



The Only Reason

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Category: Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: Two women, one fake relationship & a fall they'll never forget.

Bella Gold needs money for college, so when she hears of an agency that pays you to date people in return for large sums of cash she signs up. She knows what everyone's thinking but she doesn't take off her clothes, even if she wanted to. The only thing that happens is some hand holding and honest conversation. If she's being honest, she feels bad for how lonely these people are.

Enter Dylan Marsh, a long time co executive at To Be Read Publishing. When her boss comments for the billionth time that she's attending the parties alone, she decides to hire someone to help. The last thing she wants to do is date anyone her age or get married anytime soon, but maybe a few dates with a beautiful woman would get her boss off her back. As soon as Dylan meets Bella, it's love at first sight. For Bella, it's more of confusion, as she was expecting a man.

Dylan gives Bella a proposition she can't turn down, pretend to date her for a few months and she'll pay for her college tuition. At first Bella thinks it's a prank set up by her best friends, but the more she gets to know Dylan, the more they surprise each other. Will Dylan be able to convince Bella to fall in love with her for real? Or will Bella cash the check and not look back?

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Violet

I hate airplanes. I'm told they are safer than cars but I think that's bull. There's no way a flying death machine can be safer than something on the ground. If my best friend hadn't insisted on getting married halfway across the country, I wouldn't have to think about this. I tried to convince my friends to drive with me but they were not feeling an almost thirty-nine hour drive. *Lame.*

"You okay?" Grant asks, touching my shoulder gently. My eyes are closed but I peek one open to nod at him.

"Is she okay?" Grace asks from across the aisle. They all knew my fear of flying but they had never seen it in action. Four years of college and I had persuaded them to drive to Florida each time we took a vacation.

"She's all right," Grant answers but I can tell he's worried. He's been stuck to my side since we stepped foot in the airport. He had brought a sleeping pill that I fully intended to take, until I woke up sick to my stomach today. The last thing I wanted was to get sick in my sleep or something.

"Did I pack my sleep mask?" Kate asks anxiously from behind us. I hear her ruffling through her carry on bag.

"It's on the outside left pocket," I say without opening my eyes again.

"Ah! Thanks, babe!" she says happily. "See, this is why Violet is my maid of honor," Kate adds to no one in particular.

Kate and I have been best friends for as long as I can remember. Neither of us can remember how we met except that it was in college. We became best friends, roommates, and now I am her maid of honor. I am fully prepared to make sure this wedding goes off without a hitch. Except their getting hitched, haha get it?

Clearly this altitude is getting to me.

Kate doesn't have any family and Austin's aren't exactly on board with the wedding. So I have made it my mission to make sure everything else she wants is perfect. Which is why I am swallowing my deep rooted fears and roughing it on this plane. She wanted the five of us plus a few other friends to be there, but we are making the weekend of us. It is only Thursday and we have wedding fun planned all weekend.

The man next to me starts snoring and I wonder once again why flying is the preferred way of traveling. Kate and Austin had lucked out sitting next to each other, even Grace and Harry are in a row to themselves, but Grant and I are stuck next to this stranger. I suppose he isn't the worst person I could be sitting next to, although I should've brought some earplugs.

"Only four more hours," Grant whispers. I know he's trying to be helpful but that might be the worst thing I've ever heard.

"Ugh," I groan.

"Can we talk about the wedding? Did you decide if you want to share a room?" he adds quietly.

I'm grateful that at this moment my eyes are closed. Grant and I have been friends for a while, but at some point last year we took that inevitable step when all your friends are together and hooked up. It was good, so we continued and stayed friends with benefits. We scratch each other's itch and it is safe. We are both in grad school and

way too busy to date. But lately, Grant has been hinting that he wants more than that from me.

I like him and he is a good guy. He is sweet and great in bed, but there is something holding me back. I don't entirely know what, but I can't commit until I figure out what it is. So I have been trying to keep my emotional distance and not cross any new boundaries that may give him the wrong idea.

I'm about to let him down gently, that I'd like to keep my own room, when I get hit with a wave of nausea. I clamp my hand over my mouth and run to the bathroom a few rows away. I can hear my friends call after me worriedly but I don't stop. Thankfully it's empty and I empty my nonexistent breakfast down the airport toilet.

I groan, trying not to think about how I'm hunched over a toilet that god knows how many people have used. I throw up twice more before washing my hands and throwing some cold water on my face. There's a light knock on the door.

"Occupied!" I groan. Hadn't they seen me run in here?

"Violet? Are you okay?" It's Grant. I sigh.

"I'm okay," I lie. I feel like a hungover mess and I hate how the plane is rocking slightly. Do all airplanes do that?

"Do you need anything?" he asks through the door.

"No, I'm okay." I can sense he's torn but ultimately I hear him walk back to his seat.

I look in the mirror, I am never one to wear too much makeup so at least I don't have to worry about that being messed up. My face looks pale and clammy, I thought I'd be able to hide this at least until after the wedding. Maybe I can pass it off as airplane

sickness, is that even a thing? People can get carsick, after all.

My plan was to grab a test the moment I got back from the wedding, but I can tell I need one sooner than later. I'll have to sneak away and grab one from the hotel or something, I mean it's Vegas. They have to have pregnancy tests, right?

Dakota

When I agreed to be the photographer for Austin and Kate's wedding, I didn't realize it would be coming just after a whirlwind month of chaos.

But here I am, standing just outside the baggage claim of McCarran International Airport, waiting for an Uber to take me to the hotel. Or is it Harry Reid Airport? I've seen both names, and I am too damn tired to give a damn. I am exhausted, having just flown in from New York after a week-long fashion shoot. I am more than ready to collapse into my king-sized suite.

I hop into the first taxi that pulls up, dragging my suitcase and camera bag in with me into the back seat. "The Palazzo at the Venetian Resort, please," I ask the driver, my voice still filled with sleep. I watch the lights of Las Vegas go by with my head resting against the back of the seat. As much as I want to take it all in, I know I'll have time to after getting some sleep.

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When the driver pulls up to the hotel, I pay him and drag myself out of the car. With my suitcase wheeling behind me, my oversized purse on one arm and my camera bag slung over the other shoulder, I make my way to the check in desk.

“Hi, checking in for Dakota Knight.” I slide my ID across the counter to the woman standing in front of the computer.

“Hi!” she answers, far more chipper than I can handle at the moment. “Welcome to The Palazzo.” She takes my ID and starts tapping the keys. I watch as her chipper smile begins to falter.

“Everything okay?” I ask, exasperated and already fearing the worst.

“Um, yes. One moment.” She holds up her finger and gives me a weak smile. I know that smile. It means something is wrong, but she is pedaling for an answer as quickly as she can.

“It’s a king suite, if that helps,” I offer, feeling the worry build.

“I’m so sorry, Miss Knight, we don’t have anything booked for you.”

“What do you mean you don’t have the king suite booked? For Dakota Knight. I booked it two months ago!”

“I’m so sorry, ma’am. I—I don’t see anything here for that name.”

“Nothing? Maybe it accidentally went under one of the other suites?”

She shakes her head. “No, I’m sorry. There’s nothing here.”

I let out a heavy sigh. This isn’t happening. “Fine, can you get one for me now?” At this point, I’ll take a twin-sized bed if it means I could just get some sleep. I wouldn’t be able to sleep sideways but at least I’d be able to sleep.

I watch her falter again. “We don’t have any left. With it being wedding season, it’s fully booked.”

“Wha—what?” I stutter as my eyes grow wide. “You don’t have a single suite. Anywhere. In this entire hotel?” I can hear my voice rising and the redness in my cheeks rises with it. I am not the type to get heated with anyone in customer service. I’ve dealt with that enough in my own profession. But right now, I am running on no sleep and east coast time. I don’t have the energy to keep my voice down.

I watch as the desk clerk sputters and gives me a weak smile. “Let me get my manager.” She scurries away before I can apologize. I let my head fall to my forearms crossed on the desk. My bag slides from my shoulder, making a loud thump to the ground—not that I give a damn right now.

I can feel a small crowd of people filling in the counter space around me but I make no effort to move. I’m not risking anyone else swooping up any possible rooms for me to stay in.

I hear as someone else begins to check in. “Kate Samuels. We’re checking into the honeymoon suite.”

Before I can hear anything else, the first clerk clears her throat. I slowly lift my head. The moment I see her face, I know she doesn’t have anything good to say.

“I—I’m so sorry, Miss Knight.”

I see who I could only assume is the manager standing right behind her, as if waiting for me to lose my shit.

Which I almost do. I start to raise my finger when I feel someone's hand on my shoulder. I'm about to whip around and give this person a piece of my mind, too, when I see a girl that appears to be about the same age as me but with long, dark brown hair. She has soft, brown eyes. I can see a touch of mascara that's pooled at the edges of her eyes and something in me wants to reach out and wipe it away.

What the hell? I ask myself. But before I can think too much more on it, she speaks up.

"Hey, are you here for the Knight wedding?" Her voice is soft, smoothing out my rough anger. She reminds me of some of the models I've photographed, but I can tell she's nothing like them. One look at her tells me she's got a soft heart. Her brown eyes are inviting, making me want to get close to see what she's hiding behind her stunning beauty.

"Um, yeah. I'm the photographer. But they don't have my suite."

"You—you could stay with me?" I can hear her trepidation as she says the words.

"Really?"

"I mean, yeah." She shrugs and I see a tall guy come walking up behind her, gently placing his hand on her shoulder. And I can tell in this instant there is something more between them. Or, more so something more that he wants. The way she ever so slightly tenses up tells me she's not on the same page as him.

"What's going on?" he asks, looking between us.

“Her—” She looks at me, realizing she doesn’t even know my name.

“Dakota,” I interject.

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“Dakota’s reservation got lost and they don’t have any more rooms to stay in.”

“Oh, shit,” he mutters, and I can see the gears working behind his eyes. And he’s not exactly thrilled.

“Yeah, so I offered to share my room with her. I mean, I have a double and I don’t really need a double.”

I watch as the guy leans in toward her to say something. I try to hear them without being obvious, but I’m interrupted by someone else patting a hand on my back.

“Dakota! You made it!” I recognize Austin’s voice immediately and feel my shoulders relax.

Ever since we were kids, Austin and I were close. Closer than any of our other friends and their siblings. And as we grew up, we grew even tighter. We needed to when our parents didn’t approve of our career and lifestyle choices. Not only did our parents find it unorthodox that I preferred women over men to share my bed with, but they also thought I was reckless to choose a life as a freelance photographer.

Then, Austin got hit with the disappointed parents. He also went down the artist path—as a kickass tattoo artist.

As much as it sucks to not have supportive parents, at least we have each other. Whether it is a two a.m. phone call where I end up in a mental breakdown because the entitled model doesn’t think she needs to listen to me, no matter how many times I tell her that I am her boss when there is a camera involved. Or it is a six a.m. series

of text messages from Austin, telling me all about how he proposed to Kate.

And now, here we both are, standing in this luxurious Vegas hotel so my brother can say “I do” to the only person he’s loved possibly more than me.

“Is this the famous Dakota?” The sweet voice draws me back to the moment in front of us.

Austin has fully wrapped his arm around my shoulder now and I see the woman I recognize from photos as Kate walking toward me with her arms outstretched. She’s just as tall as Austin, with long blonde curls and wearing a pink sundress. If not for her arms and legs covered in tattoos I would wonder what they have in common.

At first glance they’re total opposites, until you learn she’s also a tattoo artist. Because of my busy schedule, extensive traveling, and their quick engagement, we haven’t gotten the chance to meet yet.

“Dakota, this is my fiancée Kate. Kate, this is my older sister Dakota.” He smiles as Kate leans in for a hug. I’m a bit taken aback, but I accept the embrace.

“It’s so great to meet you! Austin has told me so much about you. We truly appreciate you offering to take our wedding photos.”

“It’s the least I can do.” I turn back to the chipper receptionist who clears her throat. She was surprisingly patient through all our introductions.

“Sorry, but have we figured out a plan of how to move forward with the room?” she asks, looking between me and my possible savior. Shit, I haven’t asked her name.

“You’re sure you don’t mind?” I look at her again.

“Nope, the room is under Violet Roy.” She steps forward as the receptionist types it in.

“Yes, your room is ready, and we’d like to offer a discount for the troubles.” She smiles and hands Violet and I our room keys.

The man behind her is glaring. What the hell is his problem? He clearly isn’t the boyfriend if she isn’t staying with him this weekend.

“Lemme introduce you to everyone else.” Austin smiles as a bellhop takes our luggage.

His other friends are introduced as Grace and Harry. Grace is a petite Asian brunette with bold lips and a great sense of style. I’ll have to ask her later where she likes to shop. Harry has his arms around her, a tan complexion, and a variety of tattoos up and down his arms. The guy behind Violet is Grant. He shakes my hand with a subtle eye roll as I decide I don’t like him very much. He is only a few inches taller than me and the most striking thing about him is his hazel eyes. But I’m not concerned with him anymore. I don’t have the energy to figure out what his deal is. I only have the energy for crashing into a bed.

“So, how about we all freshen up and then head down the street for dinner?” Austin chimes in.

I can’t help but let out a loud groan.

“What, Dakota. You don’t eat anymore?” Austin teases.

“I eat. But I also sleep. And right now, I need sleep.” I start toward the elevator, not even waiting for them to catch up to me.

“Fine, take a nap. Meet us for dinner in about an hour?” Austin punches the round button, illuminating the twentieth floor button.

Again, I roll my eyes. “Don’t forget us peasants down here on eighteen.” I playfully push past Austin, smacking the button with my index finger.

The elevator jolts and started rising. I can feel my vertigo starting to hit but I push it down. I am not about to explain to a group of strangers how I always want to curl up in a ball when riding an elevator.

I waste no time pushing out and into the hallway as soon as the doors slid open. “1802...1802,” I keep muttering to myself as I lead most of the pack down the hallway. Grace and Harry find their suite, barely waving good-bye before slipping into their room. Grant finds his room next to theirs and I watch as he stares after Violet, expecting her to follow him.

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I actually thought she was when she pauses, letting me go ahead to find the room. But as I slide the key card into the slot and hear the little beep as the green light illuminates, I feel her presence just behind me. I push open the door and step in, fully ready to just go collapse on the first bed I get to.

Except, there is only one bed.

One. Bed.

Two people. Twostrangers.

“What the fuck,” I deadpan, dropping my bag to the floor.

Violet isn't paying attention as she comes crashing into my back. “Oh, shit. I'm sorry,” she starts, but I feel her breath hitch when she realizes why I stopped. “This was supposed to be a double. I—I distinctly remember talking to them on the phone and they said they only had doubles left. I didn't want to pay for a whole extra bed, but they said they wouldn't charge me for the extra. So I just took it. But this isn't a double.”

I can already tell that Violet has a tendency to ramble when she gets nervous or is trying to figure something out.

“I'm sure there's a pullout bed in the couch.” But as the words come out, I know there isn't. One look at the tiny sad excuse of a couch tells me that there is nothing below those cushions.

“The bed is big enough,” Violet offers, but it sounds more like a question.

“Um. Yeah. Sure.”

This isn’t going to be awkward at all. Sure, I’ve slept with straight girls before. But I’ve always known them longer than two hours. And there isn’t much sleeping usually.

“Well, I know you want to take a nap and I need to freshen up so...” She trails off as she turns her attention to the bathroom.

“Yeah, sounds good,” I mumble before picking up my bag and throwing it on the bed.

As soon as she slips into the bathroom, I peel off my leggings, slip my bra off, and dive under the sheets. At least the bed is comfortable.

I don’t even hear the shower turn on before I fall asleep. I feel myself stir awake when I hear the bathroom door creak open. I pry one eye open and see as Violet tip-toes to where she’d left her bag, in nothing but a towel.

Her long, dark hair is sticking to her bare back, and I can see where it has soaked through the towel. I watch as she leans over, digging through her bag with one hand while the other holds her towel in place. Her back is covered in a variety of tattoos, and I wonder if Kate or Austin had done them. And if I look just low enough, I can see where the towel rises up the back of her thighs, barely hanging just below what I can only imagine was a very round...

I don’t finish my thought before Violet stands up and spins around. I snap my eyes shut, hoping she didn’t see that I was just staring at her, wondering what she looks like without the towel.

Violet

I get dressed in the oversized bathroom of our hotel room. I was pretty sure Dakota was waking up and I didn't need her waking up to me half naked. My shower wasn't as long as I would've liked, but I need to run to the store before we go out to dinner. Grant has already texted me twice, asking if I could stop at his room before dinner, but I ignore them.

He is disappointed that I'd rather share a room with a stranger than him. I don't know how to tell him I just need some space right now. Between spending half the flight glued to the bathroom floor and finding out I am sharing a bed with a beautiful stranger, this trip is turning out to be different than I expected.

Kate has texted me, thanking me for offering to room with Dakota. I know it was an added stress that she didn't need. There are so many opportunities for photos that Dakota might miss if she was in a different hotel. Plus, who knows if the other hotels even have any room this weekend. It is a small due I am willing to pay for my best friend, and splitting the cost of the room doesn't hurt either.

I slip on a pair of shorts, a t-shirt, and sneakers before quietly opening the hotel room door. I race to the elevator, pressing the button an obscene amount of times and racing to the gift store I spotted on the way in. I head to the back, find what I need, and head to the registers.

"Oh! A baby? So exciting!" the cashier exclaims a little too loudly as she rings up my tests.

"They're not for me!" I say panickedly and look around as if I'm committing a crime. I feel nauseous just buying them.

"Oh," I must look crazy because the cashier doesn't say another word to me as she

checks me out. I take the paper bag and race back to the room. Hopefully, Dakota will still be sleeping and I'll have a chance to take the test before she wakes up.

"Hey, you going somewhere?" Dakota's voice startles me as I walk in the room.

"Oh! No, I'm coming back actually." I turn around, shocked to see Dakota in the shortest of t-shirts. It is a plain black tee that falls just to her thighs.

"Is it time for dinner already?" she asks, and I force my eyes back to her face instead of her long, tan legs. Her soft colored hair is puffed out around her face, proof she had a great nap.

"No, uh, I just needed to run and get something," I say cautiously. I don't know why I am being so cagey, it is just a pregnancy test. I just rather the least amount of people knowing about this, the better. I hold the brown paper bag to my chest.

"Okay, is it cool if I shower?" Dakota asks, yawning. As she reaches to cover her mouth, her shirt drifts up ever so slightly and I get a glimpse of red lace panties.

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My cheeks turn just as bright. “Yeah, go ahead.” I clear my throat. What is wrong with me? There is something so fascinating about Dakota it is hard not to notice her.

* * *

Dakota emerges from the bathroom wearing something that can only be described as a thirst trap. Her heeled boots are the first things I see. Showing off her bare legs, a tight leather mini skirt hugging her curves, and a red cinched top that accentuates her breasts. She’s holding it up around her neck and smiles at me.

“Can you tie this for me?” I nod and step forward.

As I tie it around her neck, I can’t help but notice she’s not wearing a bra. Her back is almost completely exposed except for this thin fabric. I get a whiff of her shampoo that the hotel definitely didn’t provide. Her light blue hair is washed and curled.

“Thanks.” She smiles.

And again, I feel the creep of the heat rising to my cheeks. “I like your top,” I blurt and immediately feel embarrassed for myself.

“Thanks. I got it from one of the models I photographed last week in New York.”

“Oh, really?” I’d heard that she was in New York, but I hadn’t heard why.

“Yeah, I was photographing a fashion show all week.”

“That sounds so exciting.”

I watch as she nods before sweeping her soft blue tendrils back before shaking her head. I’d been so focused on her simple yet mesmerizing movements that I almost missed her question.

“So, what do you do for a living, Violet?”

Isn’t that a loaded question. “I, uh.” I stutter for a moment. It is hard to explain what I do without explaining why. “I work at Eternal Port Valley University Campus admissions doing clerical work to pay for classes.”

“Oh that’s awesome, how do you like it?”

“It’s okay, I don’t hate it, but it’s not necessarily what I want to do for my life.” I shrug.

“What do you want to do with your life?” Dakota asks but it isn’t in a parental way or an accusing way, just more out of curiosity.

“I’m not sure,” I say honestly.

“It’ll come to you eventually, you got time.” She smiles encouragingly and I nod.

When Dakota starts playing with her camera, I finally am able to take a few minutes to take the test. Waiting those three extra minutes, though, is a nightmare. I pace back and forth in the tiny hotel bathroom, wishing the little pink line—or lines would just show up already. Confirm what I already know.

But I won’t get the chance to check it right away because Grant is now knocking on the bathroom door.

“Vi, hey, you all right in there?” I can hear the same concern that was in his voice back on the airplane.

“Yeah. I’ll be out in just a second,” I call out, glancing between the closed door and the white plastic stick on the counter. It still hasn’t given me an answer yet. Shit, is this a dud? Am I going to have to risk another trip to the gift shop?

“Okay, everyone is out here,” I hear Grant say, dropping his tone.

“Oh, all right.” I sigh and grab the test, dropping it into the trash can before throwing some tissues over it to hide it. The last thing I need is someone finding it and knowing the answer before me.

“Hey, guys.” I smile nonchalantly as I walk out of the bathroom. Grant raises an eyebrow but doesn’t say anything.

“Hey, you ready?” Kate says excitedly. She is wearing a skin tight white dress with a dollar store veil and tiara. Tonight after dinner is her bachelorette party. We’d opted for tonight rather than tomorrow because we all knew how trashed we’d be getting tonight. Clearly I’ll either be sipping water all night or I’ll need to sneak back to the room and check the test.

“Heck, yes.” I grab my ‘maid of honor’ sash and we all head to the elevators.

“You okay?” Grant whispers, leaning in behind me, almost scaring the crap out of me.

“What? Yes, I’m fine.” I shrug him off.

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“You seem off,” he says, studying me again from behind his round rimmed glasses. They are something that originally pulled me to him, something about the way he looks like that nerdy hot professor.

“Just tired from the flight.” I push into the elevator first, desperate to get away from his worrying. It wouldn’t take a genius to figure out what was wrong with me.

I end up shoulder to shoulder with Dakota and her very low cut top. Why the hell am I noticing that? I quickly look up and pretend to be interested in the ceiling until I realize it’s all mirror. I am looking at an even deeper view of Dakota’s chest. I close my eyes and hope this ride will be over soon.

Dakota

I will admit it’s weird attempting to fit in with Austin’s friends when I haven’t seen him in so long. They’ve all been kind, especially Violet who really saved my ass. It’s only Grant who keeps glaring at me like I stole the last piece of chocolate cake he was saving for lunch. Violet has mentioned she’s single but from the way Grant looks, I can tell that’s her choice not his. I’ll have to ask Austin about it later, there’s probably a good story there. I brush the thoughts aside, focusing on my double rum and coke. I am supposed to be nursing it, not wanting to get too blasted tonight. But I find myself nearly guzzling it.

“Anyone else ready for more drinks?” I call out while simultaneously trying to get the server’s attention.

Austin and Kate decided they wanted a fancy dinner tonight—not one of the countless

buffets on the strip. Unfortunately, that came with a price tag larger than my groceries. Fortunately, Austin wasn't letting me pay a penny.

"Careful now, I'm not exactly Elon Musk. I do have a limit on funds," Austin teases, but also looks for the server.

"I'll pay for my own," I quip, not wanting to risk being cut off.

I can't figure out why I can't get my mind—and eyes—off of Violet. Of course, part of it is her drop-dead beauty. But there is something more. Maybe it is because she doesn't remind me of any of the women I've been with recently. More so, bouncing between.

I can't afford to get tied into a relationship. First, I travel too much. Second, most of the women I meet are far too jealous to be okay with me photographing other women. Maybe that's because I've gotten into the habit of sleeping with them after photographing them.

A habit I was ready to break, if I am being honest.

My attention is brought back to the table when everyone lets out a loud cheer. Everyone is holding up a shot glass that has appeared at some point of my introspection. I grab mine, joining them.

"To the happy couple!" Grace calls out.

"Here, here!" everyone says in unison.

"And here's to you two never growing bored of each other," Violet adds in, growing a mischievous grin.

Austin and Kate both laugh and initiates for us to all throw back the shot. I freeze, mid toss, when I see Violet's neck elongate.

"Damn," I mutter to myself and shake my head.

"You okay?" Austin whispers, leaning in. I nod and put on a smile, forcing my eyes away from Violet. It's not like I don't spend most of my time around beautiful women. I can be cool, but there is something different about her that I can't quite place.

"Are you ready for your bachelorette party?" Violet smiles to Kate.

"Hell yes!" She throws back another shot and kisses Austin on the mouth a little longer than I'd like to witness. But hey, they are in love.

"Let's go." Grace grabs Violet and Kate's hands and they head out of the restaurant for the night. They had been kind enough to invite me to join them but I knew I'd feel more comfortable sticking with Austin for his bachelor party. He isn't exactly the stripper type and I don't want my future sister in law feeling like I am keeping an eye on her or anything. Every woman should get to enjoy their night out.

"Where are we headed?" I ask Austin, Grant, and Harry.

"We're gambling in the casino for a bit and then headed to a show," Harry says, sipping his drink. He is a bit quiet from what I noticed, only speaking when spoken to directly. Grant has stopped glaring at me for the most part but still isn't looking to start any friendship bracelets with me either.

Austin pays for the dinner and we grab some drinks along the way to drink at the casino. They are those tall slushy cups that were more sugar than alcohol but I'm not complaining. I add a second shot to mine to make it worthwhile and sip along the

way. We are headed to a different hotel with a bigger casino than the one in ours. I didn't know Austin liked to gamble, but I guess that's what happens when you spend most of your time in different states. Sometimes I wonder what my life would be like if I finally chose a state and set down some roots but I don't know if I am cut out for that life.

"You in?" Grant asks, pulling me from my thoughts.

"Yes." I push my chips forward. I still don't know exactly how this game works, but I am not about to let a group of guys know that. I don't want anything 'mansplained' to me.

"And the winner is eighteen black!" the dealer announces, which takes me a moment to realize it's me.

"Beginner's luck," Grant mumbles and throws his cards down as he steps back from the table. Harry pulls him aside to go play something else while I collect my winnings. Apparently I won three hundred from a game I still don't understand, but hey, that is Vegas.

"Slots?" Austin asks.

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“Sure.” I nod. We take a seat together at a couple of machines that look empty. I don’t know the system for picking out the machines but Austin seems to know what he is doing. A waiter comes over asking if we had enough to drink and we order a round of Jack and Cokes.

“So, what’s the story with Violet and Grant?” I am trying to sound like a curious sister and not like I am pining for her.

“What do you mean?” Austin isn’t paying nearly enough attention to see straight through me. He is sloshed. But that means perfect timing for me to ask him questions.

He can’t keep a secret to save his life. He’s told me that was one of the reasons he proposed so quickly. He just couldn’t wait and couldn’t hold it in.

“Like, are they together?”

Austin shrugs. “Honestly, your guess is as good as mine. Kate said that she thought they were but then Violet started pulling away from Grant more. I think Grant wants more than Vi does, and they just haven’t figured out their balance yet.”

“How long have they been trying to?” I’m sure my intentions are obvious but I’m thankful he doesn’t realize.

“I don’t know, it feels like forever. But maybe just a few months?” he answers as a question and I take that as my cue to leave him alone. I don’t want him to remember any of this tomorrow. I hand him his drink and we both take a hearty sip.

“Where’d the boys go?” He stands up and he is a bit wobbly on his feet.

“Why don’t you wait here and I’ll find them?” I suggest.

“Okay.” He nods.

I walk around the perimeter of the casino, looking for them. I mean they wouldn’t have gone far, right? Looking through the rows and rows of slot machines and crowded poker tables, I don’t see them anywhere. I wonder if it would’ve been easier to just call them, but I am pretty trashed myself so that isn’t the first thing to come to mind. I start walking back although I swear I feel like that scene in the Percy Jackson movies where I can’t find my way out of Vegas and time is standing still. I walk a few times in a circle until I finally find Grant, Harry and Austin at the bar at the end of the casino.

“Where have you been?” Grant growls when I reach them.

“Dakota!” Austin cheers and throws his arms around me. Yup, my little brother is drunk.

“I got lost looking for you guys.” I frown.

“I called them when you didn’t come back,” Austin explains. He hops on the barstool, almost falling on his ass and climbs up a second time trying to sip his drink.

“I really hope that’s water,” I say, looking at the clear liquid.

“It is.” Harry nods.

“What?! No wonder it doesn’t taste good.” Austin makes a face.

“No, you need to drink some. Or you’re cut off, man.” I give him my best big sister look and he frowns.

“You can’t be too hungover tomorrow, man,” Harry reminds him. Austin sighs and sips the rest of his water.

“We were about to head to the show if you’re ready,” Grant says snippily. What the hell is his problem?

“I’m ready.” I clench my jaw. It isn’t worth it to get into anything tonight. Tonight is about Austin and him only.

Violet

When we all started to split our ways, I thought it would be the perfect time for me to sneak up and check the results. It is killing me. I need to know.

But what am I going to do when I did find out? And what if it is...

I can’t think about that until I see how many lines were on the test.

But apparently, I won’t be getting to slip off anytime soon.

“Come on! It’s time for Gatsby’s!”

I look at my phone, seeing it is almost time for our reservation.

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Who has to make reservations for a bachelorette party?

Gatsby's Cocktail Lounge was the only request Kate had for her bachelorette party. She'd heard from one of her clients that it was a "must" for any Vegas trip. So I made a reservation for us. Being honest, I am excited. But also, I am not excited about possibly missing out on their famous cocktails.

"We have a couple of minutes," I blurt. When everyone turns and looks at me, my face starts burning red. "I, uh—I just need to go grab something from the room real quick."

Kate's attention was glued to her phone. "Hurry up, I already set up the Uber."

I don't waste another second, practically running to the elevator and smashing the button relentlessly. By the time I make it to the room, I am out of breath. I fly into the bathroom, frantically digging in the trash to find the test. Grabbing it, I have a sinking feeling in my stomach. With the test in my left hand, I search for the empty box, flipping it over to read the instructions again.

Disregard any results after ten minutes.

"Fuck," I cry, dropping them into the trash can. I am going to have to get another test.

Even that is going to have to wait until later. My phone starts vibrating and with one look, I see Kate's name pop up.

"Hey—" I start but Kate interrupts me.

“Where are you? The Uber is here, and he can’t wait forever.” Kate is stressed.

“I’m coming right now.” The moment I answer the phone, I’ve already started making my way down.

“Good,” Kate says just before ending the call.

Thankfully, I make it to the elevators just as it is making its way back down. I squeeze in between the just married couple and the two men in suits who don’t even bothering hiding that they are both staring at my boobs. I let out a disgusted sigh and roll my eyes before turning away.

“Men,” I mutter.

The moment the elevator makes it to the lobby, I am out, rushing to find Kate and Grace.

* * *

All of our jaws drop when we enter the lounge. The ceiling is covered in purple balloon lights and there are people all around. Grace finds the host, letting her know who we are. We follow her through a maze of curved couches and around the full circle of the bar, to the back of the lounge. The music is loud, already encouraging us to start dancing. But first, drinks. Kate has also told us about the secret menu, which apparently is not-so-secret. Just a scan of the QR code and voila.

“We have to get the Champagne Bubble Bath!” Grace exclaims.

“The what?” Kate and I ask in unison.

“It’s a drink from their secret menu. It literally comes in a bubble bath and has rubber

ducks in it!” Grace is as giddy as a girl ordering her first drink with a fake ID.

“A bubble bath?” I can’t help the way my face scrunches.

“It’s not like a literal bath. It’s a—oh, look!” Grace points between Kate and I. When we turn, we saw exactly what she is talking about.

And sure as shit, it is a little white porcelain bathtub sitting on a silver tray. There are rose petals all over and I can see the little yellow head of a rubber duck poking out of the bubbles.

When a server comes to take our drink order, Kate blurts out the drink right away.

“Would you each like to have one?”

Kate and Grace both nod their heads, leaving me the odd one out.

“Um, I’m not ready to order yet.”

“What? I thought you wanted the bath too.”

“Um, I’m just not sure. I’m not a big champagne person.” I shrug.

Kate and Grace let it go, already being absorbed into the environment. I take it as my opportunity to make my way to the bar. It is crowded and I have to wedge between two different barstools, hoping to catch the attention of anyone.

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Thankfully, the same girl who took our order makes her way to me. “Know what you want now?” She smiles at me, showing off her pearly whites.

“Um, yeah.” I shift my eyes back and forth and let out a heavy sigh. “Okay, so, my friends don’t know this but I can’t have any alcohol tonight. I don’t want to spoil the evening and it might not even be anything to worry about. But I still don’t know and I just want to be careful.” I am rambling. I am blurting my secret out to some strange woman who doesn’t have the time for it.

But she nods, understanding me. “Sprite or coke with a lime wedge?”

“Sprite, please.”

She smiles and grabs a glass, making me a faux gin and tonic. She slides it over to me and says, “We can make you our drinks as mocktails if you’d like. Just order one by name and I’ll make sure there’s no alcohol.” Again, she gives me a warm smile. “I’ll be right over with the other drinks.”

“Thank you so much.” This girl is going to be my saving grace tonight.

I head back to my friends and feel a bit of relief wash over my shoulders. At least I don’t need to worry about that for right now. Of course there is still the matter of buying a third test. At this point I should’ve bought them wholesale. I am going to be spending all of my ‘going out’ money on these stupid tests. In reality it should be something the guy should buy. But then I’d have to tell Grant the truth and I don’t think I can fathom that right now.

“Yay! You got something.” Kate smiles.

“Ahh! Look at how cute!” Grace gasps when the waitress brings over their drinks. She and Kate take a variety of photos before she touches them. I sip on my sprite slowly, pretending it’s gin which is not my favorite alcohol but it’s the price I pay for casual sex.

“I want to take it home!” Grace whispers.

“Take what?” I ask, confused.

“The bathtub.” She winks and moves her purse closer to the table.

“Grace!” Kate and I exclaim at the same time.

“Fine, fine!” She sighs, shaking her head.

“So did I notice Austin’s sister checking you out? Did something happen there?” Kate turns to face me and I feel a blush creep over my cheeks.

“W-what?” I stutter nervously.

“Oh my gosh! Something is so happening!” Kate squeals. “If you guys get married then we’ll be actual sisters!”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, let’s slow down,” I say, wide eyed.

“Are you into girls?” Grace asks. Not with a hint of judgment, more so curiosity.

“I- I don’t know,” I answer honestly. “I’ve never really met anyone that’s made me curious.” Until now. There was something about Dakota that made me innately

curious. And it's not like I ever said I was one hundred percent straight, I've always just liked who I've liked.

"You're so going to go home with her." Kate sips her drink with a huge smile on her face.

"Well, we are sharing a room," I joke.

"Let's dance!" Kate exclaims when a song she likes comes over the speakers. It is one of those annoying songs they play at every college party so by the end of the semester you have to know all the words whether you want to or not.

"You two go ahead! I'll watch the drinks," Grace decides and for a moment I panic, wondering if she'll be able to tell I'm not drinking. So in desperation, I pick out the lime, and down the rest of the drink. I even make a face for good measure and follow Kate to the dance floor.

She's wearing this tiny, skin tight, black dress that I'm a little worried is going to show off all of her if she moves too much. But of course she doesn't seem to be worried about that and decides to drop to the floor. This dress must be made out of elastic because it moves with her and she's back holding my arms and dancing with me. My dress wasn't much better, dark green with a slit up my left thigh, but that's what I get for letting Kate pick out my outfit for tonight. She thought I might want to pick up a guy but in reality, I am hoping it might catch Dakota's attention. Then again, do I really want to catch anyone's attention when I don't even know what is going on in my own body?

Kate starts grinding on me and I can't help but laugh. I know she's drunk but even if she wasn't I'm sure she'd do the same. We're dancing together and I notice some guys starting to watch. What is it about two women dancing together that make guys think they have a chance?

“Move along, boys! I’m getting married!” She flashes them her shiny ring and they make a face but disperse.

“Vultures,” I say, shaking my head.

“It’s Vegas, baby!” She’s in too good of a mood to let some men ruin her fun.

We head back to the table to check on Grace when we realize she’s not at the table. I figured she went to the bathroom or something when I see only one bathtub cup on the table. No fucking way. We can’t leave our friends alone for even a minute. She’s left a few bills to cover our drinks at least, but she is nowhere to be found.

“Where’d she go?” Kate asks.

“She stole the duck cup,” I whisper. Then it hits me. We’re close enough to the hotel that maybe Grace ran back to the room with it. Which means I’ll have enough time to do the same.

“Let’s go find her, okay?” I ask Kate. I mean it is her bachelorette party after all.

“Okay!” She throws an arm in the air and slings it around my shoulder.

We make our way toward the hotel gift shop and I ask her to wait at the candy aisle while I grab something. She makes a joke about it being condoms and I dash around the store hoping she won’t see what aisle I’m actually in.

I get to the front and of course it’s the same chipper cashier from earlier. Doesn’t she ever go home? I shoot her a look that says don’t even ask and she doesn’t say a word to me the entire interaction. I buy a few other souvenirs to hide what I’m actually buying and stash the pregnancy test in my purse. Kate’s holding a stuffed animal that looks like a beaver, three aisles from where I left her.

“Look at how cute! It says ‘loves you’ get it? ‘My beaver loves you’.” She’s hysterically laughing but I can’t help but join in. That shit is ridiculous in the best of ways.

“Let’s go, we can find you some water on the way.” We’re almost to our floor when Kate’s phone starts ringing. She’s dancing to the music, not realizing it’s her phone so I grab it from her hand and answer it.

“Hello?”

“Um, where’d you guys go?” Grace asks from the other end. I can hear the music from Gatsby’s playing in the background.

“We went to find you, we’re back at the hotel.”

“Shit, you figured me out.” She laughs.

“Yes, you little thief.” I chuckle. “Come meet us and we’ll go to the next place together.”

“Okay!” she agrees happily and I let out a sigh. I will have just enough time to pee and finally get an answer to the only question I am dying to know.

Dakota

I can’t help but wonder if I should have just gone with the girls tonight. Sure, I wanted to spend time with my brother. He is the one I know.

But I just am not having it with this Grant guy. Every time I look at him, he is scowling at me. Plus, if I join up with the girls now, I’ll actually be able to spend some time with Violet. You know, before we have to share one bed. It might be good to get to know someone for once before sleeping next to them all night.

“Austin, give me your phone.” I interrupt their conversation about something either slot or slut related. For everyone’s sake, it better be slot. We’ve already seen the comedy show and ended up back at a random casino for more gambling.

“What? Why?” Austin’s words are still slurring but he is already reaching for his phone.

“I’m going to call the girls and see where they are.”

“You bailing on us, Dakota?” Grant sneers.

“You, maybe,” I toss back. “But yeah, I’m thinking it’s time I join people more on my level. Maybe go see some naked guys or something.”

Grant tries to hide the way his eye twitch when I mention “naked guys.” I roll my eyes at him and wander off to somewhere maybe a bit quieter.

“Austin!” Kate answers the phone on the fourth ring.

“Um, no this is Dakota.”

“What?” The music from their background is blasting through the speaker. “Is Austin okay?”

“Yeah!” I nearly scream back. “I just wanted to know where you all are. I think I’m going to join you after all.”

“Hell yeah!” Kate is more than tipsy at this point. “Hang on!” I hear her call out to someone else and then I am met with a different voice on the phone.

“Hey, Dakota. Kate told me to tell you where we are.” Violet.

Damn, her voice. “Um, yeah.”

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“We just got to Tao.”

“Tao?”

“Yeah, Tao Nightclub! See you soon?” Her voice drops and I can feel her sultry tone flowing through.

“Yeah, see you soon.” I hang up before I can say anything else.

I barely pause to toss Austin’s phone back into his lap. “Behave,” I say, pointing to each of them before I am off.

Even in these boots, I still manage to make it from the casino to Tao in the Venetian without any issues.

“Hello, Sin City.” I take in my surroundings as the DJ increases the bass, eliciting a round of screams from the crowd. Everywhere I turn, there are people dancing and drinking. The girls in their skin-tight dresses with one hand in the air and the other holding their cocktail glass. This would be a paradise for me—if I wasn’t looking for one person in particular.

I work my way around the room, squeezing between couples pretty much ready to have sex right here and bachelorette party after bachelorette party. I take my time, taking in the many beautiful views and casually flirting back with some of them. I even pause for a moment, watching the girls in the bathtub. Partly because, why? Why are there bathtubs in the middle of a nightclub? And even more, why are there women in them, with nothing but rose petals? I mean, I’m not complaining.

Except one of them looks eerily close to a model I've just photographed recently. In fact, the same girl that I got this top from. On instinct, I run my hand around the nape of my neck, remembering the way Violet's fingers caught my skin on fire.

I am stuck in the thought when I hear someone call my name. It is coming from the direction of the bathtub and my heart starts racing. Is it...?

"Dakota! You made it!" Kate comes clamoring toward me with her arms wide open. I let her pull me into a hug like we'd been best friends for a lifetime already. Her energy is infecting me and I find myself finally ready to enjoy the night.

"Let's get some more drinks!" Grace comes up behind Kate with Violet beside her.

I nod, letting them lead the way to the bar. Violet is between them, seeming to be the only thing keeping Grace and Kate on their feet. They sway in opposite directions but Violet is flawless in correcting them. Flawless in her perfect green dress that hugs every curve perfectly, all the way down to the hem that barely covers her ass. And don't get me started on her breasts, perky and full, filling out her dress like a dream. If she had been anyone else, I'd have made it my mission to bring her back to bed.

"So what made you want to ditch the guys?" Violet asks over the pounding music.

"Well." I hesitate, I can tell her the truth that her guy who maybe isn't her guy was hounding me all night like I was the devil. "I just needed a change." I shrug instead.

"Well, those two are drunk off their asses." She points to Grace and Kate on the dance floor who are twerking in tiny dresses.

"They're having a good time, I can't say her groom is doing any better," I say with a chuckle.

“Did you want anything to drink?” A waitress comes over, almost pushing her tits in my face.

“Rum and coke, please.” I don’t take my eyes off Violet.

* * *

It feels like forever when Kate finally decides to call it a night. She’s a giggly mess so Grace offers to walk her to her room. Which leaves Violet and I alone just as the night club is dying down for the night.

I’m torn. I want to keep dancing. But my feet hurt, I can feel the exhaustion seeping in, and right now, I don’t want to share Violet with a slew of drunk people. I want to get her alone. See what this really is with us. If there is a “something” with us. Or if it’s my imagination.

I’m about to ask her if she wants to go grab a bite to eat somewhere when her phone starts ringing.

She pulls it out from her bra just enough to see the screen. “Ugh.” She shoves it back in her bra, letting it continue to ring.

“Everything okay?” I’m searching her face for any hints.

“Um, yeah.” I can tell she’s hesitating to tell me who it is. Which makes me jump to the conclusion that it has to be Grant. I can tell she’s been avoiding him.

So I change the subject. “How about we grab some food? There’s this huge Taco Bell Cantina and they have the huge slushy drinks there.”

“With alcohol?” Violet’s eyes light up.

“Yup.”

We start heading down the strip. It's unfortunately several hotels down but worth it. We get just past the Paris hotel when Violet's phone starts ringing again. This time, she pulls it completely out, staring at the screen and debating on whether she wants to answer it or not. She doesn't make her decision in time. The moment the call ends, a text pops up on her screen and I feel the tension shift.

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“Everything okay?” I ask again, this time feeling the worry seep in.

“Um.” Violet attempts to hide the screen from me.

“Vi, what is it?” The nickname slips out before I realize it.

“Austin is missing.”

My eyes go wide and my stomach flips—which is not good for the alcohol. I feel sick and suddenly sober. “What—what do you mean he’s missing?”

“Grant and Harry can’t find him.”

“What the hell? How can they lose him?”

Violet’s phone starts ringing again and this time, Violet answers right away. She puts him on speaker and we attempt to find somewhere quiet enough to hear him.

“What do you mean he’s missing?” Violet immediately starts in.

We hear Grant sigh and a muffled voice in the background. “He’s just...gone.”

“Well, how did that happen?”

“We were about to head back to the hotel but we were hungry as fuck. And the only place still open seemed to be the Taco Bell down the street. So we started walking that way. Harry wanted some water so we all went into Walgreens. We went different

directions and that's when we couldn't find him. He up and disappeared."

"In the middle of Vegas?" Violet deadpanned.

Another sigh. "Yeah."

I can hear the stress in Grant's voice and despite how much he irks me, I have other priorities. Like how in the hell does my brother just go missing and how the fuck do we find him in the middle of Vegas. "Did he say there was anywhere he wanted to go that you guys didn't?" I chime in.

There's silence for a minute before Grant responds. "Dakota. I didn't know you were there." His voice is a mixture of disappointment and surprise—like I wasn't supposed to find out. "Who else is with you two?"

"Just the two of us," Violet responds for us.

"So Kate isn't?"

"Nope." Violet rolls her eyes.

"Where is she?"

"Grace took her back to the hotel."

"Did they make it there?"

"Yes," I answer this time. "They texted us when they got there."

"Good."

“Do you think he went back to the hotel?” I ask.

“I don’t think so. He was pretty adamant that he was starving and not ready to end the night.”

“Do you think he went to Taco Bell without you?”

“We’re heading that way now.”

“Okay, we can look in the hotels on our way back up the strip,” Violet says, turning around and going back the way we just came. “Get us some food while you’re there,” Violet tells Grant.

“Um, sure.”

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“Don’t judge me, I’m fucking hungry.”

“We are too,” Grant replies, too quickly. He sounds irritated but sighs again. “What do you want?”

“A twelve-pack of soft tacos.” Violet ends the call before Grant says anything else.

I pull my phone out and check my messages for the first time in hours. Nothing. I have a feeling he won’t answer, but I call Austin anyway. When he doesn’t answer, I send him a string of texts before trying to call again. We’re walking in the Paris hotel, looking at every machine we can possibly see. These casinos don’t make it easy. It’s just a maze of slot machines and tables. But we make our way around twice, checking the bars too. Nothing. So we head through the Paris shops and into Bally’s. This casino is even more hectic. It is just a rectangular room but the machines feel more clustered.

“Is Austin even a gambler?” Violet asks me.

“Honestly, not that I know of. I mean, Vegas is all about gambling, even if you’re not so maybe. But I don’t feel like he’s here.”

I’ve called him a few more times, about every five minutes. I’m exhausted and now pissed off. When I thought about Violet and me spending more time together, this is not what I had in mind.

“Look, neither of us feel like he’s in a casino. Why don’t we just go back to the hotel and check in their room?”

“Kate’s there though. We don’t want to worry her.”

“She’s probably dead ass asleep.”

“And if she isn’t?”

Violet shrugs. “We’ll just tell her that we’re checking in on her before we go back to our room.”

I nod my head. “Yeah, let’s do that.”

We make our way out of Bally’s, sluggishly making our way back to the Palazzo. I think at this point, we’re both on auto-pilot. We’re limping a bit from these shoes. But we make it into the hotel, to the elevator, and up to the top floor, where Kate and Austin’s honeymoon suite is. We’d stopped at the front desk, getting a key. Thankfully the guy at the desk didn’t care enough to check either of our IDs when we said Kate’s name.

Luckily, these hotel doors aren’t like a lot of the other ones I’ve heard about in horror stories. It is quiet, letting us into their room with just a soft click.

The room is pitch black but the moment our eyes adjust, we see the lump of covers in the bed. The large lump. That belongs to two people.

“He’s right fucking here,” I hiss at Violet. I see her give me a look of irritation.

We back out of the room and the moment the door closes, I let the words fall from my mouth. “Those fucking dumbasses. They were so damn convinced he wasn’t here. And he’s right there, sleeping next to his fucking fiancée. We just ran around half the damn strip looking for him.” I know I am being dramatic but I am pissed. I don’t function well when I’m tired. Hell, let’s face it, I’m a bitch when I’m exhausted and

don't have coffee.

"For fucking real," Violet responds as she calls Grant.

"He's not here," Grant answers the phone.

"Yeah, because he's here."

"Where's here?"

"In his hotel room. With Kate. Dead ass asleep."

Violet

"YES!" I shout as the single line pops up on the test. Not pregnant. Thank the freaking lord. I wrap up the test tightly in toilet paper and toss it in the garbage can.

"You okay in there?" Kate calls and I realize my blunder.

"Yes, just thought I was getting my period but I'm not," I lie.

"That's great! We can get you laid." She giggles. I loved drunk Kate, it isn't much different than sober Kate except she is more giggly.

We meet back up with Grace and head to the nightclub. This time I order myself a Jack and Coke and enjoy the warm whiskey rushing down my throat. Good lord, I missed alcohol. It will take some time to catch up with my friends but I will pace myself. I still have to climb into bed with Dakota later. Damn, that sounds dirtier than I thought it would. Suddenly I am blushing at the thought of the two of us in bed together.

“Who wants to do shots?” I ask the girls and they cheer, throwing up their arms with a woo.

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“Party girl Violet’s coming out?” Grace jokes.

“Maybe.” I wink. I was a little bit of a party girl my first few years of college. I have toned down for the most part now, but every now and then I like to let loose.

We’re about to do shots when Kate’s phone starts ringing. “Dude! That’s your phone!” I tell her and she giggles, answering it with a slurred hello.

“It’s for you!” She giggles and pushes the phone toward me. I take it, confused, but then I hear Dakota’s voice on the other end. It’s too loud to understand her completely, especially with Kate and Grace making kissy noises in my face.

“Come meet us! We’re in Tao nightclub!” I say, realizing she wants to meet up with us. My stomach does a flip as she says she’s on her way. This girl is suddenly giving me all kind of new feelings.

* * *

When we finally find Austin with Kate, the sun is coming up. Harry calls it a night with Grace, who’s already asleep in her room, and I can tell Grant wants to hang out but I give the I’m tired excuse. I don’t know if he buys it but he doesn’t press me on it. The truth is, I want more time with Dakota. She’s been so flirty all night but I am torn. Maybe this is just how she is, I am out of my depth when it comes to flirting with women. How am I supposed to know when they are flirting with me or they are just being nice? I am trying to flirt but I am worried it isn’t coming across right. Then again, she hasn’t taken her eyes off me all night so I assume that is a good sign.

“You coming to bed?” she asks as we walk down the hallway. “Shit, that sounded so much dirtier than I intended.”

“I’m not really tired.” It isn’t a lie. I am still a little tipsy and drunk off the adrenaline of her.

“Want to come with me? I was thinking of getting some photos of the sunrise.”

“I’d love to.” I nod. Then I look down at my dress. “Can I change first?”

“Of course.” She chuckles. “I will too, these heels are killing me.”

“They’re super cute though,” I admire. They’ve shown off her incredibly toned calves all night. I glance at them again as she unlocks the hotel room.

“Thank you, they were a gift at a photoshoot last year,” she says, bragging a bit.

“You do a lot of fashion shoots?” I ask curiously as I paw through my suitcase.

“Yeah, it’s what pays the bills,” she says, shrugging. I glance back at her and she’s slipping out of the top I tied her into. I blush as her back is completely bare as she puts on another t-shirt.

I grab a pair of leggings and a crop top, I was going to head to the bathroom but now I didn’t want to. If Dakota can be bold, so can I. I don’t check to see if she’s looking at me, but I slip my dress off, letting it fall to the floor. I’m wearing a bra and panties that have more coverage than some of my swimsuits but I still feel naked. I change a little quicker than normal and toss on my sneakers, my feet thanking me.

“Ready?” Dakota asks. She’s wearing a similar outfit with her camera strapped over her shoulder.

“All set.” I nod.

I let Dakota take the lead since she seems to have a spot in mind. We walk down to the elevators, head to the bottom floor and we head outside. It is severely empty compared to how it was just a few hours ago. We walk to the right, clearly she’s looking for something in particular but I don’t ask. Part of me wants to be surprised. She leads me up to a walkway across the strip and stops.

“I thought it might be a nice spot to catch the sunrise,” she explains, pointing to the view ahead of us. With the hotels and the street, it would definitely make for an artsy photo.

“Okay.” I nod.

“Now we wait.” She checks her phone. “Sunrise is in fifteen minutes, that okay?”

“Yeah.” I smile.

She takes a seat against the railing and turns on her camera. I don’t know much about what she’s doing but it looks like she’s setting up for the perfect shot. The sky is dark with a hint of light peeking out from behind the buildings. There are people heading back to their hotels for the night, women with no shoes or carrying them, and men holding drinks claiming they can keep going. I take a seat next to Dakota and she smiles.

“You ever model?” she asks and I scoff.

“You’re joking, right?”

“No, I’m serious,” she insists.

“No, I don’t model.” I laugh. “Is that a line?”

“Do you want it to be?” She winks and I look away blushing. She points her camera at me and I hold up a hand.

“What are you doing?”

“Can I take your photo?” Dakota lowers the camera with a soft smile. I am putty from it.

“S-Sure,” I stutter.

Dakota stands up and offers her hand. I take it hesitantly. She interlocks her fingers with mine and I can’t help but notice how easily they fit together. She leads me to the middle of the bridge, holds my hand out and lifts the camera with the other.

“What do I do?” I ask nervously.

“Be yourself.” She smiles, and I feel an ease. A smile softens my face and I try to relax. She holds my hand in front of the camera, trying to go for some kind of angle like we’re both in the frame. I don’t know how it looks but I try not to overthink anything. She wants natural, so I focus on Dakota’s bright blue curls, her dark eye makeup, and the way both still looks flawless after the night we had.

“Perfect.” She lets go of my hand and I instantly miss the connection. “Come see.” She waves me over to behind the camera and shows me a bunch of photos that actually make me look pretty good.

“Wow,” I admire. It isn’t just me, the whole photo together looks so natural and amazing. The sun is rising behind me and I hadn’t even noticed.

“You ready to head back?” she asks and I nod. I want more time with her but I also

know we have brunch reservations in a few hours. Fuck, less than six hours from now. I yawn instinctively.

“Tired?” She chuckles.

“Hey, there was a long flight.”

“God, I can’t believe that was today.” It was true, we had done so much and it was in less than twenty-four hours.

We walk back to the hotel room quietly, we don’t want to be those drunk assholes making noise through the halls. When we get back to the room we are met with our bed. The one and only bed. Dakota puts her camera down and I look for something I can wear as pajamas. I’m not someone who usually slept in clothes so it feels weird to be putting clothes on to go to sleep. I find one of my oversized t-shirts to do the trick with a pair of under dress shorts.

“Do you care if I don’t wear pants? I kind of hate wearing them to bed.” I turn around to see Dakota standing before me in a crop top exposing her bare stomach and bellybutton piercing. But I only have a second to notice that because she’s wearing a pair of bright pink panties and nothing else.

“T-that’s fine.” I stutter and try to bring my eyes back to her face. God, I am as bad as a man.

“Cool.” She smiles and heads into the bathroom. I use some makeup wipes to clean my face and hop into the bed, claiming one side as my own.

I don’t know how this will work. Are we going to put up pillows? Stay on separate sides? I have a tendency to move around a lot in my sleep but I don’t want her to think I am a weirdo. Maybe it will be like when Kate or Grace and I share a bed and

have a sleepover. I am probably overthinking it because I am still thinking about the fact that she will only be wearing a thin layer of clothing. I can feel a fire between my thighs as I think about it.

“Can I hit the lights?” Dakota asks, coming out of the bathroom.

“Yeah,” I mumble and pull the comforter over me. This is the moment of truth.

Dakota shuts off the lights but with the sun up, we still had a dim light coming in from the curtains that don’t fully close. So I can see the side of her face as she climbs into bed next to me, and I hold in my breath as she moves around. Her foot touches my leg and I don’t mean to, but my eyes widen.

“I’m sorry,” she says, immediately apologizing. “I was trying not to touch you but also trying to get comfortable. I don’t know how to act.”

“Oh my gosh, me either,” I admit with a laugh. She turns to lay her head on the pillow facing me so I do the same. We’re inches apart and I can’t help but notice how pink and soft her lips look.

“I don’t mind if you touch me. Fuck, why does everything sound so dirty? I just mean I don’t mind if you touch me accidentally when I’m sleeping. It’s bound to happen and I want us to be comfortable.”

“Okay, I don’t mind either.” I nod.

“Okay, then we can both relax.” She smiles and I feel more relaxed having talked about it.

“It’s just like a sleepover,” I add.

“Exactly.”

Except neither of us closes our eyes or makes any other movements. The quiet around us suddenly becomes deafening as I become aware of how loud my breathing is. Has it always been that loud? Am I out of shape or something? Maybe I have sleep apnea. Dakota’s breathing is so light, which probably means she can hear my insanely heavy breathing. Fuck. Great, now I’m not breathing and she probably thinks I am dying. I try to steady my breathing but nothing seems natural anymore. Somewhere in the middle of my wide eyed overthinking, Dakota closes her eyes and I’m able to relax a bit. I tell myself she’s sleeping and with that, I’m able to lull myself into a deep slumber.

Violet

In the morning, I wake with my arms wrapped around Dakota’s body and her leg thrown over mine. Wide eyed, I’m immediately reminded of how pantless she is and how casual this was supposed to be. My phone buzzes on the nightstand and I reach for it, carefully untangling myself from her. She turns over but doesn’t wake so I pick up my phone and take it to the bathroom.

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“Hello?” I whisper.

“It’s me, can we talk?” Grant asks.

“Sure, I’ll come to you,” I say quietly and we hang up. I quickly brush my teeth and run a brush through my hair so I don’t look as bad as I feel. I need some coffee or a gallon of water, stat.

Grant’s waiting outside his room when I open my door and I can tell he’s in the mood to talk. I don’t blame him. I have been kind of hot and cold with him since we got here. Hell, since the plane ride. I just didn’t know what to do about our little possible problem. Now that there isn’t anything to be worried about, I am positive about what I want to say to him.

“Are you ending this?” he says as we walk toward the only Starbucks nearby.

“I am.” I nod.

“Because you know how I feel?” he asks. I know he has feelings for me, and I thought maybe I had some too, but I know now that when we aren’t having sex, those feelings are purely platonic.

“No. I like you, Grant. I just don’t feel the way you do about us.” I sigh. I know it would be easy to, we could work. But I don’t want to settle for what could work when there is so much more out there.

“Is it because of her?” he mumbles. For a second I don’t know what he means, but

then it hits me. Dakota. Have I been that obvious about my little crush?

“No, I—I’ve been thinking about it for a bit. I just wanted to be sure. I don’t want to lose you, Grant, you’re still my best friend.”

“Yeah. Of course.” He forces a smile that as his best friend, I can tell this is going to be harder on him than I originally thought. Yet another reason why you shouldn’t be friends with benefits with your best friend.

We order our coffees and we decide to get extras for the group. God knows they’ll need it after the night we had. Seven coffees later, we’re on our way back to the hotel and Grant helps me knock on everyone’s doors. Grace and Harry extend their arms and let us know they’re going back to sleep. Grant takes his coffee back to his room and offers to bring Kate and Austin’s up to their room. I take him up on it because I’m dying to sit back down and have a sip of my own before we’re expected to do things today. Heading back into the room, Dakota is still asleep so I try to creep in but the door clicks a little too loudly behind me. She sits up in bed, stretching with a long yawn. Her curly locks are in a disarray around her face, some of them flat, some of them poofy like a lion’s mane.

“Is that for me?” She perks up.

“Yeah, it’s Starbucks but it’s the best I could do.” I chuckle. It isn’t my favorite coffee, but hey--desperate times.

“I hate Starbucks but I swear this is going to be the best coffee I’ve ever had. I have such a killer headache,” she says, reaching for it. I hand it to her with some milk and sugars but she starts chugging it black.

“Damn.” My brain is like ‘name something non sexual that turns me on’.

“Sorry, I’m used to having like five minutes during shoots with no bathroom breaks.” She laughs. “I guess I could afford to sip this one.”

“We’ll hopefully have some better coffee at brunch.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot about that. Is that soon?”

“We have an 11am reservation, which back home sounded late. But now I’m wondering if they still serve brunch at 2pm,” I joke.

“I don’t blame you. At least I have time to shower beforehand, I feel so icky from all the dancing,” she says.

“You go ahead, I’ll hop in when you’re done.” I smile.

“Okay. Thanks for the coffee.” She takes it with her and heads into the bathroom.

DAKOTA

The moment the bathroom door clicks shut, I let out a heavy breath and grip the edge of the counter, staring at my reflection. My hair is a rat’s nest and I have make-up smudged in the corner of my eyes.

I peel off my crop top, letting it fall to the floor before stepping out of my panties and climbing into the shower. I turn it as high as I can possibly stand it. I need to wash off the flight, alcohol, dancing, and the way Violet’s body against mine had me aching for more. I curl my hands around my neck, dropping my head back, and groan.

Violet is off limits. Whether she is in a relationship with Grant or not—which, I’m pretty sure that’s a no-go—I still have no idea if she is even interested in any girls, especially me. I could swear she was flirting with me. And the way she smiled at me,

not my camera, but through it and straight into my soul had me begging for more. And the way she blushed when she saw me in just my crop top had me convinced she wanted more.

I let the thought of running my fingers down her skin, wrapping around her waist, pulling her close against me, letting my breath skate across her chin as I kiss my way to her lips. Her plump lips...

“Hey, you doing okay in there?” I hear Violet call out, sounding nervous and pulling me back to reality.

“Um, yeah, sorry. Just washing off the, uh, flight,” I yell back and grab the travel shampoo bottle. I am the nervous one, feeling like I’ve just gotten caught with my hand in the cookie jar, indulging myself in a sweet forbidden treat.

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I turn the water off and grab a towel. Why don't hotels ever have towels good for hair? They're either all shitty hand towels or heavy ass body towels that make me feel like my head is going to fall off.

"Shit," I mutter to myself. I didn't bring any clothes in with me. Oh, well. At least walking out of the bathroom in nothing but a towel might give me a better indication of what's going on in Violet's head.

When I walk out, I see Violet brushing through her hair with an outfit laid out on the bed. I can see already that it's a halter top and shorts.

"Oh, hey." Violet turns and her eyes flash wide for a moment.

"Yeah, sorry, I forgot my clothes." I'm searching Violet's face but she's keeping her emotions tucked away. So I suck in a breath of confidence before I walk toward Violet, not sure of what exactly I'm going to do.

She's still standing there as I get closer, hoping she isn't going to play chicken on me. I get close enough and decide to go for a kiss. At this point, I'm feeling brave—really, reckless—enough.

I'm right in front of her, leaning in when she turns ever so slightly toward the mirror again. Knowing I lost the moment to kiss her, I reach out instead, letting my hand graze against her lower back. I walk around her as my fingers brush her hip first, trailing around until I find the other side and slide past her. I pretend it was an innocent, accidental brush as I reached for my own brush.

I half expect Violet to pull away from me but she doesn't. She's pulled her lips in, like she's not sure how to respond yet. But I see a hint of something flash in her eyes as we catch each other's gaze in the mirror.

She opens her mouth and I can feel her apprehension as she debates turning toward me or running away.

Please don't run, I'm thinking over and over.

She gently sets her brush down and begins to turn toward me, her eyes trailing from mine down to my lips, then my neck, before resting on my towel-covered chest.

She moistens her lips and this is the moment. I'm sure of it. This is the moment that she steps toward me—

“Um, I'm going to go shower now.” Her voice is shaky but she's already backing away. She scoops her clothes off the bed and clutches them as she hurries to the bathroom.

“Fuck,” I mutter. I'm filled with disappointment and confusion.

“What?” Violet asks, barely turning her head over her shoulder before disappearing into the bathroom.

“Um, I'm going to go get a drink from the machine.” I blurt the first thing that comes to mind.

“Oh, okay.” Violet disappears, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

What the fuck just happened? What was that? I drop the towel and sit on the bed, sighing with defeat. Had I read her wrong? Or had I scared her?

I hear the shower turn on and begrudgingly push myself off the bed and make my way toward the closet to get my sage green sundress.

I'm so lost in my thoughts that I don't even hear the bathroom door open. And I don't see Violet until she smacks into me.

Naked.

Just like me.

And we're just two bodies, pressed against each other, frozen in place.

I reach up, sliding my hands to her hips, thinking I need to steady her. But she's just fine. In fact, her hands find my hips too. Her breasts are pressed against mine, perky and plump. And I swear I feel her nipples pebbled against mine. I'm filled with a heat traveling from my chest all the way to my center.

Slipping my hands around her waist, I pull her tighter against me and drag my eyes from her chest up to her plump lips, begging to be kissed, and then up to rest on her eyes. And it's then that I get my answer.

She wants this too.

* * *

"About damn time you two showed up." Austin grumbles and I catch the way Grant is eyeballing us. But I ignore him. Not even Grant can fuck with my good mood—great mood. Sure, it is a little awkward, trying to both hide what happened and also figure out what the next move is. But, right now, I am going to focus on the elation that was on Violet's face when my hands were on her.

“Um, sorry, we both had to take showers but the hot water sucks,” I blurt, hoping they will buy my lie.

“Oh my god, for real!” Kate blurts. “This asshole got up before me and by the time I got in the shower, it was damn near ice cold.”

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Suddenly, I worry that Violet had to take a cold shower. Ironically, I feel like I need one now.

I let myself drift off to my thoughts, letting everyone else talk around me. When our coffee comes, I feel Violet's eyes on me. She hides a smile behind her coffee cup. Brunch continues like this. We catch each other's eyes, hide a smile behind a fork full of pancakes, or a champagne flute of mimosa.

As much as I want her alone again, this secret flirting in front of our oblivious friends has the heat pooling between my thighs. And I can't wait to kiss her.

Violet

"We're going where?!" I squeal.

"To the High Roller," Dakota says like it's no big deal. And maybe to her and my friends it isn't, but I am terrified of rides. Anything that moves and goes that high isn't normal and isn't meant for people.

"Oh, you know maybe I'll just wait down here," I say nervously, looking up at the Ferris wheel.

"No, you have to come!" Everyone cheers and I swallow my nerves. I just nod, unable to speak, and they all cheer as we make our way to the ticket booth. I can't believe I am paying to have the shit scared out of me.

"Everyone ready?" Kate asks as she hands out the tickets with a smile. I can't believe

I made it this many years without telling anyone about my erratic fear of rides.

We make our way up the escalators and through the line. When we get to the front, we see that there are photographers taking those tourist photos with a green screen that you just know are going to cost an arm and a leg.

“Let’s go.” Austin pulls Kate over to the photographer and poses, going in for a kiss that is a little too gross for the rest of us.

“Want one?” Dakota asks.

“Um.” I smile weakly. I am flattered she asked me, but I am about to ruin any chance I have with her in about ten seconds of being up there.

“Let’s go.” Dakota pulls my hand, taking us past the photographers and into the open air. I have to admit, the fresh air helps my nausea, but only a touch.

The pods for the Ferris wheel are huge. And they never stop moving. Dakota keeps pulling me through the line. I look back but can’t see any of the others. They’ll catch up with us soon enough.

But we get to the front of the line, and it’s just Dakota and I. The attendant ushers us in and heads back to the line. Kate, Austin, Harry, Grant, and Grace are all jogging through the line to catch up with us but it’s too late. Our doors close just in time to see the others boarding the next pod.

We have the whole pod to ourselves and despite the vast open space, I feel like everything is closing in on me. The wheel is going so damn slow that I almost can’t tell. But the voice on the speaker is already talking about the views we’ll see and how we’ll be going five hundred and fifty feet up. I see a television that is counting each foot as we go. I try to focus on breathing instead of panicking. I feel the pod jerk

slightly as I walk around and I know that can't be a good sign. I am surely going to die on this ride. I sit down on one of two small benches, gripping the edge of the cold, red plastic. Dakota steps up right in front of me, looking with worry in her eyes before sitting beside me. She's holding her camera and I bet she's going to take some photos of how amazing the strip probably looks from up here.

"You okay?" Dakota asks as the ride continues its ascend. I'm gripping the handle next to me and squeezing my eyes shut.

"Never better," I squeak with my eye peeking open. Which was all around a terrible idea. It is bad enough to feel the climbing under my feet but to see it is a whole other thing.

"Are you afraid of heights?" Dakota asks with a whisper.

"No." I hesitate. "Just rides. Anything that is off the ground," I admit.

"Here." She stands which leads my heart to start racing.

"Are you insane!? Sit the fuck down!!" I scream.

"Here." She sits down next to me and holds out her hand. I don't hesitate in taking it and I start to feel a bit calmer.

"Come here." She holds out her arm and I sink into her. We're awkwardly holding hands with her arm wrapped around me but I don't care. It's the first time since stepping on this stupid ride that I'm not panicking.

"Thank you," I whisper.

"Don't mention it." She smells like the hotel soap but there's also whatever her

perfume is. It smells expensive and I wonder if she got it from one of her photo shoots.

“Is this thing almost over?”

“Uh, should I be honest?” she asks, chuckling nervously.

“Oh gosh, yes, please.” I nod.

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“The ride lasts thirty minutes, and we’ve been on for about four.”

“Oh my god.” I throw my hands in my face. Why the hell did I agree to this?

“Why don’t we talk about something to distract you?”

“Like what?” I doubt anything can distract me from our impending doom right now.

“How did you and Kate meet?”

“We were assigned to be partners on a project in college. We were the only two who actually completed our parts in the group and the only two in the class to pass.” I smile, thinking about how intimidating the blonde tattooed girl had been when in reality she is the nicest person I’ve ever met. It is part of why I never judge another person based on their looks.

“Okay, I thought you might have a longer story.” She chuckles.

“How’d you know you wanted to be a photographer?”

“I grew up taking photos, I was always interested in art and growing up this was the only thing I wanted to do. I thought I’d do it as a hobby and get a quote ‘real job’ but then I learned it could be my only job so I made it my mission to be able to,” Dakota explains with love in her voice. If you can’t tell from watching her, you can tell by the way she talks about it, photographing is her passion.

“Did you go to school for it?”

“No, I mean I took some classes on craft but for me at least it’s more about not overthinking it,” she explains.

“I get that.” I nod. My eyes are still closed but as she talks to me, I don’t notice the rocking anymore. All I can think about is her arm around me and our naked moment we shared this morning that neither of us brought up. Not that we’ve had a moment alone since brunch was with everyone.

“Are you feeling any better? Should I keep talking?”

“Please.” I nod.

“Okay. How about we talk about something you’ve always wanted to do but never have?”

“Bold.” I pause. This is my chance, I can tell her how I’ve never kissed another woman and she’d press her lips to mine. I was sure of it. “I-I . . .”

Instead of saying it, I open my eyes, push forward and press my lips to hers.

To no surprise, she kisses me back.

Her hand rests on my cheek as our lips move in unison.

My hand reaches instinctively for her chest and she moans into my mouth. So I know I did something right. She’s kissing my neck, and I throw my head back, keeping my eyes closed. This is bliss. Her hands brush lightly against my chest and down to my waist. We’re both barely on the bench but turned as much as we can to touch each other. Our lips crashing against each other’s as we tune out everything else going on.

It’s only when the door opens and the man yells at us for kissing that we realize the

ride's over. Gathering ourselves, our unbuttoned shirts, and our dignity that is long gone, we get out of the ride. Our group is still on so luckily they aren't witness to what just happened.

"So that was..." I start.

"A great ride." Dakota winks and I smile.

We stand in silence for a few minutes before Dakota holds out her hand and we link fingers. It feels natural, like we are meant to hold hands. She starts walking so I follow, I glance back at our friends who are somewhere on the ride. We at least have our phones on so it isn't like we'll be lost like Austin was last night. Dakota and I walk along the cobblestone road. I don't know where we're headed and I don't ask. She seems to have a place in mind and who am I to question it?

"I thought we could get some ice cream," she says after a few minutes as we approach a Ghirardelli ice cream shop.

"I love ice cream." My eyes widen as I see all the flavors and toppings they have. It is like a chocolate lovers dream.

"Who doesn't?" She smiles. We grab two cones and make our way back to the ride.

"You guys got ice cream?" Kate moans.

"We can get some, babe," Austin reassures her.

"Okay!" She kisses him again.

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“How was the ride?” Dakota asks.

“It was nice.” Kate smiles, leaning into Austin.

“We were stuck with a bunch of people we didn’t know. They said there was some other couple going at it in one of the things though,” Grace says and I start coughing.

“That’s crazy, maybe they didn’t realize other people could see them?” Dakota says with a smirk into her ice cream. I am blushing profusely but it doesn’t seem like our friends know it was us.

“I guess.” Grace shrugs and they drop it. Dakota excuses herself to look in the gift shop while I finish my ice cream and the group talks about where they want to go next.

“We could get drinks somewhere?” Kate suggests.

“You’re not still tipsy from brunch?” Grant teases.

“Nope, I’m not a lightweight like some people,” she jokes back.

“All set?” Austin asks Dakota as she comes back empty handed. I guess she just wanted to look inside.

“Yup.” She nods.

“Well, why don’t we head to the mall and we can get drinks while we shop?” Grace

suggests.

“That’s a thing?” I ask, surprised.

“Here it is,” she says with a smile.

“Let’s go.” We all head across the strip, closer to the hotel where there’s a mall in the middle of the strip. It is multilevel complete with tons of stores and a few bars. You have to love Vegas.

The boys head into a gaming store so Grace, Kate, and I head into a lingerie store to find something for them. Dakota says she’d rather head back and not think about her little brother’s future wife in that way. We don’t blame her and agree to meet at the bar that sells drinks you can drink from a robot. I think it’s as cool as it sounds and I’m looking forward to it.

“How’s this?” Kate holds up a piece of string that has less coverage than a bandaid.

“Austin would go crazy,” Grace says and I agree.

I find myself pawing through the lingerie just in case. It’s not like I didn’t have sexy underwear from sleeping with Grant for so long, but I don’t necessarily want to wear something I wore with him. Not that I think Dakota and I will be sleeping together, but after that kiss, I can’t tell where exactly we stand. But I am dying to kiss her again. She is something euphoric and curiosity is eating away at me.

“Are you looking for something in particular?” a saleswoman asks me.

“No, I’m just browsing. Thank you.” I know it is her job but it makes lingerie shopping even more stressful when there is someone watching you pick it out.

“Oh my gosh, are you going to buy something?” Kate gasps.

“I-I might.” I blush.

“For Dakota?” Grace says in a hushed tone.

“Maybe.” I turn around so they can’t see how red I’m turning.

“Oh my gosh!” They both squeal.

“It’s no big deal.” I try to brush them off despite the nerves culminating in my stomach.

“It might be your first time with a woman! Of course it’s a big deal,” Kate announces.

“Thank you, I don’t think Dakota heard you.” I put back the blue one I was eyeing.

“No, come on. We’re just excited for you. You’re learning new stuff about yourself. We just want to support you.” Grace offers a hand and smiles.

“For real.” Kate nods.

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“Then I need some help because I don’t even know what to look for,” I say honestly.

“Well, you’re a woman. What would you want to see on Dakota?” Grace asks and Kate winces.

“Sorry, is this weird?”

“No, but don’t tell Austin you’re planning to bone his sister,” Kate jokes.

“Oh my gosh, no, this stays between us. Please,” I plead and they all nod.

“Here, this is simple but would look banging on you. It’s just sexy enough without being too crazy.” Grace hands me a matching bra and panty set. She is right, it is just enough for me. It doesn’t look as scary as some of the other pieces I had seen.

“Thank you.” I take it to the register and hope I can checkout before anyone else sees me with it. The last thing I want is Dakota to walk in and see me holding it. I’d much rather her see me wearing it.

Dakota

We never did get our Taco Bell before. Grant and Harry were too worried about Austin to remember Violet’s twelve-taco request. After wandering around on the strip some, making our way all the way down to Planet Hollywood, the others start bowing out. Grace is tired so naturally, Harry joins her to go back to the room. Kate and Austin are straight forward with us. They want time alone. Grant is the oddball out and I feel a slight twinge of sadness for him. But not enough to ask him to join us.

Nope.

Not after the High Roller.

I squeeze the key chain in my pocket, biting back a smile. I am not the type for souvenirs. But I had to get something to commemorate the best kiss of my life.

Violet and I split off, letting the others wait for a Lyft while we continue down the strip.

“Where the hell is it?” Violet grumbles after we’ve been walking for a bit.

“I thought it was right here.” I’m looking up at the Hard Rock guitar in frustration.

Violet lets out an exacerbad sigh. “God, I’m hungry.” She’s holding her arms around her stomach and looking irritated.

“Hey, we can’t be far from it.” I close the distance between us and run my hand up her arm.

I have to stop myself from kissing her because right now, the look in her eyes could undress me in a moment.

I inhale and bite my lip. “Let me check Google.” I let out the breath and swipe through my recent apps. I tried to memorize what was where but there was so damn much to remember. I type ‘Taco Bell’ into the map and it shows that we’re .6 miles away. In the other direction. “Um, we have to go back up a bit.”

“How far?”

“Not far.” I shrug. “Just up there.”

We'd walked right past it just after splitting off from the others. I feel like such an ass. I was too preoccupied with everything Violet to pay any damn attention to where we were. Now, we have to walk back past the creepy abandoned area, past the restaurant trying to shove dicks in our faces, and up the broken escalator just to cross the street and go back down the—you guessed it—broken escalator.

"I'm sorry," I offer when we finally find ourselves standing in front of the Cantina.

Violet brushes it off with a smile before grabbing my hand and pulling me inside. Right away, we see the wall of slushy machines. It's a beautiful rainbow of frozen juices and alcohol.

"Every Taco Bell should have this," I mutter as I stand in awe. "I don't even know what flavor to get."

"All of them," Violet says and I'm sure she's joking until I look at her. She's grinning like a kid but she's serious as hell.

"We couldn't..." I start.

"Why not?" Violet gives me a mischievous look. We're next up and Violet confidently steps forward and literally proceeds to order every single flavor. We watch as they take the tall twisted souvenir cup and work their way down the line, making a layer of each flavor. It's beyond crowded and there's a DJ blasting dance music throughout. We manage to order a pack of tacos from the kiosk and make our way upstairs. There's a crowd of people dancing with a slushy in one hand and the other drunken hand raised in the air.

Violet grabs my hand, pulling me into the middle of the group. It's not like a full-on nightclub but everyone sure is acting like it is. I pull Violet against me, partially pretending it's because of everyone else crowding around us but we both know that's

not the real reason.

I have my hand wrapped around her waist when she starts swinging her hips back and forth. She grips my hips, beckoning me to join her. Soon, we're practically grinding on each other, hands roaming everywhere. I cup her ass and watch her eyes go wide before diving in and pulling her lips to mine. I can taste a combination of the blue raspberry, pina colada, and vodka. With her flush against me, I slip my hand under the hem of her top, making my way up to cup her boob. I feel her gasp into our kiss, letting my touch spur her on.

I am vaguely aware that there are people all around us. But I don't give one damn. I am losing myself in the way Violet is bucking against me, nearly begging for more. Now she's the one grabbing my ass as I run my thumb across her nipple, our lips still clinging to each other.

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Until the song ends. I pull back from Violet just enough to peer around her. The DJ appears to be taking a break because now, it's just boring speaker music and the entire place has receded back to a fast food joint.

We pull away from each other and straighten ourselves out.

"Do you..." I hesitate. "Do you want to head back?"

Violet nods enthusiastically. "Yes."

We make our way down the stairs and I remember that we'd ordered food. I head to the pick up window while Violet gets us another drink. I find our bag shoved against the corner of the counter and just know, these tacos are going to be shit.

"Ready?" I make my way up to Violet who's already sucking down on the slushy.

"Oh my god, tacos." Violet reaches for the paper bag while shoving the slushy toward me.

I can't help but laugh at the way she opens the bag and nearly shoves her head instead before pulling out one taco.

"They're probably shit now."

"They were always shitty, just warm," Violet quips between bites of a taco.

She is right. Pushing our way back out onto the strip, I pull out a taco and cradle the

bag under one arm. We make our way back up the strip slowly, eating tacos and sharing the slushy until we are out of both.

The moment we step into the elevator, I feel just how thick the tension is. Violet is pressed against my back, this time because the elevator is too full. She takes advantage of the moment, slipping one hand around my waist and resting against my stomach.

This girl is going to be the death of me in the best of ways.

We walk to the room hand in hand. Violet is still holding a few bags from our trip to the mall and I have the bag of tacos safely tucked in my arm. She pulls out the room card and I can't help myself, my hands are on her ass again. This time she giggles a little, loudly, and I laugh too. She leans against the door and looks at me with a look that can only be described as lust. I'm about to kiss her again when we hear a door open from across the hall.

"What's going on- Oh." Grant's standing across the hall looking at us and his face drops.

"Sorry," Violet offers and steps away from me. I try not to take that too personally.

"It's fine. Good night." He slams the door behind him and Violet frowns.

"We should get inside." Just like that, her mood has changed dramatically. Fucking Grant.

We step into the room and place everything down, Violet slumps into a chair and all I want at this moment is to make her smile. Even if I can't kiss her again, I am just dying to change her mood. I don't know when I turned into this kind of person but I am leaning into it.

“Want some more tacos?” I offer.

“Yes, please.” She nods eagerly and I hand her one from the bag.

“Do you want to watch a movie?”

“Sure.”

“I want to change out of these clothes first, is that okay?”

“Me too, I was thinking about taking a shower.” A blush creeps over me as I recall this morning and our naked encounter. I am all types of turned on just thinking about it.

“You can, I’ll just change into some pajamas.”

“Okay.” She nods. “Let me make sure I have everything this time.”

I can’t help but smile and she laughs. There is that smile.

Violet

After my shower, I hesitate about what to wear. I had brought in my pajamas but I also brought in the bag of lingerie I bought today. I don’t know if I am bold enough to go out there in just my lingerie with the chance of possible rejection. I don’t want to end the night either though. I take a deep breath and decide to wear the matching set under my pajamas. That way I am prepared in case anything happens between us. Walking back out and trying to be casual about it isn’t easy. I feel like I am hiding a bomb under my clothes.

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“Want to watch that movie?” Dakota asks and I nod. I had fun going out last night and today but I am exhausted. Laying in bed and watching a movie with her sounds like paradise.

“More tacos?” she offers.

“No, thank you.” I smile. I don’t want to be too full that I can’t kiss her or that my stomach makes a weird sound.

“What did you want to watch?” She picks up the remote and starts scrolling through the channels.

“Whatever.” I shrug. I’m not picky, I hop we won’t be watching too much of it honestly.

She puts on some movie I’ve never heard of and holds out her arms for me to lay into them. I sink into her chest and close my eyes, smiling. I watch some of the movie and it isn’t half bad but it’s when Dakota starts playing footsie with me that her bare legs become noticeable. She is only wearing a thin pair of panties that are a lot lacier than the night before.

“Everything okay?” Dakota asks and I realize I’m fidgeting more than usual.

“Yes,” I mumble and try to settle myself. But my nerves and my loins are on fire.

“Violet.” Dakota says my name with such want that I look up and her face is inches from mine. She touches the tip of my chin and I’m leaning further into her.

“Violet,” she says again, and I never realized how beautiful my name could be.

“Yes?” I whisper slowly.

“I’m going to kiss you now,” she says and I nod. Her lips rest upon mine gently before the lust takes over. We’re two animals devouring each other, a tangle of arms and legs as she climbs on top of me.

I run my fingers through her soft blue curls as she presses her lips into mine, our tongues twirling together. Her hands search my body like a scavenger, looking for treasure.

She slips my t-shirt over my head and her eyes widen. “Fuck, that’s a nice surprise.”

I smirk, knowing I made the right choice. She hasn’t even seen the panties yet. They are barely there. I pull her lips back onto mine, desperate for another taste as she palms my breasts through my bra. Slipping one finger under the lace, she plays with my nipple and I gasp lightly.

Kissing girls was different than kissing men. Not just the lack of scruffy beards and the softer hands, it feels different too.

“Oh!” I moan as Dakota kisses my neck with wet, open mouthed kisses.

Her hands are roaming all over the place and I have to remember to breathe. It is like my body is in a euphoric state and she has barely gotten to touching me. She is still completely dressed, so I make a move to tug at her shirt and she pulls away just long enough to throw it across the room.

“I-I’ve never been with a woman before,” I blurt out.

“Okay. We can take this slower if you need.” She hesitates, sitting up to face me. Her legs are still straddling my waist.

“No!” I say a little too quickly and we both laugh.

“Just tell me if you need to stop. There’s no worries here.” She smiles and I nod, feeling safe with her. I know this is more than an experiment, I like Dakota. I like that she is a woman and I like who she is.

“I want to continue, I’ve just never gone, uh, down before.”

“Why don’t you let me worry about that for tonight then?” Dakota says with a smirk and a chill rushes down my spine.

I nod eagerly and lean in to kiss her again. Her top is off and now I can appreciate how perky her breasts are. They both fit perfectly in the palm of my hand, her nipples hardening instantly.

She starts kissing down my chest, pulling me to sit up so she can unhook my bra. Which was the fastest anyone has ever gotten it off of me. Her mouth finds my nipples and I throw my head back into the pillows in pleasure. They are so sensitive and no one ever spent this much time touching and licking and nibbling them. It feels so fucking good, I think I might cum from that alone.

“Can I take these off?” Dakota tugs on the hem of my shorts and I nod. She can do whatever she wants at this point.

She leans down to kiss from my breasts to my hip bone before tugging down my shorts with her teeth. It was one of the sexiest things I’ve ever seen. Her fingers graze the hem of my panties before brushing lightly over my core, causing my hips to buck toward her.

“Don’t stop.” I frown when she pulls away. I am already embarrassingly wet for her.

“All in time.” She winks and finds my lips again. Her hands roam my basically naked body and I reach for her ass, tugging down her panties too. I want to see all of her. And fuck, she is beautiful.

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“I want to taste you,” she whispers against my lips.

“Please,” I practically beg. I melt under her tender touch.

She ducks under the covers, and I feel her kissing my inner thighs. Gently, softly, placing light kisses until she gets closer and closer to my core. She places a few wet kisses on my core through my panties and I’m panting, waiting for her to stop teasing me. Suddenly, she tears off my panties, throwing them across the room and comes back up to kiss me.

I’m moaning against her lips as she slides in two fingers and my hips start moving, trying to ride her fingers. I’m thinking she’s going to continue this but instead she places one last kiss on my lips and this time her lips find my core.

“Oh fuck!” I call out as her tongue connects with my clit for the first time. She licks desperately, like she’s trying to get every last drop of me on her tongue, and I’m biting my bottom lip to keep my cries quiet.

“Mmmm,” I hear her say and I wonder if she’s talking about the act or how I taste. Either way, I am even more wet for her.

She continues licking, softly and delicately as she figures out a pattern that works. I’m tugging on her curls, pressing her face into my pussy. I can feel her nose ring slightly against my lips. She presses one hand on my hip bone, creating an indescribable sensation. All I know is I’m about to cum and it’s because of Dakota’s tongue.

“I’m so close!” I call out and she brushes what feels like her thumb over my clit, drawing small circles. It’s enough to send me completely over the edge, my legs start shaking and my head is back into the pillows.

“Oh, Dakota!” I’m screaming out her name and I don’t care who hears because it feels that amazing. I’ve had orgasms before, but this is like another level. She truly knows what she is doing.

“You’re so hot when you’re loud.” Dakota smirks as she wipes off her lips on the sheet.

But I pull her in for a kiss, desperate for a taste. She kisses me and I can taste myself on her. It is probably weird that it turns me on so much that I am ready to go again.

“That was so good,” I whisper.

“Oh yeah? I couldn’t tell from the leg shaking and the moaning of my name,” she teases and I throw a pillow at her.

“I was trying to compliment you.” I roll my eyes. Then a horrid thought passes through me, is she that good because of her experience? I don’t want to think about that. Anything she did before me, doesn’t matter. All that matters now was she is in my bed, only pleasing me.

“Come here.” She pulls me in close and places soft kisses on my lips. They are intentional, as if each one is to calm and reassure me. And it works.

DAKOTA

Violet is a goddess and I’m ready to worship her all night long. But I can’t help noticing the flash of worry in her eyes.

Does she regret what just happened? Did she not like it as much as her body said she had? Or is there something else causing her this worry?

In an attempt to calm both of our worries, I pull her close so I can lay soft kisses on her lips. Each kiss represents each and every worry, pushing it away so that its just us here. I feel her shoulders drop down and a small exhale slips her lips between kisses. She's okay now. And so am I.

"Wanna take a shower?" Violet asks, quickly pulling my attention back. She is looking straight into my eyes and I know what she means.

"Together?" I confirm.

Violet moistens her lips and pulls in her bottom lip, biting the corner with her teeth before nodding.

"Fuck," I breathe, feeling incredibly turned on—even more than I already was. I pull myself back, standing in front of her, completely naked. She's staring at me, dragging her eyes up and down, slowly drinking in all of me. The way her eyes feel on me has me sliding my fingers between my thighs.

"Let me." Violet's voice comes out gravely and nervous but also full of excitement. She's on her knees, making her way to the edge of the mattress. I meet her at the edge and lean in to kiss her.

She's meeting me with equal fervor, tugging at my lips, swirling her tongue with mine. And then I feel it. I feel her fingers slowly pushing between my thighs. I step to where she has easier access as she slides her middle finger in, slowly circling until she finds my clit—which, for a girl who has never been with another girl, she finds it easily.

I let my head fall back and moan. She's slow and deliberate with her moves, teasing just enough that I have to put my hands on her shoulders to keep my legs from going out from under me. I grip into her shoulders when she leans forward and runs her tongue along my stomach. She takes her time going from around my belly button, up to my chest, circling her tongue around my nipple before nipping with her teeth.

I slide one hand up to her head, running my fingers through her long, silky hair. She's still making small, deliberate circles with her finger. I can feel her apprehension, like she's questioning if she's doing a good job. So I slip my hand back down to her chin, lifting her face for her eyes to meet me. When they do, she slowly starts lifting from the bed, her finger reluctantly pulling away from my clit but sliding slowly up my stomach, all the way to my neck. I wrap my hands around the back of her neck, pulling her against me, feeling the way her breasts settle with mine, like two puzzle pieces made for each other. And I'm kissing her, pulling her with me as we make our way to the bathroom. We break a part just long enough for me to lean over and turn on the shower and step in before we get lost in each other again.

I start to work my way down Violet's chest when she stops me, presses me against the shower wall, wraps her hands around my waist and slides them down as she crouches. She slips her thumbs between my thighs, encouraging me to open.

I more than willingly oblige, even propping my foot on the side ledge of the tub, letting her have full access.

This time, she doesn't hold back. She isn't apprehensive. And she isn't scared. She's empowered, radiating confidence.

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And I feel myself climbing, so close to coming just from the skilled flicks of her tongue.

I'm desperately reaching for anything to grab onto as I climax. "Oh, fuck!" I cry out. I feel Violet slowly pull back and slide up until we're face to face again. She slides her hands down my arms, making her way to my hands, interlocking hers with mine and sliding them above my head. She's pressing our hands into the shower wall and leaning in to me slowly.

There's fire in her eyes as she teases me, peppering little kisses along my jaw, mouth, neck, and chest.

I let her keep kissing me for a few more moments before I take charge again. She's driving me wild and I need more of her.

"My turn." I leave her with one last tantalizing kiss as I wrap my arms around her, sliding them down until they cup her ass.

Violet lets out a small gasp and I feel it to my core.

We make our way from the shower to the bathroom counter and I help lift Violet onto the counter. She leans back, letting me make my way down to her core. It's not long before she's coming again.

People always warn others to be careful in Sin City. Be careful not to lose everything at the slots. Not to get lost in the city. But they don't know Violet. They don't know what it is to be lost in her. That I was addicted to her the moment I saw her.

Violet

Wow.If that is how lesbian sex always is, why does anyone ever stop?If Dakota and I didn't need to start getting ready for the day, my hands would still be on her curves. She has made me cum a record breaking amount of times and I am still ready to go for more. It is like something out of a porno but one of those classy ones where there's intimacy and soft forehead kisses and laughter.

"You okay?" Dakota asks from the bed. She's sitting on the edge with a towel wrapped around her lower half, brushing out her curly locks.

"Yes, more than okay," I reassure her.

"What are you thinking about?" she asks, raising an eyebrow.

"Porn." I laugh.

"Sorry, was that not enough for you?" She blinks with a laugh.

"Oh no, I was trying to come up with a metaphor of how good that was. But I'm not really great at that," I admit.

"Because if you need more, I think we have a little bit of time." She crawls across the bed, her towel falling and I clench my thighs looking at her round ass.

"We-we really should start getting ready," I mumble as she presses her lips to my neck. She's placing slow, wet kisses along my collarbone as my hands graze her chest.

"Are you sure?" She pulls away and wiggles her eyebrows mischievously.

“Dakota,” I groan.

“I love the way my name sounds on your lips.” She leans in to kiss me and we fall into the bed.

We start kissing, our bodies tangling together, when someone knocks at the door. We both freeze, pulling apart. Staring at each other, we don’t move but wait until once again someone knocks.

“Violet? I know you’re in there! I can see your location on my phone,” Grace calls through the door.

“Shit, that must mean I’m late,” I whisper.

“Violet?” Grace calls again but when I don’t answer my phone starts ringing.

I sigh. Jumping up in bed, thankful I’m wearing some form of clothes and look at Dakota. She quickly throws on an extra large t-shirt and goes back to brushing her hair.

“Hi, Grace.” I smile opening the door.

“It’s about time! Kate was getting worried you forgot what today was.” She walks in with a handful of garment bags and her hair in curlers.

“What took you so long to answer the doo—oh.” Grace nods when she sees Dakota.

“Well, we should get going then, right?” I shoot Grace a look not to say anything else. I didn’t know what might come out of her mouth and I didn’t want to have the ‘what are we talk’ in front of one of my best friends before we had it alone.

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“Yes, Kate’s upstairs waiting. Austin just got to our room, and I saw Grant headed there now.” The mention of Grant sends knots to my stomach. I wish I didn’t feel so guilty about how that ended and how happy I am now.

“Let me grab my dress.” I walk over to the small hotel room closet and grab my dress off the hanger, a few things from my suitcase, and my makeup bag. Kate and Grace will have anything else I need.

Which only leaves the awkward moment of do I kiss Dakota goodbye? It isn’t like we won’t see each other again, but it also raises the questions of what are we. Hookups don’t kiss goodbye, I never did with Grant. Nor did I want to. But it feels different with Dakota.

“I’ll see you at the chapel?” It comes out like more of a question than a statement.

“No, I’m actually coming up soon to take photos of you all getting ready.” She smiles and winks when Grace turns around. I kind of wish there is more from her but I also love it being our little secret, for now.

“That hotel room looks like you didn’t get much sleep,” Grace gushes the moment we are out of earshot.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I say as we step into the elevator. My smile giving away everything as it’s mirrored back at me.

“It’s nice to see you so happy.” She smiles.

“Where’s Dakota?” Kate asks when we open the door. Her suite is huge compared to ours, with a beautiful view of the strip.

“She’s coming, she had to get ready first,” Grace reassures her.

“Okay.” She nods. “Is that my dress?”

“Yes.” Grace smiles and hands her the garment bag.

“Let me see!” Kate ordered it online and insisted on being surprised. It gave me too much anxiety so I had Grace hold the dress so I wasn’t tempted to peek.

Grace pulls down the zipper to expose a beautiful white wedding dress. A thin white, off the shoulder dress with a slit that will run down Kate’s left thigh. It is elegant and definitely Kate. We all gush at the dress as Grace and I carefully lay it across the bed.

“It’s perfect.” Kate collapses to examine it fully. Grace and I are relieved she likes it or we’d both be on a hunt to find the perfect dress somewhere in the next few hours.

“Someone order a photographer?” Dakota knocks on the door.

“Thank you so much for doing this, it really means a lot.” Kate smiles and offers Dakota a hug. It’s a little awkward but I can tell they’re both actively trying to make an effort.

“So tell me exactly what you’d like photo wise and I’ll see what I can do.”

Kate and Dakota get into what they want with photos so I start getting ready. Kate will be the last to get ready so her makeup is the freshest. I take a seat and let Grace start to work her magic on my face. I can do a cat eye or two but Grace is a professional. Millions of hours of YouTube tutorials will do that for a person. Dakota

and Kate are still talking, Kates hands moving a million miles a minute as she explains what she wants, but I can feel Dakota's eyes on me. A blush falls over my cheeks and Grace catches my not so secret glances.

"You got it baddddd," she teases and boops my nose with the blush brush.

"Shut it," I grumble. I don't need Dakota to hear her. The room is big but not that big.

"Okay, so do your thing and pretend I'm not here," Dakota says and I laugh. Audibly. Causing everyone to look at me.

So I fake a cough and avoid eye contact with everyone. "Nice one," Grace whispers.

"Just makeup me, please." I sigh and stare at my feet. Kate and Dakota have gone quiet but I can feel their presence. There is something off about Grace too, I can't quite put my finger on it but she seems off. Maybe there is something going on with Harry and her? Weddings seem to bring out all kinds of feelings for people. I also know she wouldn't feel comfortable talking about it with Dakota around, who is basically a stranger to her, so I don't ask.

"Is this what you wanted?" Grace asks Kate, she had said light makeup and I still looked like myself so I was happy when Kate agreed.

"She looks great." She smiles. Dakota starts taking photos of me getting my hair done next and I can't help but smile. I feel so on display for once.

"So, how was your night?" Kate asks innocently, and I choke on the iced coffee I'm sipping.

"Yes, how was your night?" Grace echoes.

“Pretend I’m not even here,” Dakota says with a chuckle.

“My night was...fine.” I stumble on the last word. Dakota feigns a shot to the heart and I shake my head as Kate looks on confused.

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“Am I missing something...?” she asks, looking between us when she finally puts it together.

“ANYWAY, how was your night?” I ask Kate.

“Well, Austin and I tried this new move where I—“

“For the love of all things good, please do not finish that sentence.” Dakota’s eyes are huge as she looks like she’s going to have a heart attack hearing what her little brother is up to.

“Oh, right. Sorry, Dakota!” Kate blushes with a laugh. I have never known her to be shy but I guess there are some limits with her.

Dakota backs away and starts taking photos of Kate’s dress instead. She hangs it over the bathroom door and styles it with Kate’s shoes for the occasion; her pair of red stilettos. It is definitely her, I don’t see special event go by where she isn’t wearing those. Grace finishes my hair so it’s my turn to takeover, styling her soft, black hair. Kate helps me with her makeup first, matching mine in a similar but not exact way, considering our difference in skin tones.

It’s when we start on Kate that Dakota comes back and is taking candid photos of us. I pour Kate a mimosa as she gets her hair and makeup done and we’re all relaxing listening to music. I almost forget my best friend is getting married today. It feels like I was so worried about everything falling apart and going wrong that I hadn’t considered that maybe everything would go right. So I sip a mimosa, careful not to spill on my bridesmaids dress, which Kate let us pick out as long as the color was

black. Which allowed for Grace and I to find dresses that were equally beautiful to our vastly different body types.

A phone starts ringing and we all check ours, only to see it's Dakota who answered in a hushed tone. She excuses herself outside and it raises a bit of suspicion with me, but I remind myself not to get too worried. If she wanted me to know who it was or what it was about then she would've picked up in front of me. Part of me wonders if it was another woman calling her, but Dakota doesn't seem like that kind of woman. Then again, she did end up sleeping with me after barely a day of knowing each other. I take another sip of my mimosa and finish Kate's hair, trying not to worry myself.

"Can you please do me a favor and check on her?" Kate locks eyes with me from the mirror. I'd just put the last bobby pin in her hair.

I land my hand on her shoulder. "I'm sure she'll be back in a minute." I try to calm Kate but I am having troubles myself being calm.

Dakota left too long ago. Whoever it was, it probably had to do with the wedding and that frightened Kate just as much as me.

"Please, just for me?" Kate puts her hand on mine.

"Okay. I will." I give her a smile and make my way to the elevator. I don't see Dakota anywhere so I decide to check on our room, the elevator ride is slower than I anticipated. Making me wish I had taken the stairs but considering my lack of shoes, thinking I was going down the hall, I'm glad I didn't.

When I find Dakota and Austin standing outside the hotel room arguing with an older couple, I stop. Why were they yelling at some poor older couple? What have they done? But then it dawns on me, I have only seen a photo or two once. But it is clear in their bone structure, the hair and the lack of tattoos. These are Austin and Dakota's

parents. So much for nothing going wrong today.

Dakota

It's finally wedding day. After a night tangled in each other's naked arms and the morning we had, the last thing I wanted to do was leave this hotel room. But it was my brother's wedding day and there was no way I would miss that. Not that I could, as the photographer.

While I mostly photograph models, I do have my fair share of weddings under my belt. And even as chaotic as weddings can be, the degree in which brides turn into bridezillas, and the sheer number of mothers-in-law who think it's all about them, I'd still choose a wedding over a runway shoot.

Plus, my brother is getting married. What better event is there to photograph?

Violet and I slowly and quietly got ready. I busied myself with gathering my camera and the multiple lenses, flashes, filters, remotes, and the tripod. I'd recently replaced my camera bag with a camera backpack, and I was already in love with my choice.

Despite us getting ready without really talking, it wasn't weird. There was a calmness between us. Like everything was perfect.

After taking a variety of photos, Violet slips her hand in mine and keeps it there the entire way. It's such a soft gesture that I'm not used to and it causes all sorts of emotions to run through me.

As much as I used to hate holding hands, I can't help loving it when it's Violet's hand. She softens me and gives me hope that maybe someday, I could be that girl. The one who truly lets someone in. Someone that can balance me.

Look at me, thinking I could settle down. A small huff of laughter escapes my lips.

“You okay?” Violet asks, her soothing voice breaking through my thoughts.

“Oh, uh, yeah. Just thinking about how crazy it is that my brother is getting married. I never thought I’d see the day.”

It isn’t long into getting ready in Kate’s suite before Austin is calling me. I miss the first call, resulting in a string of text messages from him.

Austin: Hey, I need you.

Austin: Like right now.

Austin: Please.

I start to type back, asking what’s up when a fourth message came through that sent a shockwave through my system.

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Austin: Mom and Dad are here.

I don't even try to type back. I shove the phone in my strapless bra, button the oversized shirt I am wearing, and I can't even quietly make my way over to Violet. I have to act normal, despite everything in my body surging with emotions.

Me: I'm here. Please come out here.

I am tapping my finger, nervously on the side of my phone. Read.

It takes him ten seconds too long to finally slip out of the room.

"What the fuck?" I immediately yell at Austin.

He holds his hands up, shielding himself from my misplaced anger.

"I don't know. I don't even know how they knew about the wedding."

"In Las Vegas!" I exclaim. "They seriously flew out here just to crash the wedding?"

"They said they aren't here to crash it." Austin sighs, admitting that even he doesn't believe his words.

"Kick them out!" I'm getting louder and Austin grabs my arm, pulling me halfway down the hallway.

"I tried."

“Try harder!”

“Dakota, you know them as well as I do. They aren’t going anywhere.”

He is right. I cross my arms and huff. “I know.”

“Can you help me fix this?” Austin is desperate.

We’ve been avoiding our parents for years at this point. It isn’t like it is hard. They are the ones who cut us out of their lives.

So why in the fuck were they here?

“Do you know how they found out?”

“Apparently, they’ve been stalking Kate’s Instagram.”

“Are you kidding me?” I deadpan.

“Yeah. I think they made up a fake account.”

“They’re probably following you too.”

“Probably.” Austin sighs.

His account isn’t a worry, though. He only ever posts tattoos and their shop.

“Okay, how do we get them to leave?” I look off, trying to think of anything that might work.

Austin shrugs.

We have to be at the chapel in less than two hours. And if we are late, we lose out on our reservation. Thankfully, the chapel isn't too far in an Uber, but still. I hate being late.

Which gives me an idea. I look back at Austin, eyes wide.

“What?” he asks.

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“We pretend to be okay with them coming to the wedding.”

“Then what?”

“Do you know how many chapels are here?”

“I didn’t count.” Austin let out a huff of laughter.

“Exactly. There are so many chapels. We just tell them the wrong chapel and ask them to go ahead and make sure things are good.”

“If they go now, do you think they’ll figure out that we told them the wrong place?”

“Probably, but again, what’s the chances they’ll end up at the right place?”

“I don’t know, Dakota. I don’t know if that’s a risk I’m willing to take.”

“It’ll work, Austin.” But even as I say it, I feel the pool of worry in my stomach.

“I don’t think we should send them there right away. We can still tell them the wrong chapel but tell them the right time too.”

I nod. “That works.”

I don’t want to make him stress anymore than he already is, leaving me to figure out how to get rid of them after the wedding too.

Austin and I look up chapels in the area and find one far enough away to hopefully keep them away.

“The Neon Chapel,” Austin chooses, pointing it out on the map. “They’ll believe us if we tell them that one.”

“Okay. Let’s do this.” I push my phone back in my bra and turn around to handle our parents together.

Except, they’re walking toward us. I freeze, like a deer in front of the hunter. I know I need to run. I know I need to save myself—save us, if I can—but I can’t move.

“Dakota!” my mother calls out, already with her arms open, despite still being ten feet away.

“Mother,” I let pass through my clenched teeth.

“Can you believe it’s happening?” she asks as she pulls my rigid body into a hug.

“What? That you’re here, crashing Austin’s wedding?” The words leave my mouth before I can stop them, and I feel Austin’s glare. This was not the game plan.

“Oh, honey. I understand. But I promise, we’re not here to crash.”

Our father’s stone-cold expression says otherwise. He doesn’t want to be here. Mom dragged him here.

I take a deep breath, closing my eyes. I’d fought for too long to protect myself from them. To not let them destroy me anymore. To shield from their hateful comments and disappointment. I am done crying over the fact that they never did and never would accept me as I am—gay.

And I can't let them get to me today. Today is for Austin. Not me. Not them. Austin and Kate only.

"Well, thank you." I pretend I am talking to anyone but them.

"Really?" Mom loosens her grip but holds me at arm's length, looking me up and down like I am a child. "You look...good," she finally finishes.

I know it is hard for her to say. On top of the tattoos I have, I also have blue hair and am standing in the hotel hallway in only a bra, panties, and an oversized shirt. No shoes, no pants. Just me.

"Thanks." My tone remains flat but at least I'm not snarky.

"So, Mom, Dad," Austin starts, stepping forward. "We have to finish getting ready before we can head to the chapel."

"What can we help with?" Mom smile terrifies me. Looking at me, she continues, "Looks like you have a good ways to go."

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I literally bit my tongue. And hard. I keep my teeth sinking in. I know the moment I let go, I'll let every thought in my mind hurl at them.

"I think we're good here, Mom." Austin jumps in, thankfully.

"Oh?" Mom replies, attempting to pull pity from us.

"Yeah, how about you guys go to the chapel ahead of us? Help us make sure everything is good to go?" Austin has never been good at lying, usually making me be the one. His voice is squeaky, causing him to clear his throat. "We haven't been there yet, but they are supposed to decorate it for us. Kate picked out the decorations."

Our parents look at each other and my heart starts racing. They aren't falling for it.

"Well, can it wait a little bit?" Mom asks, trying to wear us down.

Austin pretends to check his phone. "Um, well we don't really have much time." Austin is spinning and I am still biting my tongue.

"What time is the wedding?" Dad finally speaks, letting me hear his voice for the first time in nearly a decade.

It shocks me enough to stop biting my tongue. "An hour. And we still have to finishing getting ready, like you said, Mom." I keep my tone as even as possible but can't hold back the subtle bite. She notices it too but decides to ignore it.

“Well, is there anyway you two could spare a few minutes to grab a drink from the bar?”

“Mom, we don’t have time,” I snap. “We have a wedding to get ready for and we don’t have time for chit-chatting. I’m supposed to be the first to get ready so I can start taking photos. Which is my job for today. So if you don’t mind, please, just go to the chapel and check on things. We’ll be there soon.”

Mom is blinking rapidly—which is one of her tells that she is not happy with me. Hell, when is she happy with me? “Fine. Just tell us where we’re going.”

“The Neon Chapel,” Austin and I recite at the same time.

“Where is it?” Dad’s second sentence graces us.

“It’s north. Up in Fremont,” I respond, hoping I’ve remembered correctly when looking at the map.

“We’ll meet you kids there.” Dad put his hand on Mom’s back, steering her for the elevator.

We let out a sigh of relief and both turned back toward Austin’s suite when we hear our dad’s voice bellow from down the hall. “You know what! Nothing has changed. You two are still just as spiteful and entitled as ever.”

“Frank, no,” Mom pleads.

I close my eyes and inhale, balling my fists.

“Don’t fall for it, ‘Kota.” Austin wraps his hand around my forearm, attempting—and failing—to keep me from letting them have it.

I rip my hand from his grip and spin around, storming toward the man who never respected or even loved me. “Entitled? Entitled!” I scream. “How fucking dare you!” I come within inches of him, poking my finger in his face. “Everything has changed. And for the better because, you know what, Austin has found a woman who loves and accepts him. He’s getting married and he’s a successful business owner. And for me? I get to travel the fucking world. I have my own business. I am a success. And I have an amazing woman by my side for all of it!” I blurt.

Shit. I’m not exactly lying. I am talking about Violet, but I took it too far.

Dad huffs and crosses his arms. “Oh, you’re still on this bullshit.” He shakes his head slowly as he looks down at me with disgust.

“What? A lesbian?” I spit.

“Yeah, I thought by now you’d be through this phase of yours. Finally smartened up. But I guess you’re still fooling around, thinking this is acceptable.”

I inhale, my nostrils flare, and my jaw trembles. “You fucking piece of shit,” I growl. I feel the anger boiling in me, even stronger than before. Stronger than the first time he called me a disappointment. And even more when he called me disgusting. In front of my first girlfriend.

“Don’t talk to me like that, Dakota Marie!”

“I’d rather go on not even talking to you at all! But here you are, fucking crashing what is supposed to be the best day of Austin’s life! How fucking dare you! You’re the despicable one. You’re the entitled one. You’re the disgusting one. Not Austin. Not me. You.”

I start to turn away from him when I feel Dad’s hand grip my arm. And not in the

concerned way as Austin had done. Not in the gentle way Violet had. But in an angry, dominating way. I can't pull from his grasp—not with how tightly he is squeezing my arm as he spins me back to him.

“Frank,” my mom pleads.

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I shoot daggers at her while I spit, “Let. Me. Go. Now!”

“No, you listen here, you little shit. You were never grateful for what your mom and I did for you two. Never. You just wanted to throw your lives away. Waste them on these childish hobbies, thinking we’d pay your way. And throwing all the love and support we gave you in our face by bringing girl home. You were just spiting us then and you’re just fooling yourself now.”

“Let her go,” Austin growls beside me. I hadn’t even realized he was standing so close.

“Austin, get out of this. At least you’re getting married, as seen in the eyes of God.” He faces me again. “Not like this one ever could.”

“That’s enough!” Austin screams, lunging toward our dad. He shoves him hard enough that Dad has no choice but to let go of my arm as he stumbles backward.

“You little shit, you!” Dad screams back, charging Austin once he caught his balance.

Austin stands firm, pushing me behind him. “What? You gonna hit me? You’re going to come all the way out here just to hit me? You didn’t learn your lesson last time?”

My eyes go wide. In all the years of agony, I never once saw Dad hit Austin. There were times I was sure he would. But he never did.

“Frank, we’re leaving.” Mom finally firms her voice, demanding Dad to step back. “It’s not worth it.”

“You mean we’re not worth it,” I yell from around Austin’s shoulder.

I watch as my words stab into my mother like shards of glass. The way she recoils and a tear slips her eye.

I don’t care.

That is it. That is the last word I’ll ever speak to either of them. Ever.

Austin slips his arm around my shoulder, turning us back toward the room. We don’t make it two steps before we see Violet standing by the door.

“Violet,” I let out through a breath. I can’t figure out the expression on her face. Is she going to understand? Or is she going to run?

Violet starts walking toward me cautiously. She doesn’t say anything until she’s close enough for me to reach out, hoping she’ll take my hand. She doesn’t. “Are you okay?” I still can’t discern her emotions.

“Um, yeah.” I toss my head over my shoulder enough to make sure our parents are gone.

“Was that...?” Violet already knows the answer.

“Um,” Austin interjects. “I’m going to go back in the room.” He points to the room awkwardly.

“Yeah.” I give him a quick but weak smile. In time, we might talk about what just happened but more than likely, we won’t.

We wait until he’s stepped back in the room before either of us speak up.

“It’s okay, Violet. I promise.”

“It doesn’t look okay.” Her voice is soft and filled with worry.

Again, all I can muster is a weak smile. “It’s fine now. Come on, we’ve got a wedding to get to.”

“Yeah, Kate started freaking out and sent me to get you.” I can tell she’s trying to put it behind her for my sake but she can’t.

I close the distance between us and bring my hand to her cheek, pushing the lone curl from her face. “You look beautiful, Vi,” I whisper before pressing my forehead to hers.

“You too,” she whispers back before pressing her lips to mine.

I kiss her back before replying, “I’m not even dressed yet. No make-up even.”

“I know.” I see her lip curl at one corner. “You’re beautiful whether you’re in a dress, a t-shirt, or naked.” Violet caresses her thumb across my jaw just before encapsulating my mouth with hers. I can feel her intensity, her desire.

For me.

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I start to lose myself in her, letting everything else go. Letting the scent of her shampoo and the curve of her collar bone replace the nightmares. Memorizing her plump lips and the way her tongue swirls around mine. Hell, the way her tongue swirls around anything of me.

I pull from her lips and start kissing down her chin, neck, and to her collar bone.

“I’m not sure about amazing, but you do have me by your side,” Violet whispers, bringing me to a stop, lips hovering against her skin.

I pull back, looking into her eyes. “You heard?”

“Yes.” She smiles at me, radiating pure happiness.

“And you’re not scared?”

“Why would I be?”

Violet

“Where in the hell are they?” Kate screams, storming back and forth at the end of the beds in her red stilettos. She has her dress on but it hasn’t been zipped.

“They’ll be here soon.” Grace is stuck in the middle, reaching for Kate every time she passes by, trying her best to console her. Except she can’t. Kate is full-on crying—like waterproof mascara can’t even withstand her tears.

I don't waste anymore time. I rush over to her, Dakota right on my heels. "Hey, we're back." I grab Kate's face, forcing her eyes to look at me. "Everything is okay."

"Where did you go?" Kate cries out, shifting her gaze to Dakota. "Is Austin..." She stops and I can see that Dakota know what Kate can't say.

"Austin and I just had to have a conversation that has nothing to do with the wedding."

"Are you sure?" Kate steps past me, walking to Dakota. I watch them, biting at my nail. Grace stands beside me, silent.

"Yes, we just had to deal with something else."

"He's not scared? He doesn't have cold feet?"

I watch Dakota smile widely; a smile I recognize as honest. "He's not scared. Hell, I'd bet he has the hottest feet here."

My heart swells. Forty-eight hours might not be enough to others but it is enough to me to at least know that I want to keep Dakota in my life.

"Thank god." Kate exhales, spinning around with determination on her face. She claps her hands together. "Okay, where are we." She states it, more so to pull herself together.

"We can get to the chapel if you're ready?" Grace asks.

"Yes, I'm ready," she says more confidently. The old Kate is back, it only took a moment for her to slip back into bride mode and make sure we are all ready. Dakota sneaks into the bathroom to get dressed and I make sure we have everything.

I double check the mental list I created, something old, new, borrowed and blue are all accounted for as well as our bouquets, Kate's veil, and Kate's change of clothes for any photos after the ceremony. Is it still called a ceremony if an Elvis impersonator is performing it?

Dakota walks out of the bathroom in a black dress that makes my jaw drop. It highlights those curves I spent last night learning while making her bright curls pop. I can't wait to get a chance to peel it off of her later. I hope I'll get the chance.

"Wow," I say audibly.

"This old thing?" Dakota fluffs her curls and blows me a kiss, which I pretend to catch and Grace fakes a gag behind her.

"We get it, y'all are cute," she teases as Kate is looking in the mirror, checking everything over for the tenth time. I walk over and take her hand.

"Hey, it's going to be okay." I pause. "You want this right? Austin?"

"Of course." She nods.

"Then you have nothing to worry about, you have this." I smile. She shakes her head and we finally agree to leave the hotel room so we're not running behind.

We Uber to the chapel, Kate's leg shaking the entire time we're driving there. Grace and I shoot each other a look, we have never seen Kate so nervous. She is the calm one amongst us. Dakota offered to sit in the front, which makes me miss her but also allows for her to grab some candids. Until the Uber driver threatens to kick her out if she doesn't buckle up. Dakota smiles at me from the side mirror and I can't help but smile back. Driving here makes me wonder how Dakota feels about weddings and marriage. Which I know is crazy, you can't bring that up to someone you've known

for two days. And I wouldn't, but that doesn't mean my mind can't wander.

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We get to the Little White Chapel and it's flooded with people taking photos under the iconic sign. It's hard to tell if the guys are here so we decide to head inside and wait for them. It's close to one, which is when the ceremony starts, and I can tell Kate is freaking out. She's checking her phone and even resorted to texting Austin despite their strict no contact before the wedding rule. But it's when he doesn't pick up that she's even more worried than she wants to let on.

I can see everything unravel before my eyes. Within seconds, Kate's eyes are wide, face flushed, and her hands are shaking. No one wants to be the phone in her hands. So I jump into action as fast as I can.

"Kate, come sit over here, it's in the shade." I gently guide her elbow but keep a tight grip until she's fully seated. I flash my eyes from Grace to Dakota and back again. Grace gets the hint, coming to sit beside Kate. She immediately distracts Kate and I make my way to Dakota.

"Hey, can you call Austin?" I know my voice is full of fear.

Dakota nods and pulls out her phone, putting it on speaker when she hit dial.

"Hey." Austin answers on the third ring.

"Where the hell are you?" Dakota hisses into the phone.

Austin sighs and I watch Dakota roll her eyes. "We're on our way."

"What the fuck is taking so damn long?"

There's silence for a minute and I feel Dakota's anger rising with mine.

"Austin," she demands.

Again, he sighs. "Look, we went to the wrong chapel."

Dakota and I balk at each other.

"How—how in the hell did you do that?" I screech, unable to hold back.

"It was an honest mistake. I'm sorry, I was flustered with everything." Austin sounds downright distraught. "But we're fixing it. We're waiting on a new Uber. It's just taking the driver forever to get here."

"Where is here?" Dakota asks.

"The Neon Chapel."

They both stifle a laugh and I feel like I'm missing out on something. I get Dakota's attention, giving her a questioning look.

"You're kidding, right?" Dakota asks while still holding her laughter back as much as she can.

"I told you, I got flustered. It wasn't a big deal at first. But now, we can't seem to catch a damn Uber out of Fremont. We're seriously considering walking."

"Walking?" Dakota and I exclaim together, instinctively looking at the blazing sun cooking us well past well done.

"Yeah, it's a suicide mission though," Austin replies but sounds distracted. "What?"

He calls out to someone on his end of the phone. “You’re not serious, are you?” He replies to them, keeping us on the edge of our metaphorical seats. “Son of a bitch.” He’s finally returned his attention to us.

“What,” Dakota states, now over it all.

“The Uber driver canceled on us so Grant has to get another one.”

“Twenty minutes!” We hear Grant’s voice in the background.

“Till you’re here?” Dakota asks for the both of us.

“Twenty minutes until the driver gets us. But it’s better than anything else right now,” Austin deadpans. “Look, just let Kate know that we’re on our way. Tell her she doesn’t have to worry.”

“Seriously, Austin?” I retort. “It’s damn near one pm and you’re telling me to tell your bride to not worry about where her groom is when he’s supposed to be waiting at the front of the chapel?” I scoff.

“You’re right. I know. But I’m trying, Violet. I really am.”

I take a deep breath. “I know.” I let my eyes close while Dakota ends the call, making sure I focus on my breathing.

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I made my way over to Kate while Dakota finds one of the chapel employees to talk to them about the delay.

Grace is keeping Kate occupied still with something on her phone.

“What’cha guys looking at?” I interrupt.

“Oh, hey!” Kate scoots toward the center of the bench, making room for me. “We’re looking at the ten dollar tattoos across the street.” Kate nods to the intensely pink building with black doors and window frames.

Plastered across their windows is “\$10 Tattoos!” and “World Famous Koolsville Tattoo”.

“Seriously? Ten dollars? How many infections you think you’ll get for that?”

“No, it’s not like that! They’re good!” Grace chimes in.

“We’re going to get some after the wedding.” Kate states. “I think we all should too.”

Dakota has reappeared and we all spend the time passing phones back and forth on which of the tattoos from the shop’s sheet we will get. So much time that we don’t even realize the guys have arrived until their shadows cast over us.

“Game time?” Austin catches our attention as he reaches for Kate’s hand, leading her in to the chapel, which has finally calmed down. Not a single tourist or lurker to be seen.

And from there, we all stand back, watching as two people who are more than perfect for each other say “I do” in front of the cheesy Elvis impersonator.

* * *

I’ve never been a person who wanted to have sex in places I shouldn’t. I am more than fine having sex in a bed, it is comfortable and easy so why mess with what works. Until I met Dakota. She’s been walking around with her camera, dressed in this short number I’ve been dying to pull off. Something about her makes me turned on all the damn time. Maybe it is the lust of being with someone new, or maybe it is just her. All I know is I am dying for some action, and I don’t care where we got it.

So I volunteer to be one of the first bunch to get a tattoo. It isn’t exactly going to be easy considering how many of our friends are nearby, but I am dying for at least a taste of her. My mind and my pussy have frequent memories of last night and I am desperate for a repeat performance. I can still feel her tongue on me and the things she did to make me cum. Fuck. I am wet just thinking about her. I shoot her a look, but she’s too busy behind her camera. Her arm is all tattooed up, going at the same time as me. I think it is sweet she wants to get something that matches the gang, considering how little she’s known most of us. Something tells me she isn’t exactly one of those “I only get sentimental things” for tattoos.

I walk over to Dakota as she’s taking photos and whisper in her ear, “Take a break with me.” I bite my bottom lip and lean in closer. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

Dakota almost drops her camera as she clears her throat and whispers back an okay.

“Do you think there’s enough photos? I have extra film if not,” Dakota asks Kate.

“I think it’s enough for now, we still have some to take at the hotel later right?” Kate smiles hopefully.

“Of course.” She nods. I excuse myself to the bathroom down the hall as I wait for Dakota to come up with an excuse. I’m sure this looks obvious as heck, but I don’t care. I need to feel her lips on mine again.

I wait in the dingy, dark, bathroom that surprisingly smells like Christmas thanks to some oddly seasonal bathroom spray. I click the light on and it’s bright enough to see my hand but it looks like the bulb could go out any minute. What feels like a few minutes later, there’s a light tap on the door and I freeze.

“Um, occupied?” It comes out like a question and I hear the familiar laugh of my blue haired lover.

“Let me in before someone sees,” she whispers and I open the door just enough to pull her in. Clicking it closed behind her, I push her body against the door. Locking my hips into hers.

“Damn, someone’s eager.” She bites her bottom lip with a smirk.

“I just want a little taste,” I say quietly as I begin placing kissing along the nape of her neck. She moans softly as I place each kiss.

“Mmm, a taste?” She wiggles her eyebrows and it goes right to my core. Something about her drives me absolutely wild.

“You’re so bad.” I giggle and crash my lips into hers. Our hands are exploring each other just like last night, desperate to touch more than the silk between our fingertips. Her hands reach for my thigh and she pulls the hem of my dress up achingly slow. Dakota’s fingers, brushing ever so gently past my panty-covered core.

“I want you,” she whispers against my lips and I’m soaked. I know it might not seem like a lot, but when this woman moans anything to me, I want to give her everything.

Dakota

I know I'm supposed to be focused on these photos. On capturing the love flowing between my brother and Violet's best friend. But my eye—and my viewfinder—keep slipping back to her. My heart is still racing from our intense bathroom entanglement.

I've fooled around in my fair share of places. Hell, even in bathrooms that look just like the one we were in. But none of them ever stayed with me this long. Those were a quick release.

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This... This is something else. This is electric. This isn't leaving my mind or lips anytime soon.

This isn't some "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" story. Come hell or high water, I am going to find a way to get my hands on Violet's neck, shoulder, chest, the curve of her hip, and the strength of her thighs turning to jelly when I slip my fingers in.

"Dakota? Everything okay?" Kate pulls me from my thoughts and I know my face is red. Thankfully, I can keep myself hidden behind the camera. My Canon has the extra battery pack and flash, giving me more of a barrier.

"Yeah, all good. I was just thinking of some other positions—poses." I add, worried I'd reveal my true thought process. I take a deep breath, forcing myself to focus. I keep telling myself, the faster I get through these photos, the faster I can get my lips back on Violet's.

Damn, she's addictive.

I let Kate and Austin lead the way through the Grand Canal Shoppes, snapping photos of them every few steps. They stop occasionally, sharing a kiss or posing quickly before continuing. We are making our way from The Palazzo, through The Venetian, around the outside with the bridge and gondoliers, and back up. It is astonishing how many spots are tucked away, waiting for someone to come along and photograph them.

"You know, I think I like it here," Violet whispers into my ear while I center the

frame on Kate and Austin, across the indoor river as they pose.

“The Venetian?” I ask, face still pressed to my camera.

“Vegas.” She breathes the word out like it’s the most relaxing thing she’s said.

“I do too. Had some, uh, pretty incredible experiences here,” I tease, playfully bumping my elbow into Violet’s side.

She lets out a soft laugh, agreeing with me, and I feel the tip of her fingers slide across my lower back. No one else can see it, making it all the more intoxicating. She drags her fingers back and forth as I keep shooting, like it is natural for us. The others have wandered off, waiting until Kate is finally satiated with photos—which thankfully doesn’t take much longer.

We all make our way back to our hotel rooms, to slip into something more comfortable, although I am going to be sad to see Violet’s dress cast aside.

The door hasn’t even fully clicked shut when Violet’s hands are sliding her dress up her thighs, exposing her perfect ass. She keeps sliding it up over her head, casting a sly look over her shoulder, smirking when she confirms I am indeed watching her. Her hair cascades across her back in place of where her dress has just been. She brushes a few strands over her shoulder, dragging only her index finger as slowly as she can.

She is putting on a show for me.

I start to step forward, to join her, but she shakes her head. She unclips her strapless bra, letting it fall to the ground before leaning forward to pick up the pair of insanely short shorts. I watch her every move as she changes in front of me, building my need for her in every movement. The irony that I am getting turned on by her putting on

clothes as well is not lost on me. This girl could be wearing a ten-year-old baggy sweatshirt and pants and I'd find her intoxicating.

Finally, she is dressed and the show is over. I close the gap between us, slipping my hands around her cheeks to her neck and diving in with as much intensity I can. I know our time is limited and I want to get in as much as I can.

When we part, I see a lazy, satisfied smile spreading across her face. "You should change too." Her voice is thick with desire, like she wants me to return the favor.

"That can wait." I lean in for another kiss but Violet turns her face just enough for me to collide with her cheek instead.

I am expecting her to say something, anything, but she is just smirking at me. Knowing she isn't going to let me kiss her until I change, I pull my dress over my head, throwing it across the room in one fluid movement. I start to lean to grab my own shorts when Violet's fingers slide along my hip and to my stomach, pausing just above my panties. I freeze, hoping she will keep going.

"I just want to touch you right now."

"You just want to tease me, is what you're doing." I lean toward her, knowing she'll bait me.

"Now you know how I feel every time I look at you." She leaves her fingers lightly pressing into my stomach, reminding me of how close we are as I slip my shorts on.

"I already knew how it feels." I pull her against me, crashing my lips against hers before she can think twice. We pull at each other, desperately trying to hold back despite not wanting to.

I start walking her back against the wall when the abrupt knocking on the door causes both of us to jump, ruining the moment.

“Dammit,” I mutter under my breath, stepping back from Violet. She stands still while I grab a pale yellow tank top from the bed before swiping my phone from the counter and turning for the door.

Violet shimmies past me as they knock again.

“Come on, guys! Save something for tonight!” Kate screams.

I expect Violet to turn red—either embarrassment or anger—but she doesn’t. It doesn’t even phase her. She just looks back at me, smiling. “Don’t worry, babe. We’re not done yet.”

Fuck. She’s good.

* * *

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I spend much of our evening watching Violet. Watching how she laughs at jokes, gets excited over telling stories, lets loose with the liquor flowing, and how she will catch my eye every few moments. Every time her eyes land on me, I see the alcohol shift from her eyes, locking with me.

We've wandered to a bar that has a live band playing country cover songs. Normally, it isn't my thing but Kate and Violet had each grabbed a hand, dragging me onto the floor. We dance through song after song, singing as loud as we can to songs we don't even realize we know every word to. Kate tries to get the guys to join us, which lasts for precisely one song before they escaped back to the table, drinking beers and watching us dance.

I feel my hips beginning to ache but numb it with another tequila shot. None of us show any signs of slowing down. Kate finally gets Austin to join her for a few songs, leaving Grace, Violet, and I in our little group. Guys come and go, trying to slip in or steal one of us away, but none succeed.

We've been dancing so long at the bar that none of us notice that everyone else has disappeared.

"Where'd they go?" I yell, hoping they can hear me.

"Probably having sex somewhere!" Violet yells back.

"I meant all of them! Doubt Grant and Harry joined in for a foursome." I can't help but laugh at my own joke with Violet and Grace.

“I don’t know...” Grace jokes. “But really, though, I bet Harry and Grant are off licking their wounds.” Grace shrugs, like it is no big deal.

Despite being around them all weekend, I still don’t know much about Grace and Harry. I know they looked over the moon in love when we all got here. But thinking back, I can’t remember a moment where they were voluntarily with each other, much less showing any affection.

I give Violet a side glance but her only response is a simple shrug, like it is nothing. So I shrug too. Partly because it isn’t really my business. But also, I don’t really give a damn. Might be horrible of me, but I have better things on my mind. Much, much better things, involving watching Violet lick the salt off the rim of the margarita she just polished off.

Damn, I love that tongue of hers.

“I need another drink!” Violet yells, changing the direction of our conversation.

“Me too!” I start to lead us to the bar but Violet pulls back.

“I wanna go somewhere else.”

We all make our way, arm in arm, as much as we could, through the loud casino until we find a pizza place and Grace wastes no time getting in line.

Three massive slices of pepperoni pizza, three tequila shots, and three bottled beers in our hands, we drunkenly shuffle over to a table near another live band. This one is playing 80s music covers.

The lead singer is in the middle of “Sunglasses at Night” and there is a small group of people lazily dancing.

“Oh, shit! There they are,” Grace mutters through the huge bite she’s just taken.

Violet and I look to where she is pointing, and sure enough, Harry and Grant are walking toward us. With a rather disheveled looking Austin and Kate right behind them.

“Where’d you guys go?” Violet teases Kate, who pushes herself onto the stool with Violet. Neither of them are doing a good job of staying on the seat but that doesn’t stop them.

“Nowhere,” Kate lies, wagging her eyebrows at us.

“Sure,” I joke. “But really. Looks like you guys had fun.”

Kate leans forward, pushing her arms across the table. “Oh, my god, so much fun!”

“Where at?” Violet and Grace ask simultaneously.

“There’s this random little nook upstairs that looks down on the casino.”

“You had sex out in the open of the casino?” Grace can’t hold back her surprise.

“I mean, there was enough privacy,” Kate slurs and shrugs.

“What made you guys do that?” Violet asks and I can sense more running through her mind. Is she wanting to find this place? Does she want us to have sex up there? We’ve been adventurous so far, so it only tracks.

At least, I hope that is why she is asking because right about now, I am ready to drag her to that spot.

“Yes! You two should totally go there!” Kate is beating the palms of her hands on the table in front of each of us. “It’s so good.” She drags out her words, letting them reflect her satisfaction.

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“Maybe we will,” I joke.

Before I can say anything else though, I feel a familiar hand slap onto my shoulder.

“Look, D, I might be drunk off my ass but I’m also still your brother.”

“And?” I stare him down.

“I’ve had too much alcohol and I’m just hearing about my wife and my sister and sex and shit and it’s just all too much.”

“Dude. You just had sex with her and you’re feeling awkward about me joking about it all?” I rolled my eyes at Austin, taking advantage of picking on him. “I mean, you do know I kiss, right? Like, with tongue and everything.”

“Come on, D, you know what I was talking about,” he slurs.

But I’m not ready to let him off so easy. “Don’t forget, it’s girls I kiss too. And I do so much more than that too.” For emphasis, I turn and grab Violet’s face and plant an over-the-top kiss on her lips for everyone to see.

Austin, not even bothering with a response, just rolls his eyes and makes his way over to get himself another beer as well.

“Dude, do you guys see that drummer’s tattoos?” Kate blurts, completely oblivious to the fact that I was just teasing her husband.

We all crane our necks, trying to see the impossible. “Which one?” I can see that the

guy is damn near completely covered.

“The one on his shoulder!” Kate’s horrible attempt to explain just leaves us all laughing.

Kate doesn’t elaborate any further though, she just stares off at the band, more than likely looking at their tattoos. She is quiet so long that she damn near makes all of us jump when she sits straight up.

“Babe. Babe.” Kate is yelling over the loud music and practically beating Austin on his forearm.

“What?” he slurs, eyes completely glazed over as he nearly loses balance bringing his face close to Kate’s.

“Tattoo Shop!” she yells and now, we’re all staring at her.

“We already got tattoos.” Austin is so drunk that his voice is shifting octaves with nearly every word.

“No, not that! I mean a shop!”

“Yeah...”

“Like our own shop!” Kate is bouncing up and down. Austin almost misses what she said with his eyes glued to her chest.

“Here?” Austin asks, his eyes still on her boobs.

“Yes!”

“Okay.” Austin shrugs, like it isn’t a big deal.

But I knew it is. And so does he. That is one thing about Austin that I’ve always loved. Things others would make a fuss over, he just accepts. He doesn’t question. He just says yes. And he’d be right there, fully supportive the entire time.

The time I had to ask him to meet me in Amsterdam, just for one day, he came. It was a huge deal to me and he didn’t question me at all. Which made it all the easier since I still can’t explain just how fucked up everything got there.

And all the times he came to my rescue with anything related to our parents. So witnessing him be there for his new wife, just as supportive, put me over the moon. And I was already there dancing with Violet.

Who is now wrapping her arms around my waist from behind me and nuzzling her chin on my shoulder.

“What’cha thinking about?” Her voice is low, sultry, and only loud enough for me to hear.

“Now? You,” I blurt, not even trying to hide how cheesy that makes me sound.

“Oh really? What about me?” Violet’s voice is doing things to me. Just like everything else about her.

I remember back to the way she’d teased me just mere hours ago. “You know, how we never finished what you started earlier. And how I’m going to finish it.” I don’t elaborate though. It is my turn to tease her.

Violet

Tonight is the last night in Vegas. Which means it's the last night I'll be spending in Dakota's arms. I don't want to think about it, but it's also all I can think about. Which is to say, my brain hates me. We haven't talked about what it means, officially. As much as I want to, I can't bring myself to bring it up. I've never been the big feelings type, I mean look what happened with Grant. He was the one who always wanted to talk about being more. It's not that I don't believe in it, I just figure I am more of an in the moment type. Like if things are meant to work out, they will. But only in regards to relationships, everything else I have to worry and over plan and overthink about.

We spend most of the night drinking but I am careful not to drink too much. I want to be sober enough to remember our last night together. The last thing I want is to be too drunk to enjoy it. And from the way Dakota is nursing her drinks tonight, it seems like she has the same thought.

"Do you want to sneak out of here?" she whispers against my ear. We've been trying not to be too obvious, for Grant's sake, but I'm pretty sure that ship has sailed. Dakota's hands have been tangled in mine all night and she's been my honorary dance partner so it isn't like we were hiding anything.

"How?" I whisper back, wide eyed, it isn't exactly like our group is large enough to sneak away from.

"Hey guys, we're going to call it a night," Dakota announces suddenly.

Everyone turns to stare at the implications of Dakota's words and my face reddens. Grant's at the bar, refilling his drink, so the rest of our friends clear the surprise from their faces and wish us a goodnight. We all hug each other goodnight, splitting off into different directions. Kate and Austin head up the elevator, ready to start their honeymoon escapades, which they told us too many details to. Grace sneaks past all of us, heading for the elevator about five "last hugs of the night" ago. Harry and Grant make their way back to the casino floor. From the looks of it, they are both looking to lose themselves in money and alcohol. I feel a twinge of guilt when Grant catches my eye as Dakota is holding my hand. There is no denying that there is something between me and her. I don't mean to hurt him more. Hell, I didn't even want to hurt him in the first place. But the stark difference between the smile on Dakota's face and the sour look on his tells me it is going to be a while before we can be friends again—if we can ever be friends again.

Dakota takes my hand, leaving our drinks behind, and walks me to the elevator. I can't help but wonder if she is dragging me to the spot that Kate had told us about.

"You didn't just do that," I scold her as we step inside the elevator alone.

"Oh, but I did." She winks and pulls me in by the waist, clashing her hips into mine. She holds me like we're dancing and I fall backward into a kiss. Her lips and the elevator moving make it feel like I'm floating on air.

"Come on." She pulls me out of the elevator and down the hall to our room. I hate that this is the last time I'll be able to say that.

"Hey, don't give me that face." Dakota tilts my chin toward her.

"I'm sorry, I was just thinking about..." My voice trails, we both already know the unspoken.

“I know, but hey. Let’s enjoy tonight, huh?” she whispers and I nod. She places a chaste kiss on my lips and opens the door.

As soon as we’re inside, my lips meet hers in a frenzy. I don’t want to let her go, and I can tell by the way she kisses me back, she feels the same. Her body presses into mine against the hotel room door. Like two teenagers desperate for a release after hours of teasing, our clothes drop to the floor just as quickly.

“I want you on the bed.” She moans against my teeth, stopping just enough to say.

I nod, and the rest of our underwear falls to the floor with each new step. Dakota pushes me down onto the bed, with one hand on my waist and the other gently around my neck. It isn’t my favorite thing, but when she does it, I am into anything.

“Tell me what you want,” she whispers into my neck. Kissing my collarbone, up to my earlobe and back down. Her hands cradling my chest, her fingers pebbling my nipples. I let out a small gasp as her thigh finds itself between my legs.

“I- I—“ I try to speak but my mouth can’t seem to form any words.

“Tell me what you want, babe,” she prompts again. This time biting down slightly on my neck as if to leave a hickey. Is she trying to brand me? We really are like high schoolers.

“I- I want you to eat me out,” I finally manage.

“Good girl.” She kisses my nose softly and I melt at her words.

Dakota flicks a tongue over my breast, while her hand meets the other. Her tongue beginning to trail down my stomach, to my hip bone and stopping just before my bare core. I can feel her warm breath and the anticipation rising in my abdomen like a

roaring fire.

She dives in, licking my clit, and I let out a loud yelp. The intensity being too much but she doesn't stop, instead I think she gets off on the twisted pleasure it brings me. Dakota continues to devour me, licking, my body a panting mess as she eats me out.

"I want to hear you scream my name. Let everyone know who makes you feel this good." Dakota stops to make me look down at her and let me just tell you, there is nothing sexier than a hot girl eating you out and giving direct eye contact. I could cum from that sight alone.

"Yes, just don't stop," I command. She giggles. She fucking giggles and dives back in, slower then picking up the pace just enough to drive me wild.

I can feel the anticipation building, my toes curling, my back arching as she gives one final lick to my core and I'm cumming. "Oh, Dakota! Fuck!" I scream out, throwing my head back.

Dakota doesn't let up, licking me just as my thigh clench together. Instead she inserts a finger and I can feel a second orgasm building almost instantly. Is she trying to kill me? She pumps her finger in and out, licking my clit and the orgasms become simultaneous with each other. I'm coming for a second time before I know it, with Dakota smiling between my thighs.

Before she can go for a third, I tap her out. I am all for going all night but any more in a row and my body might pass out, I am not used to that kind of thing.

"Wow," I say breathlessly.

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“That was incredibly hot.” Dakota wipes her mouth and climbs on top of me to kiss me softly. “Do you need a minute?” she teases.

“Yes, Yes I do.” I lean into her chest, letting her wrap her arms around me.

As I lay in her arms, breathless, I try not to let my mind wander again. Instead I let myself stay in this moment with her. The one where she fucks me tirelessly and holds me close. As I gain the energy to return the favor and make our last night together count.

Dakota

I am neverone to get weepy in an airport. Maybe because most of the time, I am flying by myself, from one job to another. It is a normal pattern in my life. Check bags in Atlanta, red-eye to Newark, do a six hour swimsuit photoshoot, guzzle a venti iced mocha with three pumps hazelnut, make out with one of the models if I am feeling frisky, crash in a shitty hotel for a night, and then start all over again with another city.

There are times where I don’t even see my apartment for a month.

So this is normal. No big deal.

Right?

Wrong.

This is excruciating uncharted territory. We met days ago. What started as an insignificant hotel mess up leading to only one bed for two strangers is now invading my every thought.

Violet was with Grant, still unsure of her true sexuality. I was fresh out of another string of one-night stands.

Neither of us were looking for a girlfriend.

Neither of us were expecting to leave here, feeling empty, unsure of what was coming. And I can't. I have to talk to her. I have to see where Violet is with us.

Is there even an us?

Is there even a chance we could be something?

Every kiss we've shared sure felt like so much more, but maybe it was the excitement of the city. Maybe it was Violet's awakening and the power I felt being the one who got her there. It's easy to get caught up in emotions when they're as intense and visceral as we've been.

I am terrified it is too much all at once. We gave it our all and now we'll have to go our separate ways.

Or, maybe there is more. By the look in her eyes, I see a chance. Anyone else looking at her wouldn't see the slight curvature of her lips, the way her eyes slowly open and close, and the gentle lift of her chest with each breath.

But I see all of it.

"Hey, can we talk?" I whisper in her ear, gently gripping her elbow.

“Yeah, I think there’s some empty seats over there?” Violet nods to the terminal next to ours. It has just cleared out, leaving nearly the entire space to us.

I focus on every step I take, hoping my nerves won’t take my feet out from under me. I let Violet pick the seats, next to the window staring onto the tarmac. Planes coming in and leaving as they always do. Employees unloading one plane while another set loads another plane. Reflections in the windows of people passing by, some scurrying to their terminal and others dragging along, obviously wiped of all energy. I hear the music of the clusters of slot machines, echoing when someone hit abig win—more than likely something like forty dollars.

I let myself absorb the sounds around me, trying to ground myself. Trying to figure out how—and what—I want to say to Violet. Trying not to psych myself out of fear she won’t feel the same. That she’ll look at this like a fun little “when in Vegas” adventure.

I build myself just enough of a protective barrier to shield myself in case this doesn’t go how I want it to. I have to protect myself, right?

People always warn others to be careful in Sin City. Be careful not to lose everything at the slots. Not to get lost in the city. But they don’t know Violet. They don’t know what it is to be lost in her. That I was addicted to her the moment I saw her.

So with one final deep breath, I open my mouth and my heart. “I have to ask.”

Violet slowly nods, like she knows where I am going.

“But I’m not sure how to ask. This is new territory for me. This isn’t anything I’m used to. I’m used to just boarding a plane and moving on. But this feels...” I trail off. I am beginning to ramble. I pick at my thumbnail, trying to regroup my thoughts.

I am never the unnerved one.

Violet reaches out, laying her hand on mine to still my fidgeting. “I know.”

“So what is this?” I blurt.

“I don’t know but I know it’s not nothing,” Violet offers.

Under any other circumstances, I would give her a puzzled look. But she is right.

“What do we do?”

Violet takes a deep breath. “I mean, this is all new for me.”

“Me too,” I blurt and when Violet tilts her head, I elaborate. “The ‘there’s something more here’ feeling.”

“Does it scare you?” she asked, looking out of the window as she asks.

“Shitless.” I let out an awkward huff of laughter. “But I don’t think it’s a bad thing. Not for me. I just don’t want to be scared of a relationship anymore,” I blurt.

“And you think I could be that person?” Violet tilts her head, her voice soft and encouraging.

“Maybe?” I scrunch my face with nerves. “But I don’t want to scare you either.”

“I’m not scared.” Violet’s voice is perfectly sincere, not even an ounce of fear.

“Really? Not at all? Because this is a lot. So I get it if this is something you just needed to do,” I offer and see as her face falters for a moment.

“I’ve never felt like this before, Dakota. I’ve told guys I love them. I’ve been in committed relationships. I’ve been in happy relationships. But I’ve also always been curious. I just never had anyone that made me want to explore it more. And I was confused for a long time. Thought maybe it was just something everyone is curious about. And I was okay with that.”

“So what changed?”

“You,” Violet answers immediately. “You’re the first girl I’ve ever really wanted to kiss.”

“Seriously? I thought you said you’ve been curious.”

“Curious, yes. Brave enough to go for it? No. And I never had that pull before. I don’t know how to explain it, Dakota, but it was different. I just knew you were the girl I was meant to explore this side of me with.”

“But is that all? I just have to be honest. I’m worried that’s it. Am I just the girl who awakened your sexuality, let you find yourself? Am I just the path for you to get to where you need to be?”

“No, you’re my destination.” Violet presses her lips against mine and I’m sure that this woman will continue to change my life for as long as she lets me.