it feels like that all good things will just be at your fingertips at this hour. And I hope, Alex. I hope so desperately. You are my good thing, Lex. You are. I was stupid not to believe in that, but now I do." He had whispered one night they went to the motel she had lived once. It was strange he willingly brought her there, but as they walked inside, he told her how that place was one of the many reasons she came to him and she couldn't help but feel like she was the happiest being alive in the Earth.

No. She couldn't. The rein would break and her heart would gallop wildly towards him. To rein it back, it was hard for her.

He would do and say things he could have forgotten, but didn't and her heart would surrender. Again.

As days went on, she realized she was being stubborn for the heck of it. Not because she wanted to hurt him, but because she did not want to hurt herself.

She was halfway there, because everything he did and do didn't feel like forced or half-hearted. It didn't feel like he was doing it only for the baby. But fear, fear that she hadn't felt once, feat of knowing how the heartbreak felt like, it was a strong deterrent.

"Earth to, Alexandra." Stella clapped.

Alex blinked with a startled yelp.

"You should wipe that drool off." Stella said with a cheeky grin.

"Haha, very funny." Alex muttered.

"I know, I am funny."

"And I am a werewolf." Alex retorted.

"Very mature." Stella scoffed. "Ah, there. Your gentleman caller has arrived." Stella curtsied when they heard the knock on the door.

Alex stood up and almost bounced towards the door and Stella gave her a knowing smirk.

"Look at you. Dancing. Gosh, you look like that guy at the door is your first crush and that you hadn't just conceived a baby with him."

"Shut up, idiot." Alex said as she opened the door for Logan and he grinned up at her and that look in his eyes... It was everything she didn't know she had needed.

I love it when he looks at me. Like that. Like he is seeing me for the first time. Like I am precious.

I do, too. The voice said with a dreamy sigh.

When he looked at her, he only looked at her. Gently. Warming her soul from the insides out and it mattered. Just that look. It mattered. So much. It told her so much, as well, those words he didn't say.

"I have something for you." He said with a smile that could still warm the frozen corners of her heart. It was *the smile.* Something that would make his whole face transform into something magical and yes, she was being so sappy, but she couldn't help it. He always made her feel like this gooey mess...

"What?"

"Here."

"What is that?"

"You can open it and see it, you know." He chuckled softly.

"I know, smarty pants." She rolled her eyes as she tore the brown manila envelope and her eyes widened as she took it out.

Surprise warred with wonder as she looked at the thing in her hand.

God. How can I not love him?

There was just no one, no one like him. Not for her. There was only one Logan in the world. Only one HIM.

"This is... It is my sticky notes." She looked at the papers tied together into a notebook in her hand. Each page was printed with the sticky notes she used to write for Logan, almost every morning. It also had that love letter, the one Alex regretted writing. "You kept it all." Her voice wavered. "Everything."

"I did." He said. "They were like- my dose of happiness, Alex. Every morning, I would walk downstairs, and the first thing I'd check was the refrigerator. For this. One note from you. It was all it took to change my day." He whispered, staring into her eyes. She couldn't blink.

"Whoa, wow. You really know how to grab a woman's heart and wipe it with butter or something. Wait, that is really weird, but you get the gist." Stella said with a whistle and Alex had to agree.

He really did know how to grasp her heart right back.

"I hope that is a good thing." He said as he looked at Alex.

"It is." Alex murmured and he gave her an elated smile.

"Good."

They walked out together into the night breeze. It was gentle and soothing.

She didn't hesitate when his fingers came around hers and clasped tighter. It felt like she had finally come home.

His hand was strong and warm and she felt safe and complete. That incessant itch in her heart, it was strangely quiet.

Content. She felt content.

And so she held on.

She had a hard time letting go when they walked inside the restaurant, their restaurant, the one he took her to whenever they celebrated something good or weird.

He gave her a smile as they sat down.

"Chocolate cake?"

"You know me." She said.

"I do." He smiled gently. "You are beautiful. So beautiful." His voice was deep and hoarse as he said that and it sent warm tingles through out her body. She looked down at her fingers, suddenly so shy.

Gosh? What is happening to me?

She didn't know why. It wasn't like he was new to her, but still... He was new.

In the golden glow of the lights, he looked ethereal. Mysterious. Like some strange creature that came from a distant land.

Her creature.

Butterflies the size of eagles flapped their wings inside her stomach, creating a chaos of emotions inside her that she has only ever truly felt for Logan.

"Wow." He whispered and she looked up at him with question. "Even more beautiful now, with that blush."

"Shut up." She playfully smacked him with the glossed menu and he grabbed her hand in his.

He looked up at her and her heart thundered. His eyes were dark with need. With want. Her body felt a spectrum of spectacular sensation as he lifted her hand, pulled the menu from her frozen fingers and pulled her fingers open.

His eyes never left her as he smoothed his palm over hers.

"I love you." He said as he pressed his warm lips over her palm and her whole body gave a shuddering moan. Thankfully she didn't.

But she knew her eyes would be just a dark as his.

The reflection of his need.

"Logan..." She trailed off, want warring with wisdom and he smiled assuredly.

"You don't have to say it back. You have waited for me to say that for a long time and now it is my turn. I love you, Alexandra. I do love you. I hope you will see that I am not lying about that."

"I- I don't know-" Her stomach twisted.

The dark romantic mood was over and now she felt something distribing flutter over her heart.

What if? What if?

You know what ifs are for cowards and you have never been one.

I know. But...

The 'but' wasn't going away.

"Look at you, Alex. You are going to have a baby." He said with a smirk. She knew he was trying to make her feel at ease and she willingly accepted the distraction. "I am thinking what Aunt Beatrice would say if she sees you now."

"No, God, no." Alex smiled. "She wouldn't stop blathering about that."

"She would be happy to learn that your child bearing hips aren't going to waste. Oh and we did have *that intercourse* and... Are you happy to know that I am not impotent?" He asked with a smug smile and she glared at him as she waved a fork at his face. He smiled up at her, his eyes twinkling in the dim candle flickering around, mischief and mirth filling them up.

"Logan Adrian Forte, you will shut up if you know what is good for you." She scowled at him playfully.

"What, it was really funny." He gave her a shrug as the waiter placed their order in front of them.

"Nuh-uh, not. Still so embarrassing." She said with a pout and he chuckled. Her cheeks flamed hot with the memory of that. "And you promised you will never talk about it above this table."

"We can go under the table if you want. We can check our the floors." He winked and she poked her tongue out.

"You are not winning any brownie points, Logan, if this is your way of wooing me." She waved a hand.

"What? It is one of the defining moments in our relationship, you know. Enlightening and enriching. And so damn arousing." He said with a dark look.

She ignored.

"Defining moment? Really? That one?" She scrunched her nose.

She could clearly remember how bothered he was and she was when she stupidly hid underside the table. Like a buffoon. And then fell on his lap.

"I think so. When I tell our baby about how we met and what happened next, I am sure I won't be missing that one."

"Don't you dare embarrass me."

"No, I think she -or he- will think it is cute, as well."

"Cute, my ass."

"Yes. Your ass is cute too."

"Logan-"

"Sorry. Just too tempting." He smirked as they paid the bill. "Hey look at the time! When I talk with you, time just flies. U will drop you off at your hotel, Alex."

"It is on the other side, you know. I can get a cab.l, Logan. It is already too late and it looks like it is going to rain or something."

"It is just past ten and it is not a problem. I want to have the option of a goodbye kiss after I walked you to your door."

"Did I tell you that I will be generous today to give you that goodnight kiss? After all, I was the one who didn't sign at the bottom of your sex contract."

"Still your loss." He said with a cheeky wink and she chuckled.

"What were you thinking, huh?"

"I was just messing with you, like you did with me. You know, every action has an equal and opposite reaction." He gave her a look that made her smile.

"I mean, I wasn't actually messing with you. I mean, not fully."

"Really? Damn." He said as he opened the door for her. She walked inside and he came to his side and sat there for a minute without starting the engine.

"You known... Emma and Eliza miss you. I-"

"I know. I do, too."

"Why don't you meet with them?"

"I talked with them the other day. It is just-"

"I am sorry for making it awkward between you. When I think of it, I feel like everything is my fault."

"You didn't make anything awkward. It is just hard for me after- after all that, but we are going to be okay. We just need some time."

"Andy and Brian misses you. Camille, too."

Alex nodded. She missed them, too. But they were all part of Logan's life and it seemed so wrong, so hurtful as well, to be in their life when Logan wasn't. But now that he was back, she wished she could go back and mend all the brokenness.

They were her family, after all. She loved them all.

"We are here." He said as he pulled into the parking lot and she stepped out.

"I can go by myself. You know, you don't have to-"

"I want to, Lex."

They both walked in silence and she was content in it that she didn't want to break it. She loved how their silence was sometimes so meaningful than their words.

"How are you feeling about tomorrow?" He asked as they walked inside the lift.

"We are winning, or mostly winning. Michael is sure of that. I just have to-"

"I will be there for you tomorrow."

"Thanks for that, Logan. If it is not for you, my dad's dream would have-"

"I wouldn't have let that happen." He said, looking fiercely protective.

"I know. And this is my door." She said as they stopped near her room.

"So..."

"I am not giving you a goodbye kiss." Alex said with a teasing smile. She wanted to, but this time, as she had said to Stella, they were taking it slow.

Lazy snail in its death bed slow???? The voice added sarcastically.

"It is okay." He said. "I don't want to pressure you, but I wish you are coming home with me. It is not home without you."

"Logan- if you talk like this, I don't know how I can say no."

"Don't say no, then."

"But-"

"I am sorry. I promised to myself that I would not force you into making a decision and I didn't want to. But Alex, sometimes, it is so hard for me to leave you here and walk away from you when I want to hold on to you with all my might and never let go. It is just-"

She stood on her tippy toes and pressed a kiss on his cheeks. "I know. But let us not rush again. Let us not break this beautiful thing. It still feels so fragile."

"Sorry. I love you."

"I know. Bye Logan."

"Bye. Good night." *

**

(*Logan)*

Logan already missed her.

The road was dark and the slow drizzle came down like tears.

He wished he could stay with her, wherever she was, but... Yes, she had waited so long for him and now it was his turn to wait.

He could wait for her. But he just missed her.

Nothing was right without her. Home felt like a cold, empty box without her. And it was hard, too hard, not to beg her to come back.

He knew she still loved him, and he knew that if he pressed a little harder, she would cave. But he didn't want to. He wanted her to come when she felt like she could trust him. He wanted her to come by herself, out of love, not out of any obligation.

He jerked up from his thoughts when he heard the loud blare of the truck. It came barelling straight towards him and he could think only one thing.

I will miss Alex and my baby.

He swerved.

And then there was only the loud banging noise, followed by utter silence.

I love you.

And the lights went out. Darkness overpowered.

~

~~

(*Alexandra)*

Alex couldn't sit still. Previous happiness was suddenly replaced by a feeling she couldn't pinpoint.

There was this nagging feeling at the bottom of her chest, and she tried so hard to sit and relax, but the niggling sensation of doom, of something unexplainable clawed at her insides, trying to come out of her throat.

It made her restless.

She paced the whole length of the small room until she felt tired, but that feeling, that feeling that something was so wrong, it didn't leave her.

She hugged herself around her midsection, trying to protect herself from what was coming. Herself and her baby.

She pulled her phone and dialled Logan's number. It rang and rang until it stopped.

"Alex?"

"There is something wrong. It is- it is- I don't know. Something so wrong."

"What are you-"

Alex's phone rang.

Her fingers shook as she handed the phone to Stella.

"No. No."

"Alex, relax. It is okay. " Stella said as she answered the call.

"It is not. It is not okay. Not okay."

Stella hung up the phone, her face pale and Alex blinked back her tears.

"Not my Logan. No. No." Alex shook her head.

"He was in an accident."

"No. Not my Logan. No. No." She repeated it again and again as if she forgot everything else, everyone else.

Stella watched helplessly at her friend.

"No. No. Nothing can happen to him. Nothing. We want him. He came here to drop me off. If I hadn't come here, he would have been safe. He would have been safe. No. No."

"Alex, Alex, stop. Stop. Baby, stop." Stella placed a hand on Alex's violently shaking body.

In a daze, Alex stood up. "I need to go to him."

She had to see him. She had to.

Don't leave me, Logan. You can't do this to me. You can't break me again. You promised.

"He promised. He promised."

"Yes. He will be fine."

"No, dammit. He promised."

"He will be okay."

"No. No. No. He can't do this to me. To us. He promised."

And then one day, I realized that we are not just friends. We are more than that. We are soul mates. Partners. Lovers. We are everything. - Logan ~~~

Chapter 45

44. Home is where you are

(Alexandra)

It was like a dream. A big scary dream, where all your demons come alive and stalk you. The kind of nightmare that would make you never want to sleep.

Alex didn't know how she came all the way here, but here she was, her heart thundering in her chest, a prayer whispered in her lips, eyes swivelling around to find a way to him.

The hospital looked crowded, chaotic and full of people complaining about things.

"Logan Forte?" She said to the receptionist and she blinked at her drowsily.

Must be a long shift.

"Just a minute, mam." The woman said as she typed something.

She needed to see him. To feel him. To know that he was alright.

He should be. He should be alright.

You can not do this to me, Logan. She thought with a frown. *You can not leave me.*

"Alex?" Alex jerked upright from her slumped position when she heard Daniel.

She sighed.

"It is room 102 mam."

She knew it was rude to just walk away, but she didn't have patience to stand there any longer when every beat of her heart was crying out for him.

"Hi." He said and she nodded vacantly.

It had been too long since she had met him. Or anyone else from Logan's family. Too long.

At the base of her brain, she knew what manners would actually deemed it right for her to say to him right now.

A how are you, maybe.

Hello!?

But words didn't seem to fit in her tongue.

She gave him a smile that felt too thin, too broken on her lips. She felt tired. She felt like she wanted to go home, with Logan.

"Is he.... "

"Come with me." Daniel said, his voice serious. He looked serious, too.

It didn't fit with his persona.

Alex' worry doubled as she looked at Daniel with question in her eyes. He avoided her look as he walked forward.

"Daniel, please, just please tell me that he is alright. I can't- I won't-"

But Daniel kept silent as he marched through long corridors, drenched with the smell of antiseptics and cleaning liquids. He looked all business.

It really made her intestine twist and turn inside.

The long hallways seemed to grow longer and longer, whiter and whiter still. It looked bare and empty, and Alex felt like she could not breathe if she walked any longer.

The walls felt like prison around her, closing in on and she felt like her lungs were going to bruise.

She was hyperaware of every noise, every sound. If she listened closer, she could hear people crying behind the closed doors, the sound, ripping and painful, so full of grief and sadness. So full of loss.

I can't lose you.

A tear slipped down her cheeks.

She couldn't lose him. Not him, as well.

After her father, he had been her home, if only for a short time. He had been her friend. Best friend. And love.

And she needed him. She couldn't imagine a life without him, a life where she had to walk all alone.

"Go on." Daniel said as he pointed the door to Alex. She waited for a moment, wishing Daniel would say something, anything about how Logan was, but he didn't.

It was as if he was completely oblivious to Alex's stuttering heart, and clenching stomach.

She pushed the door open and came face to face with Logan.

"Is that tears in your eyes? Alexandra Annie Steele, why are you crying?"

There he was, fine as a horse.

"You are not-"

He was well. Fine. Nothing had happened to him.

"Not dead." He said with a shrug. He looked too calm to her taste. Too freaking composed. And here she was, a freaking mess.

"Are you freaking kidding me?"

"Hey, now, now. I am hurt." He said with a mock look of pout on his face, as he pointed to the Band-Aids stuck to his forehead.

Seriously? Was he for real? Really real?

This was why he was here?

For those three freaking Band-Aids on his forehead?

She could have done that herself. For him. And she could have saved all these agonizing moments and worry for her.

"It is my car that really needs a surgery. Me, I am just here because I have a confusion- I mean concussion and I broke my wrist, too."

That was when she noticed the sling.

She had been looking at his face that she missed it.

"It hurts and I love you. You are so beautiful and I wish I can kiss that pouty lips, I can too, if you move a little closer to me."

"Are you high, you idiot?"

"A little." He grinned, showing all his teeth. "Paining. Can you kiss it better?" He gave her a pout that made her want to kiss those lips.

She shook her head as she took him in. Again. Fully. He looked like a thousand dollar mess and other that few scratches on his head and cheek and a broken bone, he looked fine.

He was better than fine judging by that loopy smile on his face. He looked giddy, and different. And so very relaxed.

Must be the pain meds.

She sighed.

"You cried for me." He said after a minute as he looked at her, thoroughly pleased with that knowledge. She wanted to chuck something on his head, but since he already had some Band-Aids over there, she refused to give into that temptation.

"You loooo-oove me." He sang, sounding so ridiculous that she couldn't help but chuckle.

"I don't." She said with a smile.

She kinda liked this new version of him.

"You do too. I know that. You know, Alex, how they say your whole life would flash in front of you when you feel like you are going to die... I thought I was going to die, and the only thing I kept thinking about was... You. How I missed my chance with you. How I can't ever make up to you for what I have messed up." Now he looked somber. Previous smile had drained from his face and he looked pale.

She wanted to hug him to her. She wanted him to go back to being loopy.

"Just- do I ever have a chance, Alex? With you? Do you think- is this actually working?" His eyes were pleading with her. To say yes.

It is working.

"I don't want to-" He sighed and closed his eyes. "Lose you..."

"I don't want to lose you, as well, Logan. You have become a part of me that I just can't- Logan? Hey?" She shook her head when she saw he wasn't in this world. "Did he just fall asleep? This guy is just one-" She muttered aloud as she saw him leaning against his pillows, his mouth half open and God, he was snoring. An old malfunctioned truck would have groaned in shame when it heard him.

She walked to him and adjusted his head so that it wouldn't hurt. He winced lightly and she pressed her lips againsthis wrinkled forehead and he relaxed. And smiled.

He looked adorable. Asleep.

"It is the effect of the meds." Daniel said as he opened the door. And walked in.

She took a step away from Logan , but judging from that crinkly smile in Daniel's lips, he saw what she did.

"You looked so damn serious for just few Band-Aids."

"Because you needed a shock treatment, Alex. First he needed one and now you needed one. It was this constant struggle with you two... I don't know what is the problem with you two. You both are in love with each other. And everyone can see it. So why don't you just stop all this melodramatic bullshit and get together already?"

"Have you ever been in love, Dan?" Alex asked with a frown. She didn't like that he looked all too superior and said things that might actually be right.

"A few times."

"So no?" Alex shook her head. "It is everything beautiful in the world, but it is also... Everything unimaginably painful when you fall in love with the wrong person."

"You didn't fall in love with the wrong person, Alex. You know that."

Alex turned when she heard the familiar voice. Oh, how she missed that voice.

"Eliza..."

"You fell in love with a confused, a very confused man. And he did some shitty things, but-"

"How are you?" Alex looked at Eliza and Eliza shook her head with a sad smile.

"God, I am so sorry for all of that and I-I missed you and the baby, how is the baby?" Eliza came closer, as if she wanted to hug Alex and then stopped with a hesitant look on her face. It was like there was a wall between them and Alex didn't want that wall.

"The baby is fine. And I missed you, too." Alex said as she wrapped her hands around Eliza in an embrace. Eliza sighed in relief and hugged her back.

"I want a hug, too." Logan's sleepy voice interrupted them. Alex pulled away from Eliza and smiled at him.

"You are awake already?"

"The hug?"

"Go on." Alex pushed Eliza. "Your brother needs a hug." Alex said with a cheeky smile.

"Who needs a hug from her! I need one from you."

"Umm. Ok, since you were in an accident, I can oblige you." Alex said with a wink, as she walked to him and hugged him closer to her.

He sighed. "You smell like home. My home. Home is wherever you are."

She smiled into his neck. She didn't want to go anywhere. This was a nice place to be. This was her home too.

She could feel him pressing his lips against her head and she snuggled closer.

"We are still here." Daniel coughed.

"What are you still doing here?" Logan muttered grumpily. "Go away. I am finally getting some action and I don't want spectators."

"Ssh." Alex shushed him as she pulled away from him. "I need to go-"

"Don't go." He said, looking up at her, his eyes vulnerable. For the first time in so long she could actually see every one of his emotions. And she knew he trusted her enough to show all that to her. All that pain and suffering and love. "Don't go."

She couldn't go even if she wanted to.

"I need to go and call Stella. I have to inform her that I am staying here with you. And I need change of clothes." Alex said with a smile and his answering smile was just as radiant. So bright that she wondered if he was truly *her grumpy* Logan.

"Ok, then, we will be going." Eliza said as she bent to kiss on Logan's forehead.

"Bye bye." Logan was very fast to reply. Eliza shook her head with a chuckle at her brother. "Camille and Adam and Brian wanted to come, too. I said tomorrow. Emma is babysitting them." Eliza said as she closed the door.

"Tell them I said hi. And bring them tomorrow."

"Sure. Bye. Take care, you idiot. You might be a jerk oftentimes, but you are still my baby brother."

"I know." Logan said with a smile. "And I am."

"I can bring that change of clothes in the morning, you know. Just tell your friends I will be coming." Daniel said to Alex.

"Thank you." Alex said before she called Stella.

"Are you done?" Logan asked when she hung up. "I need to continue that hug."

Alex walked next to him and sat on the bed.

"Don't you ever put me through this again okay? I can't- I just-"

"Come here?"

She pushed her face to his chest.

"I love you." He said. "I am not going anywhere. Even if you don't want me. I am here."

"As ny friend?" She pulled back from him and stared at him.

"Whatever you want me to be."

"Then what about my sex slave?" She smirked.

"Gladly."

"What about daddy to my baby."

"Yes, of course."

"I am going to make you sign an appointment order. To be my husband. Until the end of my time."

"Where do you want me to sign?"

She chuckled as he pulled her closer. "We can seal the deal with a kiss, you know?"

"We can."

***

(*Logan)*

They say third time is the charm.

Maybe this second marriage would be their charm.

He couldn't wait for her to walk down towards the judge. Towards him. And become his wife.

Two months after their divorce was finalized, they were marrying again.

Everyone had commented about the stupidity of this , but Logan wanted a fresh start. A new life with his wife.

Just him and her without anything else in between. Just them and their baby and love.

Even thought their first wedding ceremony was glossy and full and rich and done with a fine print, it was still fake. It was still done with so many other intentions that was not true.

He wanted to marry her, this time, just for herself. Only for her beautiful self.

It was a miracle that she forgave him. That she gave him a chance to be a part of her life and their baby's. Always. And he wanted to cherish that moment without any previous blunders hanging over him. Over them.

It was a small, intimate ceremony.

The small hall was decked with little white flowers and there was his dad with Beth and they both glowed. And Eliza and Emma and their family. And Barbara. And Daniel and Stella and Tom and Alice. And Leo Shine.

Yes. Leo. That Leo. The one who kissed his woman.

Logan wasn't very pleased with that guest , but what could he do...

Alex insisted on it saying he was one of the very few she actually cared about. So there he was. And yes, he looked a little morose for a wedding- but what could Logan do?!

Except gloat inside...

She was *his wife and* he was *her husband.*

That is that.

And Leo Shine can do nothing about it.

And he was happy to marry her again. He was the happiest man at this moment. He had never been this happy in his whole life.

When she walked towards him, in a silver satin dress that showed her slight bump, with Andy and Brian holding her on either side, looking like an angel, followed by a smiling Camille, he promised to himself that he would never ever doubt love. Or her. Or his love for her.

She was his, and he was hers from the moment they met each other. From the very beginning, it was all preplanned. Destined.

They were meant to be together, even through the rough roads. Their love was stronger than ever now, and their bond was unbreakable now.

It had been a hard journey, to reach that destination, his destination, but they were finally, finally here. In a place that looked bright and warm and like home. She had always been home and he was fool not to have seen it a long time ago. But he had seen it now.

"Uncle Logan, you take care of Auntie or I am marrying her the next time." Andy threatened much to everyone's amusement.

"No, I will." Brian said.

"No. No one is marrying her except me." Logan looked at his nephews with a smile. "Get away from my girl." He tickled them and they giggled before they ran away.

"I love you, Alexandra Annie Steele. For everything you are, for everything you have taught me. I have once doubted your love, my capability to love you back... But now, as I see you now, I have no doubt about any of that. I am made to love. You. Only you."

She sniffed a little.

"I love you, Logan Adrian Forte. And yes, even when you had been a jerk, a stupid, stupid jerk, I still loved you. Because I am made to love you. There is no way around it for me."

And they were together. Again.

***

(Alexandra)

"Welcome home." He said. "You made this my home, Lex. I had once lived here without feeling any emotions and then you came."

"I came. I couldn't help but come." She said as he opened the door.

He pulled her to him and kissed her. Hotly. Passionately. As if he couldn't get enough of her.

She couldn't get enough of him, too. She had never seemed to get enough of him.

"Come to my room." He said with a look in his eyes that burned her.

Her body was on fire and he was the only one who could make it burn faster and higher.

"Go on." She said with a wink. "Let me change."

He gaped at her when she walked inside the room. His eyes were wide and feasting on her.

He always made her feel beautiful. He looked at her like she was everything beautiful in this ugly world.

There was never a moment in her life that she had wanted to hide herself from him. Even when he said he didn't love her.

"You like..." She whispered.

"What are you wearing?" His voice was as breathy as it was the first time she wore it.

Of course, no one in their right mind would call this thing anything. A piece of cloth was what it was. But Logan loved it then and he seemed to like it now.

He came closer to her and murmured words to her, words that made her feel warm all over. His voice was sexy and it rasped against her skin, sending delicious tremors through her nerve cells.

The night breeze was gentle and cool on her skin, and his breath was warm and hot on her neck. He sniffed and nuzzled her neck and lower.

"Are you smelling me?"

"You smell and look amazing. Is this... That lingerie?"

"Yes. The one from our first, first night. I thought.... It is only fitting to wear it the second first night, too." She winked and he gaped at her, his eyes full of desire.

"You do know how to torture me, woman. Come to bed, Lex." He groaned when she pressed closer to him. She could feel how much he wanted her and that made her moan.

She wanted him just as bad.

This time she didn't have to worry about heartbreak or falling for him. She didn't have to worry about the time it would all come to an end.

This time it was for forever.

She had fallen for him, hardly and he had fallen, too, for her. They both didn't have any choice.

This time he was hers.

Mine. She thought as she grabbed him closer.

He kissed. Mouth opened. Devouring. Devoting. Starved.

She kissed back. Just as starved.

And when he made love, it wasn't just sex.

It was lust, yes, he would always lust for her and that knowledge was powerful. It gave her a strange sense of accomplishment and pride.

It was lust, yes, but it was love, as well.

"I love you and that is not a word. That is a promise. I love you so much, Alex, you are everything I have never known I have wanted." He said with a kiss on her forehead.

"I know. This time I know it and I don't have to wonder, ever again. I love you, Logan. I have never ever loved anyone other than you." She whispered as she grabbed her hand in hers.

Tired and spent , she curled herself around him. She was drifting off to sleep, when she jerked upright.

"Here..." She placed his hand on her stomach.

"What? God! God. Is that?" His voice sounded wobbly.

"Yes. That is your baby kicking."

"I love you too, baby. Don't feel left out." He said to her stomach as she lied down in his chest, feeling finally full. Finally complete. Finally home.

The baby kicked once again, as if saying, *I love you two.*