Tessellate

by buildasn0wman

Summary

Elsa is forced to face what she's concealed for so long once her younger sister, Anna, gets accepted into the same University as her. College!AU, Elsanna. Reuploaded, originally written 2014/2015.

Notes

Hey, so sorry about the deleting-then-reuploading-then-deleting shit. Uhh, I do have my reasons--had nothing to do with feedback I was getting or the fandom or anything like that. Had to do with shit in my personal life that's completely irrelevant now (though it was kind of amusing watching people speculate as to why I deleted it lmao)

I'm uploading this as-is, so I'm not going to be changing anything, as much as it pains me. I wrote this a few years ago and I'll be honest, a lot of it is pretty awful in spots, well, it's pretty awful overall, especially the early chapters, but it's also sort of interesting to see how my writing evolved a little bit as time went on. maybe one day i'll actually be a competent writer! (if i take up writing again)

oh, so yeah, if you're just finding this, this fic has been written and finished since...2015?

if i ever get back into writing (and i reaaaally plan to at some point) i'll probably post it on my tumblr. my url is pricefiels.tumblr.com come stalk me

also, I should add I'm aware of the formatting errors, it has to do mainly with the fact that it was taken directly from Ff net instead of a Word document, because I'm silly and kinda dumb and never actually thought to backup the chapters
"Tomorrow," Anna's voice sang from the passenger side, her body so perked up from excitement that her back didn't even touch the fabric seats of Elsa's car. Her braids swung from her head like vines as she swayed, brushing up against her nearly bare, pink-singed shoulders, where freckles crawled up like paint splatters.

"I know."

Trust me, I know.

"We move-in—"

"You move in," Elsa corrected, her gaze glued on the endless pavement that sprawled out in front of the two as she drove across the suburban hellhole the sisters were raised in.

"I move in tomorrow, to my first dorm. I can't believe it, I mean, like, I'm really, truly, going to be living on my own," the younger girl enthused, her cheeks as bright as the low-hanging sun that blinded Elsa's vision.

"Just be quiet and choose a station," Elsa muttered, hands so drenched with sweat they could hardly grip the steering wheel.

"You're such a dick sometimes." Anna tinkered around with the various knobs and presets on the dashboard, a symphony of genres in discord following each other until she decided on a station.

Not this pop shit again.

"Wow, it's the station that plays the same song again and again. What's this, song number twelve? Almost as good as song number eleven!"

"Shut up, it's better than the indie crap you listen to all day," Anna scoffed, turning the volume up until the bass of the song thumped against Elsa's temples.

I'll ignore that. "You know, you're really not going to be truly living on your own. Wait until you live in an apartment and have to pay rent and buy your own food." She grabbed the knob and decreased the volume the instant her sister let go. "You get your own fucking meal plan and dining hall. I get ramen and, if I'm lucky, a bottle of coke."

"But Aunt Gerda pays for your rent and your food, because you can't even hold down a job," Anna said, her tone biting.

"Are you forgetting who's the one driving here, princess?" Elsa warned, tapping on the brakes lightly. The car behind them beeped, startling Anna, which drew a laugh out of the elder sister.

"Gross, don't call me that."

Princess. It was a frequent term of endearment that Anna and Elsa's parents used on the youngest before they passed away in a car crash four years prior, on a night that Elsa would swear was too fuzzy for her to recall completely, despite explicit details of the event often replaying at random moments in her head. Although Anna would insist that she had recovered mostly from the trauma of losing her parents in an accident, she held quite a bit of hesitation with car rides, draping fingers around her seat belt as though it were a cross. Elsa hadn't suffered from any long-term fears caused by the accident, unlike her sister, but her personality had grown cruder, wasting away to a skeletal
frame of the Elsa she once was, as if the happiness and liveliness she had once harbored had vanished with her parents' life.

"Just don't get too used to having things handed to you. I'm not going to be running to your dorm room when you can't handle being away from auntie and uncle to hold you during the stormy nights."

"What is wrong with you?" Anna chuckled, holding a hand up to her freckled face that shook with each laugh. As hard as Elsa tried to restrain herself from looking over to Anna, remembering how stern her driver's ed teacher was about *keeping her eyes on the fucking road*, in her peripheral vision she could see her gorgeous eyes light up, as though someone from above was shining a spotlight into Anna's face with the sole intention of making Elsa's life even more torturous.

*What's wrong? What's wrong is I can't stand the thought of you being so close to me again. I went to college to get away from these stupid fucking feelings that tore my heart apart every night. Why did you even have to apply to the same Goddamn college as me?* Elsa's head grew warm with apprehension, losing focus on the road for a brief moment.

"Red light!" Anna shouted, recoiling her small frame back into the passenger seat like a startled animal.

"Shit!" Elsa slammed her foot on the brakes, the *cheap piece of crap* she called her car barely halting before the white line.

The duo almost smashed into the dashboard, saved only by the strong integrity of their seat belts, flinging back into their seats once the car responded to her braking. Again, the car behind hers replied with an abrupt honk, which accomplished nothing but agitating Elsa even further. A small flurry of snow formed around her shaking fingertips, the eldest sister losing control of her formerly well-concealed powers in a flash of fear.

"Oh God, I'm so sorry, I didn't see that light there." Elsa's heart was making a bid for an escape from her chest, her posture switching from relaxed to almost exceedingly tense.

"How? We drive through this light almost every day. We're going to Target, not fucking Alaska."

With great hesitance, Elsa looked over to Anna in hopes she wasn't as mad as she sounded. An unrelenting glare and arms crossed tight against her chest-nope, she's pissed. *Good job, you know her one fear and almost made it a reality because you can't control your stupid urges.*

"I'm sorry. I'm distracted. I'm nervous about going back to school." *Yeah, nice half-assed lie.*

"Whatever. Just drive." Anna's tone dropped dramatically, stare fixed forward without even being so kind enough to return Elsa's gaze.

Elsa wished she could push the door open and abandon her car and her sister in sheer embarrassment. A feeling settled in her stomach as though a large boulder was dropped there, weighing her body down into a sulk. The image of a resentful Anna in the seat next to her haunted the outline of her eyesight, no matter how hard she tried to concentrate on the asphalt in front of her.

The sisters didn't speak for the rest of the trip—even if there was much to discuss.

"Elsa," a feminine voice called from the hallway, slithering through the open slivers bordering Elsa's doors.
Elsa's eyes shot open, met with the darkness in her room that wasn't there when she dozed off an uncertain amount of time ago. What? What time is it? She slammed her hand around the bed until her fingers grasped the edges of what she was looking for, her old, junky cell phone she hadn't quite had the funds yet to replace.

9:18. Crap. I missed dinner. Elsa rose from her bed, her sheets haphazardly strayed around the mattress, as disorganized and disheveled as the blond hair on her head that was, at one point in the day, braided carefully. The light from her laptop, perched on the desk near her window, illuminated the mess of stuff purchased with Anna earlier in the day, a shopping trip whose awkwardness and shame she could gladly forget. Even if she achieved obtaining items necessary to continue scraping by in apartment life, the damage she had done to her relationship with Anna was not worth the sideways glances and exaggerated sighs that populated the errand.

Screw it. I'll just pack in the morning.

"Elsa!"

"What!" Elsa responded, her gravely voice as boisterous as her gogginess would permit.

"Well—uh, first, can I—can I open the door?" Anna's voice was loud enough to tip Elsa off that she was inches away from the other side of her door.

Elsa took a moment to examine herself in what little light her cell phone provided, her white t-shirt stained with red spills from the spaghetti she ate for lunch like pathetic war splatters, her chest, bra-less and admittedly small, shamefully showing through the thin fabric that shrouded her body.

"No." Elsa plopped back onto her bed with a gurgled groan. She felt so much better when she was asleep, where, for a few hours, she could pretend she existed in a world where Anna didn't exist, a reality where she wasn't consumed by these sick, sick feelings that were getting more difficult to repress with each passing sunset.

"Too bad, I'm coming in." Anna's voice grew clarity as Elsa's door creaked open, an abundance of light spilling in and hitting her unprepared eyes.

"Fuck, Anna." Elsa pulled the sheets up to her neck, clutching onto them tightly. I should probably be more embarrassed of my 101 Dalmatians sheets than my sauce-stained, see-through shirt. She sat up, her eyes slowly focusing in on the invading redhead.

"Well, excuse me for wanting to talk to you like the good little sister I am," she teased as she walked into Elsa's room. Don't say that. Don't ever say that again, lest you want me to jump you like the bad, older sister I am.

Anna's eyes locked onto Elsa, who pulled her sheets even closer to her body, sinking her head into her shoulders. "What?"

"I just need to talk you about something." Anna peeked at the floor behind her, then returned her concentration to her blushing sister. "Actually, two. Two things." She held out two fingers, knuckles curling in front of her grinning face.

"Just say it already, for Christ's sake."

"First, what's with the mess? I thought you were supposed to be the clean one, remember?" Anna
sat down next to Elsa, who flinched as soon as she felt her bed shake from Anna's weight.

"I'm tired and, I don't know, who cares? I'm moving tomorrow, what's the fucking point?" Elsa scooted her exhausted self away from Anna. The last thing she needed was whatever godforsaken scent Anna was wearing today infiltrating her sense of smell, reminding her simultaneously how oblivious Anna was when it came to how much body spray was enough, and how hopelessly smitten Elsa was that even her unwanted scent put a stop to her pulse.

"Apparently you also swear a lot when you're tired, too," Anna pointed out, prodding Elsa's hunched shoulder with a bony finger.

"Oh, please, forgive me for not being the proper little angel mom and dad thought I was," Elsa grumbled, cringing away from Anna's poke. "What was the other stuff you were going to talk to me about, anyway?"

"Okay, the other thing was – wait, why are you holding your sheets up so close to you like that? Are you—are you naked?"

"No, I just look like shit," Elsa stated bluntly, shrugging, although a deeper blush surfaced on her pale cheeks. *Is she picturing me naked? No, don't be ridiculous. She's not as disgusting and sick as I am.*

"I'm your sister, you don't have to worry about looking bad in front of me."

*If only you knew.* "Just tell me what you came in here to say, because I'm hungry and if you don't leave soon, it won't be pretty," Elsa warned, the vibrations in her stomach increasing in magnitude, loud enough to be heard by anyone else in her proximity.

"Don't eat me," Anna laughed, cowering away from Elsa. *Oh, God, Anna.* Elsa hated herself for the indecent place her mind crept into after Anna spoke. "Anyways, so yeah, earlier today—I mean, I was kind of a colossal asshole to you, what with not talking to you, and whatever, even though you took me out to buy shit for school and...uh, yeah..."

"No, you weren't a colossal asshole. More like a mega asshole."

Anna nodded subtly. "Okay, mega asshole. But, you know, it's still really tough for me." Anna paused for an intense moment and continued, sighing. Whether or not her pause added any substance to the conversation, it certainly enhanced the uneasiness that plagued Elsa. "But maybe I shouldn't have decided to punish you by ignoring you."

"Well, I guess I was kind of a jerkass to you, too. Tapping the brakes was an insensitive thing to do on my part. And I should probably pay more attention to the road next time." Elsa bit her lip, riddled with guilt as she avoided any eye contact with Anna.

"We're both stupid and mean, how's that?" Anna elbowed Elsa's ribs. *Stop touching me. Please.*

"I am, but you're not. You're not an asshole."

"But you said I was."

"I was being an asshole, because that's what *I* am, don't you listen?" Elsa jested with a smirk. *An actual smile. I'm actually smiling. Holy crap.*

"Let's just agree that we're both sorry?" Anna requested, her pitch rising with hope.
"Sure." *Stop smiling. Stop fucking smiling, you look like an idiot.* The best Elsa could do was grip her bottom lip between her front teeth in a struggle to conceal her grin, but she was about as inconspicuous as a carrot in a torrent of white snow.

"Awesome. Also, I couldn't help but notice—I mean, your hands, I saw ice—again, and I—"

"It happens. You know I can't control it sometimes, how many times do I have to talk to you about this?" Elsa's smile was wiped as easily it formed, raising her voice at Anna, though immediately regretting her tone once the anger-laced sentence fell out of her mouth. *She's just worried about you, you ass. It's probably hard as all hell for her to even bring it up with you.*

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry. I'm just concerned, because it's been happening more, or I think so, at least," Anna noted, her eyes craning up towards the ceiling as though she were struggling to think. *God, she's so adorable.*

"I know. I'll get it under control. I just really don't want to talk about it." Elsa calmed her voice into an inflection less threatening, sighing down at the carpet as she reigned her hands even closer to her body.

"All right. So, uh, hug?" Anna held her arms out towards Elsa, whose eyes immediately darted to her sister's upper body, presented in its fully clothed glory, forbidden treasure encased in an off-limits valley of green.

*No, no, don't, you have no idea what you're doing to me.* "I'm not letting go of these sheets," she excused, straining her eyes away from Anna.

"That's all right." Anna wrapped warm arms around Elsa's neck, pulling her overwhelmed sister so close to her body she almost couldn't breathe, lungs struggling to expand in her constricted torso. *Coconut. She's wearing coconut scent today.* Elsa inhaled the strawberry blonde's scent forcefully, her nose growing sore as the smell plundered her senses, not even trying to mask the fact that she was purposely inhaling her sister's aura. It nearly distracted her from the uncomfortable fact that Anna's breasts were pressing up against Elsa's hands that clasped onto her bed sheets tightly, too restrained against Anna to move more than a few desperate centimeters.

As soon as Anna ceased the embrace, abandoning Elsa in a shivering mess, Anna hopped up from Elsa's bed, starting towards the hallway where the lights were flooding in from. She stopped in the doorframe and twirled towards Elsa, who was struggling to calm herself, Anna's face as cheerful and lit as always. "Your hair looks pretty cool like that. Keep it like that."

*If you're being serious, then I'll never touch it again.*

After Anna carefully shut the door, darkness once again consuming Elsa's room as a sort of terrible reminder of her own life, Elsa groaned and threw herself down onto her bed, the furniture bouncing underneath her as the creaking of her cheap mattress bounded around the room.

*No sane person gets turned on by their own younger sister hugging her like that. Just let it pass. And if you ever touched yourself over something like that, I swear to fucking God you're sicker than you even think.*

She reached over to her nightstand to turn her lamp on, the lights flickering until creating a stationary illumination. She stared at the pile of items she needed to pack into her car the next morning, to drive across the state for five hours with her sister seated next to her the entire time, completely oblivious to everything, every *fucking* feeling, every night she spent grasping at her hair in pure madness, every day she wished Anna never applied to the same university as she did.
Every day her heart broke at how stupid she was to fall in love with her own little sister.
"Jesus Christ, Anna, get your ass over here before I leave without you," Elsa called out to the hallway from the kitchen, the spoon in her poised hands clashing down into the bowl resting below her, spraying a few drops of milk onto the table and her cell phone. "Shit." She snatched up her phone, wiping off milk stains that landed on it, when the face lit up and presented the time, 11:41, in bold, taunting numbers. *She knows we're leaving at noon. I swear to God, if we hit traffic because of her, I'll—*

"Give me a second!" Anna responded, her silvery voice muffled behind her bedroom door, which was decorated abundantly with various band posters and wonderful pencil drawings she made, a talent Elsa envied dearly.

Well, my morning was going so much better before I heard your voice. "I'm going to eat your cereal."

Anna's door screeched open, the sister poking her head out from the small opening. "Don't you fucking dare." Her unbraided hair poured down her body in a russet avalanche, stray strands leaping off her head in random directions.

"You're not even ready? We're leaving at noon! I told you this, like, what, a million times?"

"I just gotta get dressed. I mean, look at me," Anna said, sliding through the slice of space between the door and the frame.

Anna adorned an oversized t-shirt, faded red with "Delle University" sprawled on the chest in a yellow, broad typeface. The shirt spilled down to her rose-colored thighs, barely sheathing the pink boy shorts she had wrapped snug around her gaunt legs that streamed down to the hallway carpet. Although the shirt was a few sizes too large, it hugged her upper body perfectly, magnifying the lithe curves of her figure in ways that beckoned Elsa close to insanity. She smiled at Elsa, turquoise eyes lit as though she expected her to be impressed she was still wearing the shirt Elsa bought her three years ago, oblivious to the awestruck expression cemented on the blonde's face.

*It is way too early for this.* Elsa crossed her legs tight in a weak effort to extinguish the fire starting to thrive down there, still staring bewildered at Anna, who was pulling the front of her shirt down as far as it would go, not achieving anything other than establishing an enticing pose that tantalized Elsa further.

*That's your sister, you pervert, stop staring.* "Anna, please, go get dressed," she breathed, only a hint of her real voice present. Her gaze bolted down to the table, cheeks flushing redder than Anna's top.

"It's the shirt you got me, though—I mean, I sleep in it, a lot. It's my favorite shirt." Anna's tone was strapped with disappointment.

"Just go!" Elsa repeated, her face growing hotter. Her voice raised to a decibel she hoped she never had to speak to Anna in again. "We don't have time for this."

Anna looked as though she just had her heart ripped out. "Fine," she spat, shutting her door behind her a near-slam. The sudden noise shook Elsa and startled her racing heart, her body shuddering from her shoulder blades down.

Elsa buried her blushing face in her arms. *Good going. Making her think you hate her is definitely*
better than her knowing you love her, you dumbass. Anna's heartbroken voice echoed through her cluttered head in an agonizing loop, lassoing the lump in her stomach up to her chest.

Despite the hotness of her cheeks, her fingers grew cold, white swirls starting to spiral around her fingertips as miniature snowflakes materialized. Ice crept from her fingers to the table, a thin sheet blanketing a small area of the wood, with sounds of the ice crackling and snapping as it fractured, polluting the air. Panicked, Elsa snapped her hands away the tabletop, shoving her hands between her thighs as she clenched them together in hopes her own body heat would somehow subdue her uncontrollable powers.

I'm a fucking freak.

The first few hours of the car trip to the college was accompanied by a painful silence, as though the sister were old rivals who were refusing to acknowledge the others existence in a childlike act of spite. Elsa would open her mouth in futile attempts to vocalize anything to Anna, but nothing ever came out more than a defeated breath that lingered in the back of her throat. Their interactions with each other throughout the summer had been scarce, yet fertile with tension, and very little was going to change that.

Why are you even mad at her? You're the one who's been treating her like shit.

Each passing highway sign ridiculed Elsa, appearing to grow fewer and further between, the distance to their destination somehow gaining. The landmarks she used to be excited to spot on her usual drives to Delle University now frustrated her, serving as jeering reminders of how behind schedule they were. We should have passed that stupid inflatable pig forty minutes ago. Elsa could hardly stand another minute in the car with her morose sister, the tension suffocating her like delicate fingers wrapped around her pasty neck.

Anna took out her phone, fiddling around with its interface for a few moments before exhaling noticeably and shoving it back into the pockets of her jeans, resuming her stance of her arms crossed over her baggy, gray sweatshirt and her back sinking into the seat.

Just turn on the radio or something. Ask her if she's hungry. Anything.

Yet Elsa did nothing, continuing to pretend she was too occupied with driving to recognize Anna in the passenger side, whose eyes were fallen down to her own knees, occasionally looking over at Elsa for brief junctures. Elsa used every last bit of restraint she harbored to prevent herself from pulling the car over and confessing to Anna in hysterics everything she had caged inside for the past two years, if only to help Anna understand why she acted the way she did, with such recklessness towards Anna's own emotional needs.

But she never could, not with the stinging tears that fashioned behind her eyes when the mere thought of a confession crept into her consciousness.

The objects in the trunk and backseat rattled which each bump of the highway, a majority of the luggage belonging to Anna, who insisted on buying every last thing she could think of to prepare for college. Elsa glanced over in random intervals at her pouting sister, whose hair remained in a cascade down to her chest, rising up whenever she released a heavy sigh.

"So, you're not doing your hair today?" Elsa asked, in a desperate pursuit of conversation.

"No." Anna took a deep breath before continuing her answer. "You were rushing me out of the door. I didn't have a chance to."
"Okay."

Okay? That's it?

Elsa accepted her failure and didn't press Anna any further, the pain in her chest spreading. *Just one more hour, you can deal with this. Maybe you won't ever have to see her again and you can get over your stupid infatuation.*

"Why do you hate me?" Anna asked after a few minutes of stillness, her voice puncturing Elsa's inner thoughts.

"What?" Elsa struggled to confirm that Anna actually said that, her mind hazed with her own preoccupied, pessimistic ideas.

"When I got accepted here—I mean, at Delle, I thought you'd be happy. Since I got in all you've done is shut me out and pretend I don't even exist. Whenever I try to show you something that makes me happy, you make me feel like shit over it." Anna's voice cracked progressively as she spoke, her eyes and sun-kissed cheeks turning even more crimson.

*Elsa, you really, truly, are an idiot.* "I—I don't—we—* Elsa's own thoughts were incomprehensible, much less the mess of sounds that were tumbling off her thrashing tongue.

"Literally, like the moment I got in, you stopped treating me like a sister and more like a nuisance. If you don't wanna see me in college, then whatever. I'll just leave you the fuck alone. Just tell me so I don't have to spend my first semester guessing if you hate me or not."

*Ouch. Fucking ouch.* Elsa had never heard Anna speak with such toxicity in her tone. The pain Anna's hurt words inflicted on Elsa made her visibly wince, fingers close to slipping off the steering wheel as she withdrew herself. Her hands became cold, tiny ice crystals creating rivers of cold fractals along the veins of leather on her wheel. "I don't hate you. I swear, I swear to God I don't hate you."

"Then why do you act like it?" Anna's voice trembled more with each syllable. *She's crying. You made her cry, you douchebag. I hate you so much.*

"Because I'm an idiot, is that what you want to hear?" As Elsa's anxiety augmented, so did the frost that accumulated around her fingers. *Shit, shit, shit.* She darted her eyes frantically over to Anna in hopes she didn't pick up what was happening, and was met with the sight of her sister glowering down at the car floor.

"No, I want to hear that you're not going to completely shut me out at college and actually fucking do stuff with me like we're actually friends. Not even best friends if you don't want, I just, I don't want to be a stranger to you, because I'm new to this whole stupid college thing and scared as hell, and I need you, and—* Anna's voice broke completely, her hand snapping up to her face to shield it as she broke down into a bawl. "And—"

Her face was beautiful even when it was contorted into a sob, Elsa noted. *Focus, for God's sake.*

"I will, trust me, I'll be there for you."A familiar stinging surfaced in Elsa's sinuses, eyes growing sore. *Are you really going to start crying now? I'm so sorry.*

"Okay," Anna squeaked. "I just hate it when you yell at me."
"I love you. I really, really do." *You don't even know.* "I'm sorry for being such a shitty older sister."

Anna placed her hand back on her lap, her cheeks still puffed and painted with the trails of her tears. She responded to Elsa's affection with a meager nod, her stare glued on the windshield in front of her as she recollected her composure, the silence punctuated with increasingly distant sniffs. The ice on the steering wheel slowly dissipated as Elsa calmed herself with full breaths. *How the hell am I supposed to survive this year if I can't even control that?*

And Elsa sat there, lurching over her dashboard in embarrassment, knowing that if she were ever remembered for one thing, it would be for being the world's worst sister.
"Hey, loser."

Elsa picked her head off her desk, turning her head to the direction of the voice while her sensitive eyes strove to make a clear image of the greeter. "Oh. Hey, Nani." Elsa's hand gripped a can of soda, which by now had grown warm and flat. The pencil her arms rested on when she slept had left a red imprint on her arm, which she shook in a struggle to regain feeling in the limb.

"You just moved back in and you're already taking a nap, huh?" Nani asked, crossing her gorgeously chestnut arms across her body as she took a casual lean against Elsa's door frame, her smile telling of the judgment she was making behind her eyes.

"Let's just say I've been sleeping a lot this summer." Elsa cradled her forehead in her fingers, shutting her eyelids tight.

Elsa took a moment to examine her dimly-lit room, which was somehow even smaller and more pathetic than the room she hibernated in at the place she used to call home. Her apartment, although sufficing in the areas of shelter and necessities, was nothing she claimed to be proud of. She was lucky enough to call Nani a close companion and a roommate, providing company she so sorely missed during the brutal summer, when the only company she could enjoy was that of the sister she avoided. The lack of furniture, however, and the grungy walls that seemed to cave in more each day resembled that of a prison cell she unwillingly spent most of her time confined in, like a caged rat toiling through hell each day in hopes of a morsel of cheese before bed. Not even her pathetic attempts to liven up the room with band posters and art prints masked the depression sealed within these walls.

*I did not miss this fucking place.*

"Finally get a job?"

"No. It's...it's family stuff. Don't worry about it." Each time Elsa woke up from any sort of slumber, she suffered through brief phases of frustration and melancholy after her brain temporarily neglected to remind her of the existence she thrived in, where the only thought that remained a constant was her unhealthy attraction towards her sister. *God, why'd I have to wake up?*

"Oh. I know all about family stuff. Trust me," Nani said, gyrating her eyes around.

Trust me, you don't. "It's different. It's—forget it. How long was I even asleep for?" Elsa peered out her window, where the final rays of sunlight before dusk leaked through the glass and lay stripes of orange across the hardwood floor.

"Well, I got back from grocery shopping around fifteen minutes ago, and I saw you in here with your face buried in a pile of your own drool. So..."

"For fuck's sake." Elsa pulled her phone from her charger next to her with the intention of checking the time. A jolt radiated from her chest as soon as she read Anna's name on her screen, glorified in dozens of large, low-quality pixels. *Holy crap, I got a text from Anna twenty minutes ago.*

"I finally moved in, come and see it, if you want..."

A few hours ago, right when the two had arrived at the university after the tense car ride, Elsa assisted Anna in bringing her overwhelming amount of luggage up to her fifth floor dorm room,
which, as Anna announced through a pout, was "way smaller" than she expected it to be.

*She texted me twenty minutes ago, and I was sleeping. She probably thinks I hate her. Goddammit. God fucking-

"I gotta go," Elsa breathed. She gripped the edges of her desk and hoisted herself up in a rush, losing her orientation briefly as she stumbled away from her chair.

"Woah, slow down," Nani warned, quickly moving out the way of the panicked woman.

"I'm sorry, I just—I'll be back later."

---

*Fuck, I don't even remember her room number. 521...4? 5217?

The doors in the stretching hallway were sparsely decorated with felt flowers that had the residents' name cut and pasted on them in bright colors, like a kindergartener's arts and crafts project.

*Well, good to know the RA's are at least keeping busy.*

The hallway presented a disjunction of aromas—cleaning supplies, obnoxious body spray (both male and female), and years of regretful nights that settled into the carpet—Elsa wasn't sure which scent she hated more. She scanned every door she strolled by, reading the names on the flowers as the fluorescent lighting that hung above her in various brightnesses and tints buzzed as though it were filled with insects.

*Daisy, Melody, Weudy—I think someone messed with that last one.*

Elsa's attention was grabbed when she heard someone banging on one of the doors from the other end of the hallway. A freshman, his frame wrapped with muscles and coarse hair, slammed his palms on the green surface of the steel door.

"I'm here! Let me the fuck in!" he shouted in a raucous voice that echoed throughout the hall. His towering physique nearly made the doors that loomed over Elsa seem short.

*Jesus, are these the people she's going to have to live with?*

As if by response, the door across from Elsa shrieked open, a paltry hand gripping the doorknob on the other side of the reinforced steel.

"Oh, Elsa, you're here," Anna squeaked, slipping out of her room. Her skin was damp from sweat and flushed red with exhaustion, yet she was radiant, her scarlet-singed flesh bringing out the turquoise of her eyes.

*How the hell can you look so good when you're so sweaty? I look like I just crawled out of a ditch.*

"Okay, I was wondering why, I mean...well, anyways, I was just going to go to the bathroom, you can come in if you want while I go. My roommate's in there, by the way. She's pretty cool. I mean, we talked on Facebook before we got here for a bit, so I already kind of knew her, but it's so cool to finally meet her in person, she's got a lot of neat stuff, and—" Anna's ramble ceased with a quick inhale through svelte lips, her wandering eyes snapping over to Elsa. "Oh, God, I need to shut up, I'm probably just annoying you, I'm sorry. I really have to pee, anyways."
No. I could listen to you talk all fucking day. "Okay." A swell of elation pulsed through Elsa as Anna spoke, apparently disregarding the angst she distributed on Elsa earlier during the car ride. And you thought she hated you.

Anna started towards the main hallway, throwing her hand up in a wave. "Kay, well, I'll see you in a m—"

"You have to open the door for me, you idiot," Elsa reminded.

That's right, insulting her is definitely going to make this whole situation better. You'd never get away with this shit if you weren't siblings. No wonder she thinks you hate her.

"Whoops." Anna pivoted around, rushing back to her door. She fumbled around with the key and keyhole as though it were a puzzle she hadn't solved yet, jamming the metal into the opening recklessly until she accomplished a snug fit. Look at the way her tongue peeks out of her mouth when she concentrates, like a dog or something.

"...Thanks." Elsa attempted to recover from her rudeness to Anna with an uneasy smile, grappling the doorknob and pulling it open, wrestling with its unexpected heaviness.

"I thought you went to the ba—oh."

Anna's lanky roommate stared at Elsa with a curious eye, her other eye shielded by her long hair that spilled in front of her face, sitting cross-legged in her flimsy chair that rest in front of her desk, which was sparsely settled with school supplies and her laptop, a box of unpacked fashion magazines stagnant desk-side. On the contrary, Anna's desk was already cluttered with art supplies and decorations, tucked in the corner of her side of the room that boasted the same posters and drawings she hung on her walls back home, some crooked and already falling off. The amount of posters and sketches condensed into such a small area was overwhelming for Elsa. Too much Anna for such a tiny space.

"Uh, I'm Violet," the long-haired girl said, her gurgling voice barely audible over the whirring air conditioning.

"Oh, God, I'm so sorry, I'm Elsa." Elsa halted her examination of her sister's room to respond to the roommate, awkwardly waving at her.

"Yeah, I know. She told me you were coming. Or might be, whatever."

"My phone died. That's why I'm late."

"...Okay." Violet turned her attention back to her laptop, leaving Elsa to sway there in uncomfortable silence. Anna's going to talk her fucking ear off. There's no way this girl is going to survive living with her.

After a moment, Elsa ambled over to Anna's bed, her black and pink sheets appearing as though they were tossed onto the mattress as an afterthought, hardly clinging onto the corners. She slowly sat herself onto the bed, which didn't sink more than an inch under her body weight. I almost forgot how much these beds sucked. I don't think my spine ever forgave me for sleeping on these stupid slabs of stone.

"She talks about you a lot."

"What?" Wait, what?

Violet didn't avert her gaze from her flickering screen, yet continued to speak. "Yeah, well, at least
on Facebook. All she ever really talked about was how excited she was to go to college with you. Like she never really shut up about it. It was kinda cute. Also kinda annoying, honestly."

Elsa held a packed fist up to her mouth to obscure her developing smile. "Really?"

"Yup. You're lucky your sister likes you. My brothers are little brats."

Elsa didn't even register what Violet said, her thoughts still adhered to the fact that Anna talked about her. "A lot."

...And all I did was tell her to fuck off and avoid her.

Elsa's happiness expired instantly, washed out by immense guilt instead that brought her head into mope as though someone were pulling down strings attached to her forehead. Her braid fell into her face, staggering back and forth like a pendulum.

"Is there anything I should know about her? Like, as someone who's lived with her—"

"What? Oh, yeah." Elsa's head perked up, brushing her hair out of her face to nestle behind her ears. "She uh...she talks in her sleep. And she breathes with her mouth open while she sleeps, too, so she sometimes snores. It's not really a snore, it's like a series of quick snorts." And it's freaking adorable. Elsa got lost in her own chatter, the focus of her eyes pulled up to the corner of the room as her brain rattled off a list of all of Anna's quirks, translated disjointedly into words. "She doesn't kill bugs – like ever. She lets them outside. Always. She has this weird thing about not drinking the last few sips of her drinks. She has to have her volume at an even number, or a number that ends in five. She hates it when people wh—"

Elsa's gossip was interrupted by the clanging of metal on the opposite side of the door, followed by Anna fighting to open up the intimidatingly bulky door, pulling it open with both hands anchored on the doorknob.

"Oh my God, these things are so damn heavy," Anna breathed, finally entering her room and shutting the door behind her with a definitive thunk.

You're so cute, it's almost sickening. "That took a while. Did you fall in?" Elsa teased.

"No, I met a guy."

And again, as if she were on an emotional roller coaster she was unable to release herself from, Elsa's joy sank. "A...a boy?" Her head flashed cold. Her chest grew tight. No. It's only been one day. You can't—you can't fucking start—

"Yeah, he was apologizing because he was being loud and thought he was the only one out in the hallway. He was nice, I think. His name was...Steven? No, Sven. Where did I even get Steven from?"

That guy? The lunatic banging on the door? "Is he hot?" Elsa asked, her fingernails starting to dig into her skin as her fists clenched tighter. Calm down. Calm the fuck down.

"Naw, I don't know. I'm not really looking for that stuff right now."

Elsa wasn't sure how to feel. Don't be ridiculous. You'd never have a chance with her, anyway, you sick fuck. "Oh." No other words came to her, fighting hard to find something more insightful to say.
"Also, also, also, I found out what you can do to make it up to me," Anna enthused, her mouth curling into a tenacious grin, where pearls of white teeth peeked through the opening. *How do you not even realize how cute you are?*

"Make what up to you?" *You know the answer, why did you even ask?*

Anna glanced over at Violet, who was watching the two converse intently with an amused smirk. "I'm sorry, am—I am I not supposed to be listening?"

"No, it's fine," Anna said, shaking her head, silk strands of hair flying left and right with her movements. "But—you know what I mean. I know what you can do."

"What? What is it?" Elsa grew more aware of the pulse in her temples as her anticipation flourished. *Don't get excited. She's not going to ask for a hug or anything even close to your disgusting fantasies.*

"Give me a tour. A tour of the entire campus."

Elsa breathed with both relief and disappointment as her shoulders slunk down. "Oh. Wait, why? Didn't you get one at orientation or when you visited here like, what, six months ago?* I don't know shit outside the science building, or the math building. I barely remember where the dining hall is.*

"Yeah, but I want you to give me one," she insisted, clasping her hands together in front of her waist. *Don't even try to fight it, it'll make her hate you less. *All right, fine."

"Awesome! If we do it now, we can probably get to the dining hall be—"

"Now? Aren't you exhausted?"

"Eh," she shrugged. "Not really."

*Of course not, she has the energy of a puppy. Elsa sighed again, nodding her head faintly in drained acceptance. *Fine."

Anna beamed and breathed in emphatically through her teeth, which was clamped down on her lower lip in an excited smile. *Yes! I'd knew you'd do it. I mean, be cool with it. Hey, Violet, do you want in on this?"

Violet laughed and shook her head, holding her palms out in front of her coiled body. "No, no way. You two have fun."

"Oh, we will," Anna said, her eyes bright with thrill.

*Fuck.*
"This is Harrison Hall," Elsa introduced. She extended her hand towards the dorm building that loomed above them, bordering a section of the campus in a semi-circle, nearly too industrially dull in appearance to be satisfactorily considered housing.

"I know. That's where I live." Anna's voice was flat, carrying not even a trace of amusement.

"Well, obviously you don't need me to give you a tour if you're such an expert," Elsa mocked, leaning up against the unsaturated, dirty bricks that made up the building.

Anna glared at Elsa, not playing along with her tease. "If I were an expert, I'd know what that building over there was," she pointed out, nodding her head towards a classical looking building. The large building looked as though it were constructed in the 18th century, displaying the wear and tear of several seasons and abundant use, as dozens of students poured in and out of its doors, their composure too casual and gleeful for the building to be any sort of classroom hall.

"That's the senior dorm. Well, the junior-senior dorm, but mostly seniors. I can't remember its name, though," Elsa said, studying its architecture for any indication of a sign.

"Oh, well show me places to relevant to me. Like the art building. I wanna see the art building—is there an art building? Please tell me there's an art building." Anna asked, her enthusiasm peaking.

*I love it when she gets excited over the stupidest crap.*

"Of course, but it's tiny, and dirty, and smells like shit."

"Doesn't sound much different than back home."

"Great, it'll be just like working in your 'studio.'" With air quotes emphasizing her insult, Elsa smirked at her little sister, sneering in response.

"I make the most of what I have. Better than what you do in your room all day."

"What do you think I do in my room all day?" *Please tell me you don't actually know.*

"Probably touch yourself and listen to sad music all day," Anna muttered, staring at Elsa with a jeering look.

"Fuck you." *That's only half of it.*

Anna laughed and gently slapped Elsa's forearm, crossed against her chest, sheathed in a long-sleeved cobalt shirt almost one size too small. As her jobs grew had grown further apart, Elsa's bank account was too meager for her to afford purchasing a satisfactory amount of clothes that fit her well, finding herself straining to fit into the shirts she wore in high school, which was getting harder as she indulged in more stress eating than normal. Luckily enough for Elsa, however, her appearance wasn't as highly prioritized as other aspects in her life, taking a soft place a few spaces behind her mental health.

"Good to know you're really making the most of things, too," Anna pestered, still giggling. She didn't seem to notice Elsa started blushing the second she made contact with her arm.

*You get flustered when she so much as touches your arm. You're so pathetic.*
"Let's go and get this over with. I'm getting hungry." Elsa sunk her head into her shoulders, the sensation of Anna's playful slap still lingering on her forearm.

"Hey, I'm not the one keeping us here. You don't have to show me everything, just—keep me company, all right? Please?" Anna talked in a near condescending voice, as though she took a clear register of Elsa's hesitancy.

*Anything. I'd do anything for you. *"Fine, if you insist." Elsa picked her back up from the building, the sharp corners of the bricks scraping up against the tight fabric that stretched over her back.

"And don't skip anything. I'd know, trust me," Anna insisted, following her older sister as she sauntered down the pathway, which was now lit with the streetlamps that dotted its perimeter.

"I said, fine."

*You're smiling again. Stop it.*

Anna displayed general interest in every building Elsa described to her, even though the only facility she really knew anything about was the science building, where a majority of her classes were held. In fact, she saw old buildings she herself hadn't entered since her freshman year, ushering in old memories of foundation classes and the struggles of lowered GPAs, where late nights were often accompanied with binge drinking and frustrating studies that never evolved further than cram-readings of a few chapters.

Anna's eyes brightened in a way Elsa had never witnessed when she finally set foot in the art building, examining with monumental interest the various paintings and projects alumni of the university had completed and displayed in its halls. She told Elsa that one day, her work would grace the halls of the building, and her name would be immortalized forever in her own rusted plaque, where its letters would have been scratched out by years of abuse from students, but her art would stand untouched among the other masterpieces.

Elsa just nodded. *I don't even understand half of these pieces. Is that a dog? Or a chicken?*

And yet when she looked with pronounced joy at the passion Anna had for her hobby, she almost forgot about the depression that latched at her brain like parasite every night.

*Anna's actually happy here. Maybe I should learn to be, too.*

"...And that smell? The smell that smells like the decaying of thousands of students souls—and pizza? That's the dining hall," Elsa said, holding her palm out towards the cafeteria in a dramatic gesture. The dining hall, which she hadn't dined at since her sophomore year, was bustling with activity from students, who were shoving each other to either side to enter the building and feast on whatever barely edible variety of foods it offered.

"It smells good," Anna noted, snifing the night air. *Oh, you're going to be so disappointed. *"Are you up for some dinner?"

Elsa nodded after a short moment of contemplation."I guess I c—"

"Elsa!" A male voice rung from the distance, grating in Elsa's ears.

"Elsa!" the voice grew closer, prompting Elsa to twirl around to identify the source that seemed so anxious to receive her attention.
"Hey," the boy greeted, dashing up to her from the direction of the upperclassmen apartments. Despite his athletic physique, he panted after the short jog, holding onto his thighs as he regained his breathing, long locks of khaki hair dangling in front of his face as if on a mission to escape his scalp.

"'Ey, Kristoff," Elsa smirked, laughing at his exhaustion. "Got a little lazy with the working out this summer, did we?"

"Yeah, I, uh, I kind of took the summer off," the boy breathed, finally standing up straight after a moment of rest. He waved at Anna, mouthing the word "hi" to her.

"Hi," Anna said. Although the lights cast by the streetlamps were dim, Elsa could see Anna's face turn red, her lips biting down a smile that still buckled up her cheeks.

No. I fucking know that look. No.

The feeling came back—the one that clenched her abdomen when Anna said she met Sven just an hour ago. Not Kristoff. Not this fucking asshole.

"I'm Kristoff," Kristoff introduced, holding his humongous hand out for Anna to shake.

"I'm Elsa. I mean I'm Anna! I'm Elsa's sister, not Elsa." Anna shook his hand gingerly, her eyes focused on the boy's brazen figure that peeked through his shirt. Her tiny hand paired with his massive offering of a hand seemed nearly comical, if not for the genuine worry that Kristoff's strong grip could break Anna's bones.

"I figured," he chuckled, Anna joining in with an embarrassed cackle. "I've heard about you. So you two are going to the same college now, or...?"

"Yeah, I sort of just tagged along with Elsa, so I'm here now," Anna said, fidgeting with her own fingers.

"We were gonna go eat, so uh," Elsa interrupted, growing plainly uncomfortable. Just shut up. Both of you.

"Oh, that's fine. I was just going to ask if you were going to Hans' little party on Friday night."


"Well, he told me to invite anyone I want, so I'm telling you now—he's having a party, at his apartment, on Friday night." Kristoff shifted his attention from Elsa to Anna, as though he were personally inviting her along. "A welcome party, or something of the sort. You know he always tries to find things to throw a party over."

"Can I come? I mean, I hate to invite myself over—but I've never been to a college party," Anna beamed, looking at her sister, as if she needed Elsa's approval first.

"I don't see why not," he said, averting his gaze over to Elsa, who brooded in her lonesome.

"Then I guess I'm going," Elsa shrugged, looking down at the pathway she stood on.

"Sweet, well I was going to head back to my apartment, but I saw you and figured I'd say hi."

"Okay." You don't have to be an asshole to him, too. "Uh, it was good to see you." She couldn't
hide the insincerity of her voice, her mind now secured onto pure negativity.

"It was good to see you—and meet you," he smiled, waving once again at the younger sister before he disappeared off into the increasing darkness in an ambling trot, his large figure huddling up in the brisk air.

Don't say anything about him. Just forget you saw him, she'll forget about him, too. Don't ever bring him up again—

"You never really told me about your friends here," Anna said, looking up at Elsa.

"Oh. That's Kristoff. That's one of them. I have more. Somewhere." Elsa's thoughts were too clustered for her to speak any sentences that expanded beyond a few syllables.

"Now he—he's kinda cute," Anna snickered.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Anna's voice had never screeched so sourly in her ears.

"I thought you said you weren't looking for that kind of thing," Elsa reminded, becoming irate as her stomach knotted up even tighter, her anxiety rushing back through her throat and down to her chest.

"I'm not, but—I mean, I don't know. I might make an exception for that rule eventually, if the right guy comes along. And he is my type...I mean, from what I've seen..." Anna's eyes widened in adoration for the man.

I hate you. I fucking love you, but I hate you, so, so much. Elsa felt a pain in her chest, right where her heart was, that emanated throughout her entire being.

Anna started towards the dining hall, sheltering her hands in her sweatshirt pockets as the air had grown colder in the night. "Aren't you coming?" she asked, once she realized Elsa still remained firmly unmoved in her spot.

"No. I'm not hungry. I'm going back to my apartment." Elsa's voice was barely more than forced exhales that vaguely resembled words. She didn't even notice the ice that was starting to crust along her fingers.

"What the hell, Elsa? You told me you'd have dinner with me," Anna said with indigence, holding her hands out while they were still in her pockets.

"I didn't, I said I'd might. And I don't really want to, so I'm going back." Elsa turned around quickly before she could see Anna's reaction, rushing back towards the parking lot where her car was.

Anna said something, but Elsa couldn't hear it through the drumming of her heart in her head. She made out the words "fuck" and "you", unsure of if they were in succession or not. But when she reached her car, the seats and dashboard cold from sitting in the chilly atmosphere all night, she lunged over her steering wheel and broke into a sob, not caring about the ice crystals that bit her fingertips.

And she cried. And she cried, and she cried, until the clock on her phone told her that about an hour had passed by during her bawl-filled angst fest. And when she recollected herself enough that she could drive, she made the short drive home, the same drive that normally soothed her, this time brimming with pain and regret. Finally reaching her apartment after what she perceived to be the
longest drive home yet, she swiftly navigated herself to her bedroom with enough to stealth to evade Nani, who would surely comment on the redness and swelling of her face.

In every sense of the word, you're pathetic, a waste of space. Even if she did love you like you do, you don't deserve her for what you do to her.

Elsa curled on her bed, staring hopelessly at her phone. She desperately hoped it would light up with the promise of a text from Anna, so she didn't have to be the one to come crawling back and apologize for her insensitive behavior, now that she had enough time to regret her actions.

You promised her you'd spend time with her, not be a dick to her. You overreacted. As fucking always.

The only text she got during her mope was from Nani, who told her she was going to bed, and to make sure she kept quiet for the rest of the night.

How are you even going to get yourself out of this? Do you even want to?

After several moments absent from any communication from Anna, Elsa snatched up her phone and started to compose a message in a beat of hasty fret.

"I'm so sorry. It's just that I like Kristoff so hearing that you think hes cute kinda made me jealous...I'm so sorry...I overreacted...please don't be mad at me"

What a miserable excuse. Are you really going to lie to her?

Her thumb nervously hovered over the "send" button, pressing down on it lightly.

Don't press it. Just let it go, you want her out of your life anyway.

Her thoughts battling inside her swimming head, Elsa pushed down on the button, the phone acknowledging her action with a "message sent!" icon appearing on its dim screen.

You pitiful piece of shit.

She coiled up on her bed, her heart racing with anticipation for a response from Anna. Her vision adjusted to the blackness around her, now able to see the bleakness of the room she lay in. The sounds around her – the ambient noises from outside, the settling of the apartment, the distant snoring from Nani's room – all amplified in her ear as her senses grew keener, and yet her thoughts grew clouded.

Minutes later, spent wallowing in her own distress, her phone buzzed, vibrating her entire bed. She immediately grabbed up the phone and fumbled the device open to read Anna's response.

"i kind of figured. its ok i guess but you owe me dinner, k? otherwise i will get mad :)

Elsa sighed with relief, dropping the phone on her mattress. The instant she remembered that Anna was now attracted to Kristoff, however, all of the pain she managed to shoo away came surging back to her, constricting her insides. She buried her hands under her sheets to muffle the frost forming around her hands as the soreness returned.

You can't ever let yourself be happy, can you?

She over analyzed the text Anna sent, her mind delving deeper into a depression. She didn't say she'd lay off Kristoff. She didn't say sorry. That smiley is so passive-aggressive. She tossed her
phone on her nightstand, frost-tipped from the contact of her fingers, too disturbed to respond to Anna. Her mind was infected with threatening images of Kristoff and Anna together at the party they were going to attend—kissing, groping, touching, with Elsa standing alone in the corner, clutching a flat beer close to her body, left to flounder in her own poignant reality she forced herself into two years ago.

She lay on her bed, defeated, and for the first time in months, couldn't sleep.
"Does it really have to take you this long to have to get ready for a fucking party?" Elsa sighed, swaying on Anna's bed as she waited for her sister to complete her preparations in front of her vanity, the redhead bent over the furniture while she finished up a few touches of her cosmetics. *It doesn't even take me this long.* "I mean, I don't think anyone's going to notice if you don't wear red lipstick number twenty or whatever the hell you wear."

"Jesus, Elsa," Anna groaned, her eyes focused on the mirror. "You can just go ahead without me, if you're really going to be this impatient."

"But I'm your ride."

"And because you're my sister and you love me, you're going to wait for me," Anna sang out."

*Well, you're not entirely wrong.*

Elsa sighed and held off on responding to her sister, kicking her legs idly and skimming Anna's dorm room with her bored eyes. Despite only dwelling in the dorm for less than a week, Anna's character had already started to shine through in the way her clothes were strung around in random spots, uncleaned dishware and a few empty bottles calling her charcoal-crusted desk their home. On the contrary, Violet's side, which was minimalistic at best, boasted itself as being almost entirely spotless. The low illumination of her lava lamp lit the small piles of clothes that assembled randomly around Anna's half of the floor. "I can see you've made yourself at home here, Anna."

Violet laughed from her chair, holding a sweater-covered hand up to her mouth to mask her chuckles. "There is a little bit of a divide."

"At least it has personality," Anna mumbled, still fixated on her makeup.

"I'm sorry about her. Sometimes you gotta remind her to clean up or she'll forget," Elsa teased in a tone loud enough to waft over to Anna. "Like a little kid who forgets to pick up their toys."

"Dude," Anna started, "...just, shut up."

Elsa laughed in response, momentarily forgetting about the party she was so anxious to attend. For a few blissful seconds, the angst that had consumed her life had subsided as she shared a short giggle fit with Violet. During the duration of the laugh, however, her eyes were snagged onto a small detail of Anna's room that she hadn't picked up on prior, arresting her snickering and instead carrying in a gasp of surprise. Faded red fabric crested from one of the clothing piles on the floor, the familiar type face and letters peeking through in the folds of the shirt.

*No freakin' way.*

Elsa squinted her eyes, confirming that the shirt was actually there and that she hadn't started violently hallucinating from her messed up sleep schedule. As she did so, Anna had finally finished getting ready, now turned away from the mirror and staring at Elsa, whose gaze was still trained on the shirt.

"Is that the shirt?" Elsa wondered aloud, not realizing she was voicing her question loud enough for Anna to hear.

"What?"
"...That, right there." Elsa extended a pointed finger towards the garment, her stare still unmoved from its red creases. She felt the coldness of ice take over the her finger, quickly recoiling her hand to her sides.

"Yeah? It's my favorite shirt, I told you that." Elsa could see Anna shrug in the corner of her vision. "I mean, since...since you bought it for me," Anna's eyes shot down as though she were embarrassed at the sentiment she just expressed.

She brought it. Despite the shit you gave her, she fucking brought it. A confusing infusion of emotions tumbled over Elsa, who gaped at the piece of clothing. "You brought it with you?"

"Well, yeah," Anna said, her tone somber. "I can't really sleep without it."

Holy shit. Elsa bent her head down towards the linoleum floor to disguise her face, which was flushed with guilt and some other emotions she couldn't quite identify. "I'm sorry."

"What?"

"I said, I'm sorry," Elsa spoke up, still concealing her face. "For what happened that day, I'm sorry. I'm really glad you like it. Really, it means a lot. I—I'm just really sorry." Stop saying you're sorry.

"Oh, it's, uh, it's nothing. It was almost a week ago, don't worry about it."

Silence fogged the room, leaving an uncomfortableness that all of the girls who occupied it felt, their strong breaths unable to puncture the heavy emotions that accompanied the awkward stillness in the air. The lull had given time for Elsa to chafe in her own remorse, forcing her deeper into a gloom.

She loves you. She fucking loves you, even if you do treat her like crap. You're a terrible human being and don't deserve a sister like her.

"Aw, did you two just share a moment?" Violet asked, finally breaking the quiet, her voice in a near-tease.

The hell am I supposed to say to that? Elsa bit her lip and looked up at Anna, swimming with shame.

Anna wore an abundance of green—of course, as she always had since she was a child, as her parents insisted it was her best color that brought out the coral hue of her freckled skin, a pleasing contrast Elsa couldn't argue against. Her short-sleeved shirt immodestly wrapped around her frame, cutting low enough in the front that Elsa had to seize her stare to a corner of the room to halt the impure thoughts starting to violate her.

"Are you ready?" she muttered, straining to look away from her sister.

"As I'll ever be."

"You two have fun," Violet said, her smile beaming through in her voice.

I can try.

I hate this stupid douchebag bro music.

This beer sucks.
Elsa downed the remaining drops of alcohol that started to decay in the bottom of her cup anyway.

*This apartment smells like cat piss.*

*There's nothing but business and psychology majors here.*

Pessimistic thoughts, brought on by her own natural negativity and bad experiences with prior parties had gripped Elsa tight enough to prevent any enjoyment from seeping through to her. On the contrary, Anna's head had been held up with high expectations and enthusiasm the moment the sisters walked through the door, from the chilly bitterness of the outside to the hot pandemonium of the party.

"I never really thought college parties were actually like this, it's like a cliché," Anna said, standing close to her sister in the hallway, who was leaning up against the wall with an empty solo cup held right in front of her mouth. To the side of them was an unidentified student in his lonesome, a large man who was sat up against the wall with a spilled bottle of beer resting next to him, barely conscious as his eyes fought to stay open.

"Yeah, I fucking hate it," she muttered through the plastic.

Anna exhaled through her nose, over the beat of the music. "I know you do, Elsa," she stated after a pause.

*What's that supposed to mean?*

"I just, I really don't like parties. Or any sort of social gathering. Last time I was at a party, I wound up having to fight off this plastered asshole while he tried to grope my boobs." *And if he's here, I swear to God I will kick him right in his tiny dick.*

"I know, I know, but if you could just please try to pretend like you're actually enjoying yourself, that'd be great, all right?" Anna requested, turning towards Elsa. "I don't mean to sound like an asshole, but God, Elsa, do it for me? Just find something you like?"

Ow. As if she wasn't already burdened with guilt, Elsa imagined herself running through the increasing mass of college students, out of the apartment and back into the quiet life she lived, where, although her thoughts were crowded, her room was not. Instead, however, her brain scrambled in a haste to find something sufficient enough to say to stop Anna from hating her.

"I, well," she snapped her eyes over to Anna, who was staring up back at the regretful blonde with concern threaded in her gaze. In a moment of what she could later only justify as extreme weakness, she shakily laced her hand through the opening between Anna's arm and body, fastening their arms together in an affectionate lock. "I enjoy the company," she stammered, her voice drowned out by the dubstep that blasted in the other room.

Holy shit. Did I just hit on her? What the hell am I thinking? Elsa's arm trembled as it pressed against Anna's warmth, growing afraid the smaller girl could sense the sweat that started to accumulate on the limb and soak through the blue fabric of her shirt, reducing the already slick friction between the two.

"Aww," Anna swooned, pulling Elsa closer to her so that their shoulders were now making contact. "That's so sweet."

*Oh, God. Oh God. I've only had one beer, for God's sake.* Elsa stood there awkwardly, her arms intertwined with her sisters, clutching the cup so hard that it crushed between her clinching fingers.
"I really wish you did more things like this," Anna sighed in a break of the music.

"What? You mean—this?" Elsa asked, looking down briefly at the sister's fastened arms.

"Yeah, just, all of this. Do stuff with me. Treat me like a sister, show me that you care, I don't know. I just miss spending so much time with you." Even though her voice was as soothing as it ever was, it brought an inkling of apprehension out of Elsa.

Jesus, Anna, I wish, I mean I really, really fucking wish I could make you understand why I can't do this all the time. "Okay," she whimpered, unable to voice her real feelings.

For the next few minutes the two stayed there in silence, nestled in their own little corner of the bustling commotion. Elsa glanced at Anna in random intervals, taking these brief moments to appreciate just how gorgeous she looked as she stood there with a look of actual content on her face, instead of lamenting disappointment over her sister's social incompetence. Every time Anna took a breath, Elsa felt her body move up against hers, drifting shivers through Elsa's spine that grew progressively more enjoyable. The short period of calmness gave Elsa enough time to soothe the rapid beating of her heart, almost reaching a point of actual tranquility.

This is nice, isn't it? Well, of course it is, idiot. You're in love with her.

"Do you think Kristoff's here?" Anna asked, her head perking to the side. Well, there goes any shred of serenity I ever had.

"What? Why—why do you care?"

"I thought you liked him."

"Oh." Oh, shit. "Probably. I don't know."

Anna escaped from Elsa's arm, peeking out into the living room, where the smell of Old Spice and alcohol lay dormant in the air. "I don't—I don't see him. But oh, I think I see Sven." She held up her arm, waving frantically into the inattentive crowd, which was dotted with awkward, horny students who weren't quite yet versed in the art of successful flirting.

Why the fuck would a freshman be at an upperclassman's party?

"I'm gonna go talk to Sven. You should go look for Kristoff, all right?" Anna suggested, poking Elsa's shoulders.

"No, don't—I mean, don't leave me." Wow, that's pretty fucking pathetic, even for you. Elsa bit her tongue to stop herself from saying any more once she heard herself speak the pitiful plea, shrugging her head down.

"Wait, really?" Anna looked at Elsa with sincere shock, as though Elsa wanting to bask in her company was that surprising.

"Yeah. Well, I guess if you want to go to talk to Sven you can," Elsa said, shooing away the desperation in her voice. That's right, let your stupid pride get in the way of what you actually want.

"I do, but I'll be back," Anna assured, gifting a warm smile to the older sister. God, you're so hot. Elsa merely nodded in response.

As Anna pushed her way towards the evolving horde of people, Elsa withdrew herself even further into the hallway, which had now unofficially established itself as the resting place for the more
lonely party goers, sulking up against the wall in a fashion similar to Elsa, who huddled herself in her crossed arms. Fidgeting with the crumpled mess of plastic in her hands, she considered navigating her way to the beer table to replenish her supply and possibly help soothe the anxious feelings that started to exhaust her once again. You have no competition with Sven. Let it fucking go. Calm down. She clenched her fists tight to stifle the ice conceiving in her hands, afraid her powers might overwhelm her and cause a scene.

"Was that your girlfriend?" asked the slurring pile of human that perched against the wall next to her.

"...What?" Elsa looked down at the man, whose gray shirt was stained with drops of beer and saliva. Did I even hear that right?

"That girl, the one you, uh, you uh, were holding hands," he clarified, wiping drool away from his gaping mouth.

"No, we weren't." I wish we were, though.

"You were doing s—something, I wasn't really paying attention, but if that's your girlfriend, good job, dude."

"What the hell are you even talking about?" Elsa slid down the wall, joining the man as her rear settled on the dirty, brown carpet below them, littered with old stains and food crumbs.

"She's hot, is what I'm trying to say. Jesus Christ." The man came unnecessarily indignant, the beer clearly taking hold of his emotions and destroying his ability to rationalize. "And you are, too. We don't get a lot of lesbians here."

Oh my God, is this really happening?

"That's my sister, weren't you listening to us talk?" she grumbled. Though it really doesn't make much of a fucking difference to me.

"Shit, I'm sorry. You two don't look alike, although I might, maybe, might be a bit too fucked to tell."

Elsa grew amused by the blubbering man, nearly hushing the worried thoughts that screamed in her head. "She is hot, isn't she?" Wait, shit, you said that out loud. You better hope he's too fucked up to notice.

"Dude, I thought—I thought that's your sister." The man laughed, despite the awe in his voice.

"I don't wanna bang her or anything, for fuck's sake." He doesn't have to know.

"Oh, no, no, no, I know, I'm just saying."

Elsa looked out into the living room, Anna and Sven completely obstructed by the bodies of everyone else. She tucked her head into her knees, her cheeks rubbing up against the denim of her jeans. "I hate this fucking place," she whined after a minute.

After not hearing any reply, she looked up and realized the man had left, leaving her alone to fester in her own antagonism.

Not even drunk people want to hang out with me.
"Isn't this your seventh beer?" a girl asked from beside the beer table, watching Elsa as she struggled to refill her cup.

Elsa tried to focus her concentration on the source of the voice that spoke to her, but her inebriation only allowed a slightly blurry image of the woman to assemble itself. She could make out blonde hair falling down her shoulders, framing a fragile yet pleasing face, and a sky blue shirt hugging around her small anatomy.

"I don't know, I'm not keeping—fucking—count." Elsa's response lazed out of her mouth like the beer spilling into her cup, splashes of the alcohol dousing onto the carpet thanks to her lack of coordination. "Shit."

"I've been watching you all night. Are you all right?" Wow, what a fucking creepy thing to say.

"Watching me?" Elsa placed her cup on the table, slamming it down with more force than she intended. "That's really creepy. You're kind of creepy. Why are you—why are you watching me?"

"I don't know, I like watching people," the girl shrugged. "I like watching interesting people."

"Weellll, way to be so fucking straightforward about—bout it."

"Your language sure is colorful," the girl laughed, leaning up against one of the several movie posters that tastelessly decorated the beige walls of the living room.

"I never claimed to be—a, uh, shit...what's the word?" Word...master? Wordperson? Blacksmith? No, dammit. "I don't know. I don't care. Why do you even care if I'm all right?" Elsa chugged a majority of her cup, the increasingly less bitter beer scalding down her throat. "You don't even know me," she swallowed, wiping the remnants of the drink off her lips. Why is everyone trying to talk to me tonight? Do I even look like I want to be talked to?

"I'm just curious. You've been sitting in that hallway for most of the night," she said, pointing towards the hallway of depressing desolation, where a few students still vegetated. "I've been watching other people, too, but every time I looked, you were sitting right there."

"That's a really strange thing to admit, like, if I were a crazy person, I could kick your ass over t—that," Elsa warned, stepping away from her and fumbling over her own foot as she did so. "I'm fine, I'm fine."

"I'm simply trying to make sure that you're okay. I hate to see people look so down."

"Oookay." Go away, now. I don't need you to take pity on me. Elsa stared out towards the crowd in hopes the woman would take the hint and leave her alone, although she watched her attentively in the corner of her softened vision.

"Whatever's bugging you, I'm willing to listen," she confided, not picking up on her passive warning.

Elsa paused, her eyes now locked on her younger sister as she stood in the corner of the room, chatting with her larger friend, whose smile was a bit too wide and polished for Elsa's comfort. "It's nothing. Don't worry about it. I'm cool."
"Well, if you ever want to talk about it, I'm right here."

Maybe it's worth at least talking to someone tonight. Staring at Anna isn't going to help. Elsa, disoriented, turned towards the mysterious girl and melodramatically sighed. "If you really want to kn—know, I've just been dealing with, like, a lot of shi—stuff. Like girl problems." Elsa's ability to control her volume had diminished as her insobriety increased, her voice loud and garbled.

"Girl problems? Yeah, I've been dea—"

"No, no, no, no. I mean, like, problems with girls. Girl problem...s. "

"Oh, I know what you mean," the girl said, nodding her head with widened eyes.

"What?" Elsa burped before she progressed, deciding to hold off on refreshing her drink. "What I'm basically saying is I like girls and they make my life a fuckin'—a living hell." Especially one girl in particular.

"I know, I'm saying, me too." The girl's voice, although feminine and high-pitched, fell austere, looking at Elsa as though she expected her to pick up on the hidden context.

"Oh. Ohh. Are you a lesbian?" Elsa asked, her inhibitions now non-existent.

"I'm not straight," the girl laughed, playfully pushing Elsa's arm, whose lack of balance prompted her to stumble back a few inches.

This just got pretty interesting. "Oh, well, uhh." She's pretty, I mean, as far as I can tell. Fuck, I forgot how to hit on people. Do I touch her? Do I tell her I think she's hot? Elsa stood proud as though a brilliant idea had come to her. "Yeah, I, uh, I love girls."

Oh, super smooth.

"Yes, they're really something," the girl giggled, her eyes lighting up at Elsa.

You're way too fucked right now to successfully pick anyone up. Just give up and go back to sulking alone and sadly obsessing over Anna. "So is that why you wanted to talk to me so bad? You think—you think I'm hot? I mean, do you?" Or you can make a giant fucking idiot out of yourself. You're only doing this to take your mind off Anna, for Christ's sake.

The girl burst into a stronger laughter, holding her tender hand up to her boldly lipsticked mouth. "Why don't you just tell me your name first?"

"Elsa. Like, Elssaaa." Yeah, you're wasted.

"Okay, Elsa, well it's great to meet you. I'm Alice."

That's an awesome name. Our name's are kind of similar. Elsa...Alice...sa." As thoughts slurred from her lips, Elsa moved closer to Alice, who stiffened her body up in response.

"I think you've had a bit too much drink," Alice said, placing her hand on Elsa's shoulder.

"I think you're—" No, you are not drunk enough to say that. Don't fucking say it. "Uh, maybe you're right. Maybe."

"If you want, I'll keep you company until you feel better. I mean, if you want me to." Alice took her hand off the intoxicated blonde's shoulder, shrugging.
Elsa looked back to where Anna and Sven were last, the spot now empty. *Who even knows where they are right now? You might as well talk to someone instead of obsessing over it and looming in self-pity.* "Yeah, that'd—that'd be nice. I guess."

"Really? Biology?" Alice asked, watching Elsa with keen interest.

A lot of time had passed—Elsa hadn't been exactly keeping track, but the crowd of the party started to die down as the night had grown older, the solo cups that littered around the apartment being the only reminder of their presence. Elsa's sobriety had started to return, to the point where she was able to speak to her new companion with enough coherence to hold a conversation that wasn't interrupted by her short-term memory loss or need to belch. Anytime, however, she remembered about Anna and Sven—who had remained missing from sight for some time now—a rush of anxiety would abduct her, causing her to lose almost immediate interest in the conversation. As if she picked up on these moments, though, Alice would quickly change the subject to recapture the still tipsy Elsa's attention, completely oblivious as to what it was causing Elsa these sudden surges of pain.

The two lounged on the now unoccupied couch that rest in the middle of the living room, one which was likely so ridden with bacteria and dirt that a completely sober Elsa would have refused to sit on its tacky patterned cushions.

"No, I mean, yeah, but n—neurobiology, to be more spec—specific, uh, spe—specific," Elsa clarified. *That's a really hard word to say.* "It's fun, but, you know, shit, there's only so many times you can learn about the, uh, chemical make up of brain cells and, and tissue before you want to throw your book out the window and declare a major in 'fuck everything.'"

"Well, that certainly beats a major in drug studies," Alice shrugged. Her breath froze after she spoke, as though she had just revealed something confidential.

"No shit, that sounds a lot funner. Er, more fun. Like what do you even study? How, how drugs affect the brain? Or whatever?"

"Yes, something along those lines. More like, how alcohol and drugs are made up and how people grow dependent on them. Just, I guess, boring stuff." Alice's shoulders rolled as she spoke, like she were uncomfortable with the focus being pointed at her studies.

"Wait...are you only here because you wanted to see drunk people?" Elsa asked, proud of her still inebriated brain of making such a bold connection. "Like study? Are you, are you studying me?"

"No, well, I don't know. Hans is my neighbor and he throws a lot of parties, so I like to come here and sort of just...do research, quietly, in the back of my head. And you, well, you just caught my interest." Alice's eyes scanned up and down Elsa's figure, before returning permanently to meet her offended gaze.

"Oh?" Elsa asked, receding her body into the couch dramatically. "Is that the only reason you wanted to talk to me? Because I was drunk?"

"...Was? And, no, I haven't talked to anyone else I've been studying, just you. You stand out to me, and I don't know why. But you're a fascinating person to talk to, even if you're not entirely, well," Alice bit her lip as she strained to find a word appropriate, smearing red on her tooth. "...Lucid."

*So, she thinks you're cute, but pathetic. Perfect.* "So did you even care that I was sad? Or were you just trying to hit on me all night?" Elsa scowled.
"I do care that you're sad, I was trying to take your mind off of it," Alice assured, strictly.

"Well, thanks, I guess, but I really don't want to be used in your research."

"I'm off the clock right now, I promise you," Alice said, placing a hand on Elsa's, which idled on the cushion next to her.

Well, shit.

Elsa fought to rescue any words that came to her clouded mind, but nothing succeeded in making it past hitched breaths in her throat. Knowing she wasn't skilled enough in reciprocating any sort of flirting, she chose instead to avert her stare away from Alice, as if playing it cool and uninterested would somehow coax something more out of the girl.

"Hi!"

_Dammit, no. I almost forgot. For the first time in two years, I almost forgot you fucking existed._ Elsa turned her head around, acquainted with the sight of Anna with her chin resting on the couch behind her, her fingers strapped on the back of the furniture. _Perfect timing, really, just the most perfect Goddamned timing ever._

"Hey, uh, how's—how's Sven?" All of the worries that kept at bay while she talked with Alice flooded through her gates, her chest swollen with a rapid heart.

"Oh, yeah, I'm really sorry about that, truly. He kept talking, and talking, about everything, and then introduced me to some of his friends. I also had a drink, and a half—actually, more like a beer and a quarter, and it was pretty nasty, nothing like the shit we have at home," Anna blabbed, her lips curled into an authentic smile as she did so. "But I started to get kind of bored, and I wanted to come see you again, so—so here I am."

"Talking? About what? Anna, what was Sven trying to talk to you about?" Elsa said, her words sloshing together.

"School? I don't know, why do you...why is it such a big deal?"

"I'm just curious. Do you think he likes you? I mean, I gotta look out for you." _Way to be so fucking transparent._ "It's—it's my job, y'know?"

"I don't think he does, but I can make my own decisions about that, you know," Anna said, rising her head up from the couch. "I'm old enough to know what I'm doing."

"Okay, but, but be careful," Elsa said, trying her hardest to not plead those words. _Because if I ever saw you with anyone else, I don't know how I'd ever cope._

"Yes...well, anyways, I was going to ask you for a ride home soon, but I think it's best if I find another way home," Anna said, not hiding her judgment under her deciding gaze. Her tone turned almost hostile after Elsa's little protective confrontation.

"What? Why? I'm perfe—perfectly capable of driving you home."

"Elsa, I don't think it's safe—"

"No, no, I can drive, trust me, I'm fine. Where are my keys?" Elsa arched her butt up from the couch, patting lazily around her pants to identify the familiar bulge of keys in her pockets. "Let's go home."
"I am not letting you drive me home!" Anna grabbed Elsa's shoulders, shoving her down into the cushions. Elsa briefly broke under Anna's hands, allotting herself a second to recover from the unexpected touch of her sister. *Calm down, you idiot.* The few people who remained in the party momentarily turned their focus towards the girls, but as quickly as their attention was captured, resumed their own activities, the volume level returning to what it was prior.

"I'm sorry, but you're clearly a little drunk, and I can't let you put yourself in danger like that. Or me. Or anyone. Just—find a way home, all right?" Anna bent over to Elsa, strands of her copper hair kissing the shoulders of the startled woman. "And it looks like you already found someone to go home with, anyway," she whispered into Elsa's ears, looking down at her hand, which was still resting under Alice's.

Although Anna's warm breath entering Elsa's ear ushered in a crescendo of pleasure that trekked down to her lower body—*are you really this desperate for her?*—Elsa seized at the words that accompanied these breaths. She looked over at Alice in a panic, who was too busy staring at Anna with curiosity, her hand remaining draped over Elsa's.

"I'll see you later, okay? Just don't drive home, please. And...of course, have fun," she teased, offering the seated pair a subtle wave.

Once Anna wandered off into a room away from sight, Elsa had time to analyze all of the anxieties that tormented her at once. *Who are these friends of Sven? Is she—is she interested in him? If she thinks I'm with Alice, is she going to go after Kristoff? Where the hell did she go?* Elsa's gasps were tethered in her lungs, only releasing after each panicked worry manifested itself in her head. Her fingers preemptively curled into a fist to subdue the frost surely due to fabricate as the negative thoughts did.

"Who was that?" Alice asked, gently removing her hand from Elsa's, who slid her's back to her own side.

"That was—a girl. A girl I know." Elsa's voice was monotonic, punctuated only by distracted breaths.

Alice nodded knowingly, her mood evidently shifting from flirtatious to concerned. "I think I understand."

*But you don't, and you won't, because no one never fucking will.* "I think she's right, I think, I might be a bit—I don't think I should drive home. I should find a place to stay tonight." Elsa glanced over at Alice, arching her eyebrows up in an effort to plant the idea she had into Alice's head as well.

"You're suggesting my apartment, aren't you?" Alice asked, her body perking up.

Elsa had suddenly grown aware at how empty the living room was, the only other students mingling in the area too involved in their own conversation at the opposite side of the enclosure to pay any attention to the two blondes that were now gazing at each other on the couch. "Yeah, I—I am."

*No.*

*You don't want this. This won't make you forget her.*

"I really, truly, hate to be so blunt, but, are you trying to pick me up?" Alice asked. Elsa couldn't read Alice's face well enough to know what the right answer to that accusation was.
"Yes," she critically breathed, unconsciously clenching her fingernails into the palms of her hands.

You don't fucking want this. Don't even try to act like you'd ever want anyone but Anna.

"I'll take you back because I know you need a place to stay the night—God knows Hans has been in his own bedroom all night trying to score with some chick, or guy he doesn't have a chance with—but," Alice started, reeling her head into her body as though she had been suddenly overwhelmed with shame, "I can't—I mean, I won't do that with you. I'm sorry. Oh God, I'm sorry." Her voice fell hushed as she apologized.

"Why—why not?" Elsa asked, sensing the recognizable pangs of heartache assault her once again, a feeling that she was all too familiar with, although her heart had never grown calloused enough to be impervious to its pain.

"You're cute—you're really, really, cute, trust me, you were right about that being one of the reasons I approached you, but not only are you still clearly too inebriated to be making any sort of decisions like this, but you—" Alice paused before she continued her explanation, sheathing her hand over Elsa's once again, but this time in a gesture of consolation. "Elsa, I know I literally just met you—"

"Then don't say anything, because you—you don't fucking know me," Elsa repeated from earlier, this time more anger mended in her tone.

"You're in a lot of pain, Elsa, aren't you?" she softly asked, lacing her fingers between Elsa's.

Elsa couldn't hold back the stinging of tears that occurred behind her cerulean stare, and the redness that dyed her cheeks. "How is it so obvious?" This is why I don't fucking talk to people.

"I like watching people, I can see pain. I don't want to take advantage of you, I can't live with myself if I knew I took you home like that if you're hurting so much. Besides, I'm not, well, particularly the type of person who does that sort of, 'activity.'"

"Then why did you hit on me? And hold my fucking hand?" Elsa spat, although her hand stayed fixed in Alice's grasp, unable to bring herself to escape her warmth.

"Flirting doesn't have to lead to sex."

This is a blessing, not an inconvenience, you dense asshole. "I would have been doing it for all of the wrong reasons, anyway," Elsa said after a calming breath. And having sex while thinking about your sister is depressing as all hell. She succeeded in holding back her tears, but the dampening moroseness of her situation still lingered inside her.

"I figured as much," the girl shrugged. "Also, I hate to change the subject so quickly but—your hand, it's, it's very cold," she noted, squeezing Elsa's.

"Yeah, I have that thing where your hands get really cold. Bad—bad circul...circulation," she lied.

"You probably shouldn't drink too much, then."

"Probably not." But for other reasons.

Elsa bit her lip in the silence, fighting to find anything to talk about or even do to take her mind off of Anna. "I'm sorry I called you a creep—and then, uh, got—got mad when you wouldn't go home with me. That's creepy, I think, I think I'm the creep here."
"No, it's fine, I've always been rather blunt about things. Either way, I do have an extra bed where my old roommate used to sleep that you can sleep in tonight," she offered with a grin.

Elsa nodded, knowing she had no other choice at this point in the night. "Fine."
Pick up. Pick up. Pick up. Pick up pick up pick up. The constant ringing on the other side of the line mirrored the frantically repeating words in Elsa's head, mocking her inflating panic. For God's sake, if she doesn't-

"Hey, uh, what's up?" The sound of an actual human voice startled Elsa, who had begun to consider hanging up.

"Hi, Anna," Elsa said, grogginess blisting her voice, her clammy hands shaking as she held her phone, body perched cross-legged on the bed. "I'll uh, just get straight to it, I guess. I just—I wanted to apologize about last night, mostly."

"Oh, wait, wow. Really? You're calling me about that?"

"Yeah? Why, is it so wrong for me to want to say 'I'm sorry?'" Elsa couldn't inflict her tone to be anything close to angry, her voice instead staying flat and exhausted.

"No, no, no, it's not that," Anna assured, speaking quickly. God, it's so cute when she jumbles her words together like that. "I'm just surprised, I never would have thought you'd call to apologize about anything, I mean, it's nice. Uh, it's a nice surprise. I'm sorry, I'm a little distracted right now—Violet was making me watch this video online."

Elsa heard Violet's voice ring out in the background, faintly making out "it's funny, dammit."

"So, wait—you made it home?" Elsa asked, becoming more alert.

"Yeah, I got a ride home, from Kristoff."

_Fucking. Hell._ "What? He wasn't even there!" Elsa said, a twinge of agony swelling through her. Her free hand gripped the sheets of the bed below her, bunching the fabric up in her straining fingers, nails scraping against cloth. _Stop it, calm down. Don't freeze this poor girl's bed sheets._

"Yeah, he came late. Something about getting too distracted pre-gaming. But he offered me a ride home, so I took it. Oh, he drove Sven home, too, so I wouldn't worry about me getting in the car with strangers or whatever the hell it is that's been making you so paranoid lately."

_So she has noticed._ "I said, I'm sorry. And I'm sorry for offering you a ride home when I was—well, not, uh, entirely in the right state—"

"Drunk," Anna strongly corrected, cutting Elsa's ramble short.

"Fuck, okay, whatever. I'm sorry for that, and for being overly protective." _Except I'm not, and I'm only apologizing because I missed your stupid fucking voice and didn't want to seem like a terrible sibling._

"It's okay, I'm just giving you shit. It's okay, really. Thanks for looking out for me." Anna's tone fell to something close to affectionate and soothing, almost distracting Elsa from the unease that had recessed inside her.

"No problem. But—you know, with Kristoff—nothing happened with Alice and I, oh, and she's the girl I went home with, but anyway—nothing happened, and I—" _What am I even trying to say?
"Elsa," Anna laughed, her voice fading away briefly as if she was taking her phone away from her face. "I don't, uh, I don't think either of us are going to have a chance with him, if that's what you're trying to say."

A small feeling of relief soothed Elsa, but was accompanied with a hoard of questions. "Why?"

Anna sighed, her breath so loud it distorted through the speaker. "I get the feeling that he might, um, how do I even say this—he might play for the other team."

_Holy shit, no way._ Elsa hesitated a bit before speaking, sitting up against the wall of the room she slept in the night prior. "He's gay?"

Anna giggled again. _Stop it, you're going to kill me with that laugh of yours._ "I think so."

"How do you know? You don't even have a gaydar," Elsa said, craving more clarification that Kristoff was indeed off-limits for Anna. "When I told you I liked girls, you acted like I just told you I was considering becoming a nun or something. Plus, I've known him a lot longer than you have, and I never—I mean, I never—"

"Well," Anna started, cutting off her sister, "I just get that vibe. I get vibes from people, you know?" The sound of Anna settling onto her mattress carried through the receiver, muffling her voice. "Plus, he was talking about this boy he met at the party all night. How they 'really hit it off' or something. Either way, I'm not going for that."

Elsa ached to ask Anna if she were going to hold off on dating entirely, but with the boundaries she had been pushing lately, she decided to respond instead with a mere "oh," barely audible enough to carry over to Anna's side.

"Yeah," Anna exhaled.

"Okay. Uh, well yeah, I just wanted to call to say sorry. And, maybe see if uh...well, uh—" _Just ask her, for fuck's sake._ There was no response from the other line, but the faint sound of breathing hinted to Elsa that Anna was still there, waiting for her to finish her request as she staggered over her words. "Do you wanna maybe hang out later?" Elsa's invitation was nervous and barely intelligible, syllables meshed together in anxious urgency. _You get nervous asking your own sister to hang out. Bravo._

"Wha—me? Really? Yeah, of course. Oh wow, I honestly—I was afraid I'd never really see you. But uh, yeah, definitely. What did you have in mind?" The excitement returned in Anna's voice, alleviating Elsa's apprehension.

"Actually, I don't really know. You can come over to my apartment and see it, 'cause you've never seen it. Maybe just some food and a movie, I don't know. 'Cause, I do owe you dinner, so..." _Shit, that's cheesy._

"Of course. Just text me later with a day or whatever. But yeah, sure."

Elsa chewed down a smile, as though she were afraid Anna could somehow see through her phone the excitement broadcasting on the older sister's face. "Yeah, I will. All right, well I gotta go—"

"Me too. Thanks for calling, really."

"No problem, bye." Elsa suspended talking for a moment, taking a deep breath before speaking further. "I love you."
After being met with silence, Elsa scrambled to look at her phone, only to discover Anna had already ended the call moments earlier. Learning this, she lazied against the wall, listening only to the sound of her progressively calmer breaths. *It's not a date. She's your sister. Don't get too excited.*

"Hello?" Alice asked from the opposite side of the door, knocking on it softly.

"Yeah? You can come in," Elsa said, straightening herself up.

"Hi, I heard you talking—on your phone, I assume, and figured you woke up already." Alice opened up the door to her former roommate's room, her eyes instantly fixing on Elsa's.

"Yup. I woke up around a half hour ago and then decided to call, uh...that girl from last night." *Why are you too afraid to tell her she's your sister?*

"Oh." Alice seemed almost disappointed. "Anyway, I, uh, I made breakfast for myself, but I have some leftover, if you're interested."

"Oh?" Elsa asked, her interest caught in the promise of free food. "What did you make?" *She's offering you a free meal. Don't be picky.*

"Pancakes," Alice responded with an enticing smile, raising an eyebrow.

"Shit, that sounds perfect." Elsa took a moment to scan herself over, still dressed in the clothes she wore to the party, which stunk of alcohol and bad choices. She ran a hand through her hair, where locks of white diverged into something of a mess, her single braid close to coming undone. "Well, I was going to say let me get dressed or ready, but I guess I just brought myself here."

"Yeah, how are you feeling? Are you hungover at all or anything?" Alice asked.

"Not really. I feel more gross than anything," Elsa shrugged, pulling at the sleeves of her unwashed shirt. "I think after breakfast I'll just...take off, if that's okay."

Alice acknowledged Elsa with a gentle nod, her stare remaining fastened on Elsa. "Okay. Whenever you're ready, though, it's out in the kitchen."

The smile returned on Elsa's face, a sincere trace of gratitude hidden behind her eyes. "Thanks."

"Are you leaving already?" Alice asked, noticing Elsa bringing her cleared plate up to the kitchen sink, which was immaculately clean and free of any sort of food debris, a sight pleasing to Elsa.

Alice's apartment was a stark contrast from Elsa's, decorated by someone who clearly had an intricate imagination and at least a vague sense of proper interior design, as well as disposable income. Its subdued blue coloring cast tranquility into Elsa, a feeling which was rather uncommon to her lately.

"Yeah, I didn't know where you went, well, I assumed you went back to your room, but I didn't want to disturb you," Elsa called out over the sound of running water.

"Oh, you—you didn't have to clean that, you're the guest. I'll get that for you," Alice said, rushing over to Elsa.

Gently, Alice pushed up against Elsa, taking the plate from her hands to wash it herself. Elsa didn't particularly hate the feeling of touched, but it was not a sensation she was used to, either,
unintentionally trembling upon the contact with Alice's body. "T—thanks," she stammered, shuffling away from Alice.

"No, thanks for keeping me company. Ever since my roommate moved out, it's been pretty lonely here," Alice confided, finishing off the cleaning with a final rinse.

_Company? I've barely seen you since you took me home._ "No problem, really. It's nice to have a new place to sleep every once in a while."

"Well, I gave you my number, right? Anytime you want to talk to someone, or need a place to stay, you know where to find me," Alice reminded, putting the dish on the drying rack and turning herself towards Elsa, who was leaning up against the kitchen counter.

"I might take you up on that. A lot._ Because having someone listen to me for once is a nice change of pace._

"I'd love it if you did," Alice smiled, her grin lighting up her delicately beautiful face.

A moment fertile with an odd tension passed, the two girls caught up in staring into each others eyes with unclear intentions. Elsa's body raised with a strong breath, readying herself to say anything to break the increasingly uncomfortable silence, tapping her fingers on the navy surface of the counter. "So yeah, thanks, honestly. I owe you."

"It was my pleasure. I'll walk you to do the door, okay?" Alice offered, pointing her thumb towards the entrance.

Elsa glanced over at the boldly white door, which was only a few feet away from the kitchen. "Uh...okay, yeah, sure."

"So, you remember where you parked?" Alice asked, leading Elsa over to the front door.

"Yeah, right down the street, I got it," Elsa nodded, walking beside the other blonde. _Be nice to her, she saved your sorry ass._ "Again, though, thanks for everything, for the food, the bed, even just lending an ear. It means a lot to me, you have no idea how much of a mess my life has been recently._ You're not drunk anymore, you don't have to give her your sob story._

"Anytime. Seriously." Alice opened up the door for Elsa, a slight breeze wafting in from the chilled outdoors.

"So...I'll see you around, or text you," Elsa shrugged, standing in the doorway. "If you can think of any way I can repay you, too, let me know."

Alice knit her gorgeous lips together, which were twisting up in a grin. "You could buy me dinner," she suggested after a moment, a whisper of a flirt in her tone.

_Fantastic. Now I owe two people dinner. I can barely afford my own food._ "Sounds good," Elsa responded, despite her discontent. "All right, well, bye."

Before Elsa could step outside, however, she felt the faint pressure of fingers on her forearm, followed by the familiar sensation of plush warmth pressing against her lips—Alice was kissing her.

_Well, this is happening._

Alice pushed herself away from Elsa as soon as a few seconds passed, Elsa still hung up in
registering the sudden intrusion, her hands held out to her sides with her fingers spread out in an
instinctive reflex.

"Oh—was that—was that too—I shouldn't have done that," Alice gasped, reading the awe on Elsa's
face.

"I was thinking something more along the lines of a handshake," Elsa blurted, folding her hands
back down.

Alice looked horrified, breaking eye contact with Elsa and stumbling back into her apartment with
regret abundant in her movements. She shut the door on Elsa, the cold gust from the closing door
blowing into the lighter-haired girl's face.

"Fuck," Elsa heard Alice swear from inside, her voice rich with remorse.

What the fuck just happened? Elsa stared at the door in front of her, her thoughts still catching up.
"Well, bye," she shouted to the door, turning around and hurrying to her car.

That's right, repress the fact that all you could think about was how much nicer it would have been
if it were Anna on your lips instead of her.
"Hey, I'm—I'm here," Elsa yelled to the door in front of her after a few quick knocks on its surface, rough from the paint peeling on it. *Your voice actually squeaked. Holy shit, are you a 15 year old boy going on your first date?*

"Elsa, oh my God, you *have* to see this," Anna urged as she opened her door, once the two sisters met each others gaze—Anna's filled with excitement, Elsa's, with residual anxiety.

Before Elsa could make any sort of reply, Anna grabbed Elsa's forearm, pulling her into her dorm room, shutting the door behind them. Violet was sat on her own bed, sitting with her legs up to her face, conspicuously suppressing a few giggles while she covered her eyes.

"Watch her," Anna instructed, still bouncing with enthusiasm, her hand remaining gripped around Elsa's arm.

"I can't believe I'm doing this for you," Violet said in a muffled voice, still chuckling.

"What?" Elsa desperately tried to ignore the warmth spreading through her body from the sensation of Anna's hand wrapped around her. "What's going—"

"Just show her already!"

"All right, all right," Violet said, her voice hinting that she was smiling. "Elsa, just—just watch me, okay? ...Are you watching?"

"Yeah, I'm, uh, yeah." Elsa darted her eyes back to Violet after staring at Anna for a good moment, enamored at how adorable Anna was when she was this excited.

"Okay. So I'm here, right?"

"...Yeah?" Elsa looked at the girl curiously, now very aware of her unconscious body moments when held under Anna's grasp.

*Oh my God.*

As soon as she spoke, Violet disappeared into what Elsa could only describe as the lamest yet most mesmerizing magic trick she's ever seen, leaving only her purple shirt and black pants in her place, still retaining her shape. As amazing as it was to witness, it disturbed Elsa greatly, seeing filled pieces of clothing and indents in the bed without anyone responsible for them, the empty space emitting a few girlish chuckles.

"What the *fuck?*" Elsa said, lingering in disbelief.

"Isn't it amazing? Like, holy crap, I came in earlier and startled her and she went invisible. Actually, well, *almost* invisible, except for her clothes. Apparently she comes from a family of super heroes or something. I thought it was really cool, and you were the first person that came to mind," Anna rambled, finally letting go of Elsa's forearm, the imprints of her fingertips embedded in the pale blue fabric. *The first person?*

As Anna spoke, Violet regained her visibility, staring up at the two girls with amusement in her gaze. "It is pretty cool, isn't it?" The normally humbled roommate blushed, still hiding her face.
"That's—wow, that's—how do you even do that?" Elsa asked.

_I'd do anything to be able to turn invisible sometimes. Christ, I'm pathetic._

"I don't know, I've always known how to do it," she shrugged.

"I told her about what you can do," Anna said, grinning at Elsa as though she were searching for approval.

_Fuck. That was supposed to be a secret._

"Oh." _Don't get mad. You never told her._ "What did you tell her, exactly?" Elsa said, quietly.

"That you have ice powers, basically." Anna pointed at Elsa's hand, where fingers curled with frustration and worry over what was about to happen.

"Yeah, that's pretty awesome," Violet interrupted, able to hear the sisters talk despite their lowered voices. "My dad has a friend who has powers like that. It's not very common, honestly. Were you, uh, were you born with yours?"

"Y—yeah," Elsa stammered, hiding her hands behind her back. "I'm not sure how I got them, I mean no one in my family has powers."

"Do you wanna see? She can do really awesome things with it, I swear." Anna looked up at Elsa with pride in her eyes. _She's proud of you. She's actually proud of you over something._

"It couldn't hurt," Violet said, only a trace of sincerity present in her response.

"What? No, she's seen it before, she doesn't have to see _me_ do it," Elsa said in protest.

"Come on, please? For me?" Anna begged.

_Dammit, I'd do anything for you._ With hesitance, Elsa brought her hands out from behind her back, rubbing together for a moment to appear as though she were in preparation for something in drastic—in reality, however, it was a pensive move to appease the anxiety of something going horribly wrong, as it had in the past when her powers became uncontrollable. She separated her hands, a miniature flurry forming between her fingers. In the corner of her eyes, she could see Anna watching her with peak excitement, despite seeing Elsa display her powers hundreds of times before during their childhood.

_Don't fuck this up._

With anticipating eyes glued on her, Elsa pointed her trembling hands at a clearing on the floor, a storm of frost streaming from her fingers onto the spot she pointed at. A blast of ice struck the floor, crystals radiating out from the center towards the walls in menacing spikes.

_Shit. That was supposed to be a panda._ Elsa withdrew her hands back to her body, getting ready to release a frantic apology. "Oh God, I'm s—"

"Woah, that's pretty awesome," Violet said, reaching her hand out to touch one of the spikes.

_I guess it could have been a lot worse._

Anna nodded, her eyes scanning around the icy mess now on her dorm room floor. "Isn't it? She never does it anymore, but when we were kids she used to make sculptures and, I don't know, we just played around in them all the time."
"I can't really control it as well as I used to," Elsa muttered. *All because of you.*

"Yeah, well, if you ever *do* get it under control," Anna said, looking at Elsa again, "tell me. I'd love to play with you again—you know, like old times."

"Even though we're grown up?" Elsa raised an eyebrow at her younger sister, yet hoped she'd still abide by what she said.

"Of course. Age is just a number."

*And "related" is just a technicality.*

"So, you're wearing your hair down now?"

Anna ran her fingers through her hair, twirling wisps of red around her fingers. "Yeah...um, I braid it sometimes—like for that party we went to last week, or, well, I guess that's really it. I'm starting to get used to it being, uh, free like this."

*It looks beautiful. *"It looks pretty good."

Anna smiled at the elder, pushing stray tresses behind her ear. "Thanks."

Elsa grasped her own braid, pushing it beside her face as if she were self-conscious of the mesh of hair, which had been growing progressively messier the more stressed out she became, unable to keep up with the maintenance it deserved. *Just shut up and watch the movie.* But even Uma Thurman couldn't distract her from the beauty sitting next to her on the couch, rising in soft breaths.

"I think yours looks good, too," Anna said after a short silence, the volume of her voice matching that of the movie.

*She's just saying that to make you feel better.*

Yet Anna brought a hand up to the top of Elsa's head, taking strands of white between her fingers and sifting them through her fingertips, shivers sending down Elsa's spine at the contact. After a short moment of Anna tracing her digits around a select strand of her sister's hair, she tucked her hand back onto the couch, but not without giving Elsa a warm smile first, one that magnified the tremors that were assaulting her.

*What was that? Was that a come on? Oh my God, does she—does she feel the same way?*

Elsa glanced over at her younger sister, the pleasant shudders finally subsiding. Anna had resumed watching the movie, her hauntingly charming eyes fixed on the barely substantial TV that sat on the far end of the living room.

*Make a move on her.*

At a glacier's pace, Elsa scooted closer towards Anna, who was too engrossed in the movie to notice how close her sister was now, the rough fabric of Elsa's button-up barely scraping up against the bare skin of Anna's arm.

*Wait, what the fuck are you doing? Don't make a move on your sister, you idiot.*

Elsa stayed there awkwardly, frozen in her position. As hard as she tried to watch the movie, which had reached a rather intense moment, she couldn't ignore the feeling of Anna's body slightly
pressed against hers, nearly melting at the feeling.

"This movie is fucking insane," Anna whispered, her voice so close it tickled Elsa's ears.

Elsa stretched her head away slightly, calming herself enough to respond. "I know. It's one of my favorites. That's, uh, that's why I chose it. I can't believe you've never watched these."

"That Bride girl is so badass," Anna swooned.

*I could be badass.* "Yeah," Elsa gently agreed.

Anna turned her head towards Elsa, studying her for a moment with dilated pupils.

"What? Is it really this obvious?"

"I don't know, you seem nervous, or distracted, or something," she shrugged, her shoulders tugging against Elsa's.

All you've been doing for the past few weeks is cringing under her touch and losing your breath when she so much as looks at you. Your own fucking sister. Maybe it is time to tell her. Or do something. Anything.

Elsa gifted Anna a powerful stare, holding onto her breath.

Say it. Tell her.

She glanced down at Anna's lips, which somehow looked even more inviting than ever, glistening in the lights that came from the end table lamp beside her.

*Kiss her.*

"Elsa?"

"...Yeah?" Elsa breathed, all of the muscles in her body tightened.

Just do it. You can't live like this anymore.

Yet Elsa still froze, unable to move any part of her body past a few hair widths, as though her body kicked in a defense mechanism to prevent her from making any reckless decisions. Anna raised her eyebrows, looking genuinely worried at Elsa's apparent inability to respond. *This was a stupid decision. What the hell were you thinking?*

"Woah, wait—what's that?" Anna asked, her eyes now focused on Elsa's furthest hip. *Sweet fucking serendipity.*

"Huh?" Elsa looked at where Anna was staring at, catching that a blotch of black on her skin was visible in the section exposed between her shirt and her pants. *Shit.*

"Is that a birthmark? What—what the hell is that?" Anna asked, looking back up at Elsa.

*No point in lying to her.* "It's a tattoo," she mumbled.

"What the hell? When did you get a tattoo?" Anna asked, straining to look at it closer.

Defeated, Elsa pulled the waistband of her jeans down a few inches, exposing the tattoo entirely, as well as the previously hidden pastiness of her complexion. "I got it two weeks after my eighteenth birthday. I never told aunt Gerda or uncle Kai, so if you could keep it a secret, that'd
"What is it of? Is that—is that a logo?" Elsa could physically feel Anna's gaze on her skin, let alone the caressing breezes of the air in the apartment.

"It's the Radiohead logo. I—I used to be really into them." Now I try to forget I have it.

"Wow, you really are a loser," Anna smirked. "Did it hurt?"

"Like all hell. I wish I got it on my shoulder instead of my hip."

"I can't believe you have a fucking Radiohead tattoo. You're the biggest nerd in the entire freaking planet," Anna said, giggling.

"Shut up. You can barely see it." Great defense.

Anna shook her head as she laughed, ropes of her hair brushing up against Elsa's cheek, prompting the older sister to harness the breaths in her chest. "Can I touch it?" Anna asked, suppressing her chuckles.

Oh, Jesus. "Why?"

"I've never touched a tattoo. Does it feel weird or anything?" Without gaining approval from Elsa, Anna reached her hand over, tracing the outline of the small, inked artwork that blurred on Elsa's abdomen. Unwanted arousal instantly throbbed through Elsa, who bucked her hips involuntarily at Anna's touch. Oh fuck. Oh, fuck.

"The movie's over," Elsa breathed, the words tumbling out of her mouth in a haste as she noted the black screen on the TV. "And I have homework."

"You're kicking me out?" Anna asked. She brought her hands back to her body, Elsa trembling as the uncomfortable crave for released lingered between her legs.

Get it together. For God's sake, get it together. "No, I'm not, since I have to drive you home. If I were kicking you out, I'd just shove you out the door," Elsa teased, attempting to bring some light back into their interaction, hoping it'd subdue the heat between her legs.

"Hey, uh...N...Nani's roommate," Anna called out to Nani's room, who she briefly acquainted with before dinner. "Elsa's kicking me out."

"You little shit," Elsa sneered, elbowing her sister.

"Elsa, you're an ass," Nani's voice chimed from her room. "Let her stay."

"But—but I have homework and class in the morning, and—"

"Relax, I was just messing with you. Thanks for finally making me dinner, I guess we're even now." Anna patted Elsa's thigh hard enough for her to feel the sting of her slaps through the black denim. Christ.

"No problem."

"Well, I guess I have to finish my project for Drawing 101. I have to do twenty still lives. Twenty fucking still lives. In four days. This class is going to kill me." Anna rose from her seat. "I might just visit you more often, at least to distract myself from the shitload of work I have to do. Plus, you have to show me part two."
Please do. "Please don't."

Anna laughed as she stretched her arms above her head, Elsa straining her neck away to prevent herself from staring at Anna's slender physique as it peeked through the bottom of her green t-shirt, a sliver of her untouchable skin briefly visible. Don't stare, you creep.

"It's fun hanging out with you again, like we did when we were kids. I missed just hanging out like this, like...sisters," Anna mused as she stretched out her body.

Sister. Of course. She wasn't coming onto you, she's just treating you like any other sister would, which you're too stupid to realize because you never treated her like one. "Yeah."

"I'm going to use the bathroom real fast before we leave—uh, where is it?"

"Right over there." Elsa pointed at the furthest door.

"Great, I'll be back in a minute."

As Anna made her way towards the bathroom, Elsa took a moment to examine what the hell just happened. You almost kissed her. You almost tried to kiss your sister, you fucking retard. What the hell is wrong with you?

She doesn't want you. She'll never want you like you want her.

Although her body recovered from Anna's unforeseen contact, the painful bite of Anna reaffirming that they were just that—sisters—stayed in her chest. Her eyes darted at her cell phone, which lay unmoved on the coffee table in front of her.

...But there is someone who wants you.
"What's your favorite animal?"

"What?"

Alice scrolled through her phone, her eyes fixed on its bright screen. "I like to make people's contact picture their favorite animal." Well, I suppose that's one way to keep track.

The last two and a half weeks saw the two meeting quite frequently, forming a friendship that Elsa so sorely craved to have. Despite Alice apologizing for her intruding kiss, as well as showing genuine interest in Elsa's character and companionship, their friendship was not without its flirtatious moments, be it Elsa's hand accidentally brushing up against Alice's sides, or a lingering stare that may or may not have been intentional. Elsa still had no interest in Alice that wandered past a physical attraction, however, her affections still latched on Anna like a worsening curse. Yet she couldn't help herself from returning the flirts, even finding herself enjoying it on occasion. Yet, at the other times, the two got along like fast friends, teasing each other and talking for hours about subjects that had no pressing importance. Elsa could almost be herself around her. Almost.

"...Otters," Elsa muttered, sipping on her straw afterward.

"...Wait, otters?" Alice asked, looking up at Elsa across the table with a grin on her face.

"Yeah. I—I've always loved otters," Elsa shrugged.

"Why? I always saw you as being someone who was into, I don't know, wolves or something."

"Wolves?" Elsa huffed.

"Yeah, or foxes, or something."

"No, I mean they're fine, but I love otters. They're adorable, and—and they're great swimmers." Oh great, now she knows your soft side for cute animals.

"Interesting. Do you like to swim?"

"Are you ever going to eat your burger?" Elsa asked, noticing that although she had finished hers, Alice had barely touched her food. The stiffness of the booths of the fast food restaurant they sat in were starting to take its toll on her back, wishing she had at least some padding against her ailing body.

"Give me a moment."

"Jesus, are you one of those people that only eat like, a quarter of a burger and then throw the rest out?"

Alice glared up at Elsa, who immediately regretted her accusation, having been mocked for her own eating habits before. "No. I said give me a moment."

"It's awfully rude to use your phone when you're with company," Elsa teased.

"You always have yours out." Alice slid her phone back into her pocket, crossing her bare arms across the table. "Anyway, I asked you a question."
"I do. I mean, I did. I swam in high school," Elsa said softly, dreading explaining to Alice as to why she stopped partaking in this particular hobby.

"You know DU has a swim team, right?"

"I don't swim anymore." Elsa looked down at her fingers with resentment, retracting them into her palms. "At least, I can't swim competitively. I have to be in the right mood to swim."

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean. When you're not in the right mood, it's really hard to do certain things."

Yeah, and I'd freeze the entire fucking pool like I did during the semi-finals in my junior year. "Yeah."

Alice finally took a bite of her burger, Elsa's eyes wandering around the restaurant as she waited for Alice to finish. Afternoon classes had just ended, so the facility was sprinkled with other college students looking for an evening snack, their loud chatter combined with the overwhelming smell of greasy foods eliciting unease out of Elsa, who was not used to eating at such establishments. Why did I even suggest this? She looked down at the table, which although she had wiped several times, was stained with various foods and condiments from years of use.

"I would love to see you swim, though," Alice purred, arching her eyebrows up.

"You'd just love to see me in a swimsuit, don't lie." Elsa hid her smile behind her cup of Sprite, still getting used to the casual flirtation.

"It'd be a nice plus."

"So, do you swim?" Elsa asked, unsure of how else to continue the banter.

"I've had some—well, strange experiences with swimming. I'm not particularly fond of it."

"Oh? What hap—" As Elsa spoke, her phone went off in her jeans, astonishing her as her body shivered. "Shit, I'm vibrating, hold on."

Elsa grabbed the phone from out of her jeans, checking the name of the caller. Anna. Oh, fuck. "I gotta take this, it's my sister, give me just one second," she reported, her pulse quickening with anticipation, her previous interest in her conversation with Alice almost entirely melted away.

"It's rude to have your phone out," Alice repeated in a mocking tone with a smirk.

"Anna," Elsa breathed, answering her phone and ignoring Alice, who shrugged and nibbled on her burger. God, she eats so slow.

"He—woah, you sound a little startled."

"Just wasn't really expecting you to call me."

"Uh, all right, well, guess what? No, I'll tell you. Okay," Anna took a deep breath, almost breathless from her excited rambling. "I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to be in an art show next week," Anna announced with delight in her voice. "I just found out. Like, literally, I just found out from my color theory professor, and I had to call you right away."

I knew she was talented, but seriously? "No fucking way. How did you even—"

"What? What's going on?" Alice asked, putting her burger down.
"My teachers love my work, and they selected a few submitted pieces from some... 'promising freshmen', as they call it. There's art from all grades in the gallery, but this is a special show. For us. Just for us!" There was excitement in Anna's voice as she spoke of her achievement, which gripped Elsa's heart with sickening adoration."Isn't that—I mean, I'm so freakin' stoked about this whole thing."

"Well, you were in all of the shows in high school."

"Yeah, but college. A university art show. An actual show!"

"That's—that's great, Anna." Elsa was oddly jealous, even though she never had any talent in the arts or creative releases, besides impromptu ice sculpting. *I wish my major had shows like that.*

"I know, I know. Oh God, I'm so happy. But, but I called you because I wanted to invite you. It's on Friday. Friday night. Uh, at seven. Or eight. I don't know, I was too excited to listen."

"I'm going to the store with you on Tuesday, why didn't you wait to tell me all this then?" *Because I love watching you get this hyped up in person, it's incredibly adorable.*

"I had to tell you right away. Oh, and you can bring someone, if you want. You can bring Alice, if you want. Or any of your other friends I haven't met. Or Nani. Do you think Nani would like to go? I don't know, I—"

"Anna," Elsa said, cutting her sister off as she trailed into another ramble. "I'll find someone to take." She looked over at Alice, phone still pressed to her ear. Alice had finished eating, and was waiting patiently for Elsa to finish, though Elsa swore she saw a trace of annoyance on the normally polite girl's face and pressed lips. "I really have to go now, though. It's kind of a bad time. *Any other time and I would have talked to you for hours if I could.*"

"Oh. Okay, but don't forget, all right? You're not busy then, right?"

"No, of course not." *I can hold off studying for you.*

"Awesome, okay, see you Tuesday. Bye," she sang.

"Bye," Elsa repeated. She always felt a small twinge of anxiety every time she ended a conversation with Anna, preceded by a few minutes of over analyzing everything she said during their interaction.

"Are you going to tell me what *that* was about?" Alice asked.

Elsa stared at Alice for a good moment before she finally spoke. "How much do you like art?"

---

Elsa tugged the bottom of her mint-colored dress, almost overly obsessive about how she looked when she was in dress clothes. She never appreciated the way they fit her body, either too short, too long, or too loose, usually presenting her body in a weird caricature of how it truly looked. *This looked a lot longer when I tried it on a few months ago.*

"Stop worrying, you look fine," Alice assured.

"Easy for you to say, you look amazing in your dress." Elsa scanned Alice up at down, envious of how well her light blue dress, trimmed with white, fit her physique.

"And you don't?"
"I don't look amazing in your dress?"

"No, I mean—"

"I know what you meant," Elsa joked. "I just wish it were longer."

The exhibit hall was small, the show hosted in one of the town's local art halls. It had an odd, off-color charm to it that Elsa enjoyed, with its cartoon pig mascot, rustic-style theming and purchasable baked goods, permeating a scent that helped soothe her somewhat. Illustrations of various subjects and media arrayed the walls, some with price tags on them, others, just for viewing. The show was packed, though, with Alice and Elsa huddled into their own little corner void of any other viewers, Elsa peeking through the crowds for any sign of Anna.

"Look, an otter...I think," Alice said, pointing to a piece that hung on the far wall.

"No, that's a weasel. Er, maybe. I can't tell." Elsa squinted her eyes, still gripping the fabric of the bottom of her dress, which reached midway down her thighs. "God, where is she?"

"She's that girl from the party, right?" Alice asked.

"Yeah, that's—"

"Elsa!"

_I know her voice when I hear it._ "Anna! Where the fu—where are you?" she called out over the horde of well-dressed people, letting go of her garment.

She saw Anna, adorned in a full-length magenta dress—_oh God, she looks so gorgeous_—gently maneuver her way around a few onlookers, inadvertently running into a larger man in a blazer. "Oh, excuse me." She waved to Elsa once she saw her, sliding her way into the pair's isolated corner in the back of the show. "Hi. Um, I mean." Anna slicked a few strands of her hair, which was still freely worn down, behind her ears. "...How are you liking the show?"

"It's really impressive, actually," Elsa noted, studying the artwork.

"I know, isn't it? Uh, my work is over—over there." Anna pointed at a painting on the other side of the wall, somewhat obscured by the heads of people standing in front of it.

Past the obstructions, Elsa could see a painting of a tabby cat, lazing on a windowsill with brilliantly rendered lighting filtering through the window and illuminating its gray fur. "Oh my God, is that a painting of Madam Purrs? I still can't believe we let Anna name her when she was nine.

"Yeah, I painted that over the summer, actually, but I submitted it for this show. Do you like it? Can you even see it? You can go get a better view if you want."

"It's really...wow, that's amazing. I didn't even know you could paint that well."

"Honestly, Anna—also, hi, I'm Alice, I think we met once," Alice said, Anna acknowledging her with a sly wave, "that's incredible. You're obviously quite talented."

"Thanks! Wow, thanks, both of you, That means a lot." Anna clasped her hands together, pulling them into her body in a gesture of excitement.

"No problem, I've seen some of your other stuff, but—" Elsa stopped talking the instant she noticed
bulky arms coming out from behind Anna, wrapping around her waist, the younger sister flailing her arms out in startling astonishment.

"O-oh, God, who is it?" Anna yelped, escaping the sudden embrace.

"Hey, Nancy," Kristoff greeted to the artist, walking out from behind her. Of course. Of course he's here. Of f**kin' course. His suit wasn't tailored well, his sleeves too long and the fabric tight around his massive torso.

"Nancy?" Elsa asked, watching the man with arms crossed against her chest.

"It's sort of an inside joke," Anna laughed, turning towards Kristoff. "Hi, Carmine." Inside joke? We don't even have many of those. How often have they been hanging out?

"I told you I'd make it," Kristoff said, holding his arms out.

Anna responded with a hug, resting her head on the taller man's shoulders, his hands settling directly below her waist. The two lingered in the hug, Kristoff briefly nuzzling his face into Anna's hair and kissing the top of her head with his dried, near-colorless lips.

No.

No.

He's gay. She said he was gay.

No.

Elsa's breaths stopped, along with, as far as she could tell, her heart. When the two finally let go, Anna looked at Kristoff with the same enamored adoration she looked at him with the first time they met—and this time, Kristoff returned the amorous gaze.

This isn't. Fucking. Happening.

She held her crossed arms tight against her hands, feeling the coldness bite her fingertips.

"And, hey, Elsa. It's been a while since I've seen you, are you avoiding me or something?" Kristoff taunted in a joking tone, turning away from Anna.

Elsa couldn't respond—instead, she stared up at him with pure hatred.

"Well, either way, you look, wow, you look— you look awesome," Kristoff looked up and down the blond, smiling at her, oblivious to the blossoming grudge she was starting to carry for him.

"Anna, it was great seeing your work, but—but I have to go," Elsa exhaled.

"What? You've been here for less than twenty minutes," Anna said with indignity, turning her attention from Kristoff.

Are you really just going to run from her again?

"I have to go. I have homework to do." What a lame fucking excuse.

Alice looked ready to say something, but was clearly too smart to interrupt or question Elsa, instead leaning up against the wall and watching the commotion with embarrassment.
"Elsa, no," Anna grabbed Elsa's forearm before she was able to turn her around, the strawberry blonde nearly stumbling over her own clumsy footing.

Alerted by the warmth of Anna's grasp, Elsa pulled her arm away from Anna. "What are you two doing? Is he, are you—"

"He's not. I swear he isn't, Elsa. We're just friends. Why do you always—always get so angry when he's here, or when I just mention him? I thought you were over him," she whispered, occasionally glancing over at him. "Just friends." I've been "just friends" before.

"I am."

"Then why do you hate him? He likes you! He wonders why you never want to hang out with him anymore," Anna said in a near-scold, her voice still quiet, yet shaking with frustration.

"I don't hate him." That's a lie. Elsa stared into Anna's begging eyes, her uncontrollable infatuation and longing for her affections seizing control of her speech. "I love you," she choked.

You did not just say that. You did not just fucking say that. Elsa froze once she realized what she just said, her blood running colder than normal.

"So because you're a protective older sister, you want me to stay away from boys?"

She doesn't get it, and she never will. Although relieved Anna didn't pick up on the context of what she said, Elsa couldn't ignore the painful jealousy that recessed inside her. A part of her wanted to stay, to watch them interact in a desperate bid to convince herself there was nothing going on, but she couldn't risk her powers ruining what should be the biggest night of Anna's college career, having underestimated them before. "I have to go." Her voice was as broken as she was.

Anna shook her head, her expression saturated with disappointment. "I can't believe you."

Rather than replying, Elsa twirled around, motioning for Alice to follow her as tears stung behind her eyes. She couldn't even look at Anna or Kristoff, no doubt staring at her with judgmental bewilderment, navigating herself out of the crowd into the blackness of the outside, fumbling onto the sidewalk in her heels. Even the cold of the nighttime air couldn't compare to the growing freeze consuming her fingers.

"What just happened?" she heard Alice cry out as she exited the building in a hurry.

Elsa held her hands under her armpits, pulling her arms down as hard as she could, yet the cold was starting to overwhelm her. It was growing increasingly difficult for her to subdue the turmoil arresting her body and mind, her own body heat barely sufficient enough.

"Give me a minute, please," Elsa gasped, curving her fingers so tightly into her hands she swore she broke skin. "I need—I need to calm myself down." If I even can.

"Can I help? At all?" Alice asked, putting a hand on the panicking girl's shoulders

Elsa started to notice the small crowd of onlookers that were watching the two from across the street. "What the hell are you looking at?"

"Who was that man?" Alice persisted.

Gay, or so I thought. Elsa stared up at Alice, hands still sealed under her arms. "Fucking control yourself," she growled to herself, still unable to answer Alice.
"Can you just—can you please give me an idea of what's going on so I can help you out here?"

Feeling as though she had composed herself enough, Elsa slowly glided her hands out from under her arms, freeing them. She saw the genuine concern in Alice's eyes, on a face she wished she was attracted to as she was to Anna's, on a girl she knew she could never love like she loved Anna. She doesn't deserve this. She doesn't deserve me.

You don't want her like this. You're just using her to distract yourself from Anna.

But that didn't stop her from kissing her right then and there, anyway.
Little Secrets

Just friends.

Gripping the plush blanket that draped over her naked legs, those words rang through Elsa's head with decaying meaning.

Just. Friends.

She felt pressure—warmth—on her leg. Alice's hand curved on her blanketed thighs, her dress wrinkled and unzipped from the theatrics of passion that played out moments prior. "Are you all right?"

"I, uh—I'm fine," Elsa said, holding the blanket closer to her.

But now that the fire, fueled by the unhealthy jealousy she held over Kristoff, had burnt out, Elsa couldn't even make eye contact with Alice, who rubbed her leg with genuine affection and concern, something Elsa was not used to.

You took advantage of her. How could you ever do that to someone?

"Correct me if I'm wrong, please," Alice started, withdrawing her hand. "But—I feel—I mean, something tells me—"

"I'm so sorry." Elsa stared over at her underwear, which piled on Alice's rug below her barely adequately sized coffee table.

"Why?"

"I don't want you think, I don't want you to think that this means I want to..." Elsa started to regret talking halfway through her sentence, conscious of the weight of her words. "I just want to be friends."

Alice pursed her lips inside her mouth, nodding her head subtly after a pause. "I figured."

"I'm sorry, I got, I got carried away and—"

"Elsa, it's fine." Alice somehow managed to remain calm, despite Elsa's biting words. "I shouldn't have let it happened, I suppose. I didn't mean to—to make you regret it."

"But I don't regret it," Elsa said immediately, tensing her body up. "I just don't want you to get the wrong idea."

"Well, then, if I may ask, why did you let it happen? Why did you kiss me?" Alice appeared sincerely curious, rather than hurt over Elsa's thoughtless actions.

Elsa grew progressively more aware of the fabric of Alice's couch pressing up against her naked lower body, shifting around the softness of the cushion. "It's a long story." Her voice was as flat as she could make it, in an attempt to hint at Alice at how little she cared to discuss it.

"Elsa, I want to get close to you. I mean, closer emotionally, not, uh, not just physically. There's clearly something bigger going on here. I hate to make assumptions but—"

"There is." Elsa's heart was racing now, like a rat thrashing inside of a cage. Why can't you just
keep your Goddamn mouth shut?

"Then tell me. Tell me why—why you freaked out earlier, why you always seem so, God, how do I put this lightly," Alice stammered, flailing her hands around for emphasis. "So—so aloof, yet pained."

"Aloof?"

"I don't know another word for it, but it's so hard to get through to you sometimes. You're in pain, yes. We established that when I met you, but I would have hoped you'd tell me why by now. Please, Elsa. I'm your friend. I'm your friend who wants to help you." Alice's voice fell into the soothing range that it was so well poised in. "You have nothing to be afraid of with me. I won't judge you, or whatever you're scared of happening, it won't happen. Not with me."

Elsa tried to calm her heartbeat, but to no avail. She crossed her legs tight, holding the blanket as close as she could to her chest. "You're going to think I'm insane."

"No, I won't. And if I do, well, then that makes me the girl who just went down on an insane girl." Alice smiled, clearly attempting to bring some humor into the situation to ease Elsa's worry.

You came this far, so just fuckin' say it. Saying it to someone might make you even feel a little better. "I—I can't believe I'm actually, maybe, sort of, considering telling you..."

"So say it. Please. I promise you, I won't—"

"I, I don't know how to even begin to let you understand—"

"Please, please, just tell me what's going on with you."

"I...I don't..."

"Elsa, all I can do is beg you."

"I'm in love with Anna." The confession crashed out of her mouth as though it had been prodding at her lips for release for quite some time now.

Holy shit.

You said it. You told someone.

Stricken with remorse over her sudden disclosure, Elsa stared out into Alice's wall—nothingness—terrified at whatever Alice would do in response. Her entire reputation she had built up with Alice had been broken down just like that with just a few syllables.

"Elsa..."

Two years. You held it in for two years.

Elsa continued to stare at the wall, wishing she could disintegrate into the air, to something less tangible, something less perceivable, as there was no chance she could be seen as anything less than pathetic at that very moment.

"Elsa, look at me."

Elsa haltingly turned her head towards the woman, an unhinged breath escaping her throat. She studied Alice's face closely—calculating, yet calm, with a small wrinkle of awe hidden in her gaze.
"You're in love with...your sister?" she repeated, her tone inquisitive.

Elsa inhaled, preparing herself to say anything to make herself seem less ridiculous, but nothing sufficient enough came to her head. "I need help," she choked.

"No, no, no, you don't, Elsa, oh God." Alice was the one who looked as though she were about to cry, grabbing Elsa's hand in her own. "Elsa, you don't need help." Yes. I do.

"What kind of—what kind of fucking idiot falls in love with their own sister?" Elsa's voice broke down completely, along with her own composure. She huddled herself into the blanket, in a futile effort to hide her emotions.

Alice embraced Elsa as she shook, resting her body on the grief-stricken girl. She made no mention of the coldness of her body, or the shaking of her arms. "You're not an idiot. You can't help this kind of stuff. Just breathe—let it out, and cry if you need to." Don't even say that, because I will. I fucking will.

And for the next long while, sheathed in Alice's arms and comfort, she did.

All right, motor neuron diseases. This is fun, right? Yet as hard as Elsa strove to make sense of the words that filled the pages of her textbook in a taunting reminder of her upcoming exam, the words made no registry in her brain beyond a few sentences. Everything that happened in the night before was haunting her mind and guarding against any other information entering, occupying her to the point of hopelessness.

It's okay, she forgives you. She understands you. She's not going to tell everyone your secret, she even let you cry in her arms for almost the entire Goddamn night. Just stop obsessing over it, and fucking study.

Long, multisyllabic words teased her, words she recognized but whose definition escaped her, and still she made no effort to look them up as her eyes scanned the page almost robotically, her mind separated from her body. The test she had coming up was not one she could afford to slack on, her performance in school already declining since last year, where she pulled a near-perfect GPA in her major.

Focus. Focus. Focus, for Christ's sake.

Her focus—or lack thereof—was interrupted moments later by a startling knock on her door, its rhythm and haste akin to Nani's.

"Yeah?" Elsa gasped, her hand falling out from beneath her chin and knocking onto the edge of her desk, a sharp pain transmitting through the hand. "Ow, ow, shit. What? Who is it?"

"It's me, your royal servant, here to take you away, my queen," Nani teased on the other side of the door.

"Well, could do without the attitude," Nani said as she opened the door to Elsa's room. "Oh, studying hard I see. Fun stuff."

"What is it?"
"You have a visitor." Nani stepped to the side, revealing behind her Anna, standing in the hallway. Her awkward yet charming smile, combined with gorgeous flowing strands of hair that even looked good in the cheap apartment illumination steered all of Elsa's worries away entirely, instead replacing them with the inappropriate adoration she held for her sister, hitting her hard in the gut.

Fuck.

"Anna?"

"Thanks for letting me in," Anna said to Nani, holding her arms out.

"Oh, yeah, no problem." Nani and Anna hugged briefly, a sight which was somehow surreal to Elsa, not used to Nani accepting any sort of affection from people she barely knew. *Lucky bastard.*

"I like this girl," Nani grinned, before heading off towards her room and leaving the sisters alone.

"How—how did you even get here? You don't have a car," Elsa stammered, fearing Anna had dropped by to tell her sister off for her childish behavior.

"Yeah, so turns out the DU shuttle stops right down the street. Did you know that? Like, two blocks down. Near—"

"I know." Don't cut her off.

"Oh. So, uh, then why didn't you tell me? It'd be a lot easier than you always having to pick me up," Anna shrugged.

"I didn't want you to have to wait for the bus." *And I don't think my heart can handle you dropping in unexpectedly all the time, like I know you will now.*

"I don't mind it. Okay, anyways, I know you hate it when I talk too much and lose concentration, so I guess I'll just tell you what I came here to tell you." Anna entered Elsa's room, closing the door behind her. She studied Elsa's room for a moment, as though she were judging the insipid chambers she called home.

"You couldn't have called me?" Elsa asked, her anxiety creeping back to her. *She hates me. She's going to bitch me out.*

"No, I wanted to tell you in person. Okay, so anyways, I just wanted to tell you that you were right about Kristoff, and I'm—I'm an idiot, and..." Elsa witnessed Anna's composure drop entirely, obviously letting out something she was holding in. "He's an idiot. I'm an idiot, I—"

"Anna, what happened?"

"After you left, well, I mean, I was really sad because I don't know, or didn't know why you wanted me to not hang out with him. And he was being really sweet with me, really sweet. Anyway, after the party, er, art show, we went back to my dorm, because his roommate was home or something, and—"

Elsa's stomach knotted up, her mouth went dry, and her heart thumped hard against her ribs. *No. No.*

"We, we started making out—"

Elsa could swear she felt her heart drop into her stomach, distracting her from the pain that pulsed
in her hand. So he's definitely not gay.

"And he tried to feel me up. God, I know it's probably gross to hear about someone trying to feel your little sister up, but—he did." Anna started to play with Elsa's doorknob nervously, the clanging of metal echoing through Elsa's nearly empty room. "And I stopped him, because I didn't want to do any of that. I didn't even want to kiss him. He seemed okay with me stopping him, but he just left afterward, like he stopped caring about me and how sad I was. He's—he's an asshole. There, I said it."

"Yeah." Elsa couldn't ignore the pain occupying her. Of course, the ice had come back to her hands, which she held tight together below her desk, but she didn't even pay any mind to it at this point. As long as her hands stayed clenched together, her powers couldn't harm anyone but herself, she learned through her trials as a child.

"So I figured that you probably knew that, and that's why you warned me. And I'm sorry I doubted you. I should know better than to not listen to you by now," Anna sighed, leaning up against the door.

"You're untouchable to me, so it's so fucking hard for me to grasp that you're not untouchable to everyone else. "I did. But thanks." Elsa couldn't make herself sound sympathetic, instead consumed by even stronger jealousy. Although she was more accustomed to the cold than her peers, the frost on her fingertips began stinging her hands to the point of pain, Elsa attempting her best to curb a forming wince. It's just getting worse. You need to learn to control this ice shit better soon, or you'll have hell to pay.

"Thanks for looking out for me, again. I'm staying clear of men from now on."

"R—really?" Elsa asked with a perked head, somehow feeling some relief from Anna's statement.

"Oh, yeah. Everyone. Fuck everyone. I'm staying solo. All I need are my friends, and you," she insisted, shaking her head.

"That's good to hear, I guess."

"Why are you holding your hands like that? Are you okay?" Anna's glistening eyes locked onto Elsa's hands, craning her neck downwards to get a better view.

"Yeah, I uh—I hit it on my desk. I'm fine."

"Oh, are you bleeding?"

"No. I don't know. Don't worry about it," she assured, although she felt the coldness dwindle away from her fingertips.

"Yeah, sure. So...uh, are you and Alice—are you two—"

"No, we're friends. Uh, I know what you were going to say. We're just friends." Elsa held her head between her shoulders, allowing her braid to tumble in front of her mouth, pillars of hair tickling against her dry lips.

"Aw, okay. You know, I was sort of hoping you two were dating or something," Anna said, an adorable smile pinned on her face, her sparkling lips putting Elsa's to shame. Elsa couldn't even stand the sight of her smile, knowing he had his mouth there, he got to taste her, he got to do what she so sorely longed to do since she was nineteen. "You'd make a cute couple," Anna continued, severing Elsa's concentration.
It's complicated. It's really, really fucking complicated. "I don't see her like that."

"That sucks. Well, if it does happen, I'm all for it. You know I love you, and would support you no matter what you do, right?" Anna placed a warm hand on Elsa's shoulder, escorting in a heat that was simultaneously pleasant and unwanted.

"Yeah, I do. T—thanks."

"No problem, sis." Sis? When was the last time you called me that?

"So, are you going home? Or, were you on your way to something?"

"Nope, just wanted to see you," she smirked. "And let you know you were right, and I was wrong, as always."

"All right."

"So I'm going to go home, er, back to my dorm..."

"Do you maybe want to stay over a bit longer?" Elsa asked, picking up on Anna's not-so-subtle hint.

"If you want, I wouldn't mind." A genuine look of joy washed over Anna's already beaming face, her hands clasping together with fervor. "You're not too busy, right?"

Elsa glanced over at the textbook that lay stagnant on her desk, the date of her upcoming exam still teetering over her head, threatening to come crashing down soon. After a moment, she looked back up at Anna, and the glee she had tied behind her eyes, begging her for a promising answer.

"No."
"You know—if you don't think you can handle being home again, you're more than welcome to stay here with me over the break," Alice offered, gifting Elsa a pair of sympathetic eyes as she grasped her tumbler filled with iced tea, taking a sip.

Elsa stared at her half-packed suitcase, already dreading the multi-hour drive across the state she had to take early the next morning. "I wish. But then my aunt and uncle act like I'm some sort of ungrateful asshole if I don't go home for the holidays, even though they practically act like I'm the biggest pain in the ass ever when I'm home." Elsa bit her lip to calm the anger that began to emerge inside her.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Alice placed her hand on Elsa's shoulder, Elsa instinctively shuddering under her touch, not yet trained to Alice's disposition towards physical affection.

"Plus," Elsa said in a sigh, slouching her body down against her desolate bedroom wall, "I couldn't do that to Anna. She'd be, uh, I don't know—" ...pissed, upset, livid... "—disappointed if I didn't go home with her. And I'm her ride, so..."

"No, I get it." Elsa studied Alice's face hard for any trace of sarcasm, but didn't detect any. "Honestly, I don't know how you do it. You're a stronger person than I am to go through all of this."

"Strong? I'm as weak as I could possibly be." "It sucks," Elsa said, unable to articulate her suffering into anything more substantial. "It really fucking sucks."

"But you have friends here who are here for you no matter what," Alice assured, picking up on the pain in Elsa's voice.

Actually, at this point, it's basically just you. Elsa nodded as a response, too embarrassed to let Alice know she was all she had anymore.

"And I'll do anything it takes to make you feel better. Anything you need—you can ask me."

Now there was something hidden in those words, instead spoken by the tenacious curl of Alice's lips and the pressure her fingers put on Elsa's shoulder.

"Anything?" Elsa repeated. You're not—you're not seriously considering going down that path with her again, are you?

"Anything."

You're not drunk anymore. You don't want her. You only want a quick fix. "No, it's fine." Yet Elsa almost found herself leaning into the girl's touch.

"Well, if there's anything you can think of—oh, perhaps something to get your mind off of it—feel free to ask." Alice's smile kept on her face, her eyes focused on the uncertainty on Elsa's.

"But we're just friends," Elsa stated bluntly, not even bothering to tip-toe around the subject. Her heart still raced at the idea, her mind adhered to the night they shared earlier when the boundaries of their friendship was way overstepped.

"What? And when did I say anything otherwise?"
"I thought—oh God, I'm so sorry. I thought you were suggesting that—that we—"

"It's okay. I mean, we already did—well, that once, so I can see why you'd think I'd suggest it again," Alice said, quickly changing her tone.

"Yeah." Elsa moped into her own shoulders, flushed with transparent embarrassment that tinted her face a high color. Nice going.

A long pause seized the air, Elsa still too remorseful to look Alice in the eye. "It's not something that we should just toss out the window, though," Alice finally said, her fingers now steeped together.

"What?" Elsa's head perked up, staring at Alice like a confused animal.

"Friends can do it. It doesn't have to have any meaning attached to it. We're old enough to know not to take it seriously. I mean—if it were to happen again, I wouldn't mind it."

Oh my God. Is she being serious?

"You said you weren't into those sort of activities, you know, when we first met," Elsa reminded in a nervous haste.

"One night stands, yes. Helping a friend out, no."

"But I don't want you to—"

"Get the wrong idea, I know, and I won't," Alice confirmed sharply. "I know where you stand. I know your heart is with her right now, and, and I'm not attempting to change that."

Elsa took a moment to seriously consider Alice's offer, acknowledging the sexual frustration that had been badgering her recently. "And what if all I needed was just—someone to talk to?"

"Again, I'm here for you."

In a moment of weakness, her stomach knotted and her fingers curled into the top of her bed sheets, Elsa nodded. "If you—if you really think it'll help me..."

"Only if you want to, Elsa. It's entirely up to you." Alice's flirtatious character shone in the way her eyebrows arched up with her words, as though she already had a preferable answer in mind.

"I just don't want it to lead to something it shouldn't."

"Elsa," Alice laughed, curving her soft hand over Elsa's thigh—her fingers pressing ever so slightly into the flustered girl, "you're not my first. It's only sex."

With her friend's fingers on her thighs pumping a strange arousal into her, Elsa found it increasingly harder to withhold from accepting. She's smart. She knows what she's doing. And although Elsa knew she couldn't do it without the image of Anna firmly planted in her head throughout the entire ordeal, it didn't cease the primal yearning for release she was repressing to take over her vocalizations.

"I—I guess—yes, I'll—yes," she exhaled.

"Yes what?"

Elsa breathed for the first time in moments, squeezing her legs together with Alice's hand still draped over her leg. "Maybe it is what I need."
Without speaking, Alice slid her hand up Elsa's thigh, her thumb rubbing in careful circles over the bony protrusion of her hips. Her sorely red lips parted over Elsa's neck, leaving stencils on the pale skin that stretched over it while she kissed her. Oh God.

"But we're just friends, right?" Elsa reminded in an airy gasp, her neck craning up at the unity of their bodies. And there's that phrase again.

"Of course," Alice purred, her fingers now trailing under Elsa's blue plaid shirt, onto the sensitive flesh of Elsa's stomach, teasing her in all the right places. "Just friends."

Elsa didn't miss home anymore.

The judgment brooding behind her aunt and uncle's eyes reminded her why. Anna was the perfect niece to them—outgoing, liberated, with a spring in her step that rivaled an excited reindeer's. She didn't lock herself in her room all day, she shared the events of her day with the rest of the table during dinner time, and always remembered to feed the cat and fill up the family car with gas after she used it. She was messy, she was only a slightly-above average student in the academic fields, and she often got lost in the clutter of her own mind, yet alone in her room, yet she was loved.

Elsa existed in the physical sense of the word, but often Gerda and Kai would question if she really existed, or if she were a figment of their imagination, as the sight of her out her room was a rare, mythical sighting. An off-handed remark from Kai about how "the beast has emerged from its cave to feed" would be met with an eye-roll from Elsa, and a badly-suppressed chuckle from Gerda. Elsa learned to pay no worry to their teases, knowing any time she spent at home was brief, albeit painful.

They weren't her parents, and they could never replace them, or the unconditional love they gave her.

So when Thanksgiving dinner rolled around, the four family members seated around a hardly sufficient table, the tension was, quite expectantly, distinctively thick.

"So have you sold the piece yet?" Kai asked Anna, struggling to cut a slice of turkey.

"No. But—but I put it up on the market. Uh, five hundred dollars. Or four fifty. Something close to that."

Elsa had no appetite, instead sipping on her milk with unconcealed apathy.

"Well, we're very proud of you, honey," Gerda said with earnest, gazing at Anna with pride. "It's so nice to have someone in the family who has such talent like you do."

Yeah, that's fine, I'll just sit here awkwardly and pretend I don't fuckin' exist.

"Oh, thanks." Anna could barely speak, her mouth filled with a hodgepodge of various cliched Thanksgiving foods.

"And Elsa?" Kai addressed, his voice now sterner. "How did midterms go?"

"Uh." Elsa started rubbing her temples preemptively, preparing for the inevitable headache about to surface. Don't tell them you almost failed your neuron disease test because you can't even concentrate anymore. "Okay."

"What grades did you get, Elsa?" Gerda asked, almost glaring at the poor girl.
Elsa looked over at Anna, who was clearly uncomfortable, shifting around in her seat and avoiding all eye contact with any family member. Even the genuinely pleasant smell of actual food couldn't comfort either sister.

"I don't know. They haven't been released yet." Elsa shoved a forkful of peas into her mouth, hoping the act of her eating would pause, or even kill, the conversation.

"Do you have any idea how you did?" Gerda said condescendingly.

"I almost failed an exam, is that what you wanted to hear?" Elsa confessed in a loud growl.

"Jesus, Elsa, what happened?" Kai dropped his fork down on the plate, the loud jangle of metal against ceramic startling the younger sister.

"I don't know, my life sucks right now, all right?"

"Sucks? We're paying you through college, paying for your home, your food, everything, and you can't even keep your own grades up?" Because she's there. Because she's there and I can't even being to care about anything else anymore.

"Look, my GPA is pretty much fucking perfect. Or was. Why does it matter if I fail one stupid exam? I still have like, a C in the class."

"You have a C?"

"Like, a C plus. I'm passing."

"Christ. Jesus Christ." Kai held a fist in front of his mouth, cooling himself down before Gerda spoke up.

"This is unacceptable. For God's sake, Elsa. If you—if you can't get that up to a B—no, an A, we're pulling you out of there. Or you can pay your own Goddamn way through college." It's an empty threat. Call their bluff.

Still, with hot embarrassment, Elsa briefly looked back at Anna, who was sulked so heavily into her shoulders, she looked as though she were about to withdraw into her own green blouse. "Well—I mean, it's not my fault. My—my powers are coming back, and I've been dealing with—"

"So why haven't you been wearing your gloves?" Kai asked calmly, though his stare was piercing.

Shit, I almost forgot about those fucking things. "I don't want to wear those stupid things. They make me look retarded."

"Watch your mouth," Gerda warned. "You can't control it. We've learned that the hard way. Now your parents—they may have tolerated it, but we—"

"Don't mention them. Don't ever fucking mention them in front of me," Elsa snapped, slamming her fist down onto the table so hard, the contents on it shook.

Great. Now Anna looks like she's about to cry. Control yourself, asshole.

"Look, look at what you did the table." Kai pointed at the area below Elsa's trembling fist, where a small rink of ice expanded below it, creeping towards the center of the table and glistening off the low light of the dining room.

Elsa didn't even notice the caustic nip of ice that been chewing at her fingertips for quite some time
now, her mind too occupied on how much she despised family dinners and the unavoidable arguments that always occurred. She brought her hand back to her body swiftly, gaping with regret at the pool of ice. "I'm—I—"

"Clearly you can't control it," Gerda noted, shaking her head with disappointment. "You need to wear those gloves. For the safety of everyone."

"Fine," she snapped, her head growing warm with rage. "Then where are they?"

"What do you mean where? You didn't bring them with you to college? God, Elsa, you—"

"I'll go find them myself, then," Elsa lied, pushing herself forcefully away from the table, her cup of milk spilling onto the worn-out tablecloth. "Thanks for dinner," she mumbled sarcastically.

Fighting back tears, she stormed back to her room, leaving the happy little family alone to clean up the mess she made. As she reached her door, hands shaking so heavily she was almost unable to correctly grasp her doorknob, she heard her uncle ask "so, you're not braiding your hair anymore?" to Anna.

They don't even fucking care. They literally do not care.

Closing the door behind her, too drained to even slam it properly, Elsa curled up on her bed, not even paying mind to the darkness that filled her room. She remembered the nights long ago when her parents would come into her room to comfort her when she was scared or sad, assuring her she was okay, that her powers would grow manageable, that her life would be okay as long as she had someone there to love her like they did.

But instead, tonight, on a holiday no less, Elsa lay alone on her bed, crying to herself in the company of no one but the crows outside and the stuffed animals that lay lifeless on the shelf above her. Her howls of pain were muffled by her door, uninterrupted for an indiscernible amount of time before she almost dozed off into sleep.

Her impending slumber, however, was interrupted by gentle knocks on her door.

Oh Jesus. Of course it's her.

"What?" she sighed.

"It's me," Anna spoke, with a quiver in her voice.

No. I'm already in enough pain. I can't deal with you right now. "What do you want?"

Uninvited, Anna opened the door, lighting up the dread of Elsa's room. She took a seat next to Elsa, her body so close the older sister's that Elsa felt her warmth. "That was really terrible of them. I'm—I'm just so sorry that you have to put up with that."

"What's new? They've always treated me like this," Elsa exhaled, sitting herself up on her bed, where the drapery of her sheets were gutted in her sobbing fit.

"It's not your fault. The powers—it's not your fault."

Does she know? Elsa's heart thumped hard in her chest. "What do you mean?"

Anna grabbed Elsa's hands in her own. Her fingers were softer than Alice's, warmer than hers, and comforted her beyond comprehension, Elsa's desire to cry any further already curbing. "You can
control it. I know you can. Because you're, you're a strong person." Why does everyone keep saying that? "You're stronger than you give yourself credit for. And I know, I know for a fact that you'll prove them wrong."

"But I can't control it. You've seen it." Elsa's voice fell quiet with defeat. "I don't know if I can do this anymore."

"Don't say that, Elsa, please," Anna begged, gripping her sister's hands tighter. "You can. You have me. You'll always have me, who believes in you, and—and loves you, and is going to cheer you on when you feel as though you can't do it anymore."

Elsa didn't even speak. She looked at Anna, at the girl who had caused her an unimaginable amount of pain without realizing it, looking back at her with sincere adoration and trust, stroking the trembling girl's hands with the soothing heat of her own fingertips. Every reason that Elsa had fallen in love with Anna in the first place was displayed in the heated moment that they were sharing, overwhelming Elsa to the point of her tears returning in her saddened eyes. Even the idolizing stare Anna gazed at Elsa with soothed her more than any amount of physical contact or venting with Alice could.

"I love you. I love you so, so, so fucking much," Elsa choked, holding Anna's lithe hands tight. I wish you understood. I wish you fucking understood.

"I love you, too," Anna smiled, wrapping one arm around Elsa in a hug, her other hand still constricted around Elsa's.

Anna didn't pick up on the heavy meaning behind Elsa's words—but for now, it didn't matter.
"No girl is worth this."

Alice's advice fell on deaf ears as Elsa cradled the phone close to her face, trying to calm herself down. She had been on the line with Alice for the past few minutes after a frenzy of panic gripped her during the afternoon, her head cluttered with hopelessness and increasingly painful thoughts about her sister, brought on simply by a dangerous, wandering mind.

"I—I can barely—I hate it here," Elsa gasped, tucking her head into her bare knees. Her voice was raspy, her mouth so dry she couldn't even wet her tongue.

"I'm sorry, I can't hear you."

"I fucking hate it here," Elsa said, almost shouting. "I'd rather be back at Delle than, than here, where I'm treated like a burden, where she's here all the time. I leave my room—she's there. I go to get some food, she's there. Like, Jesus, the past two nights she's wandered into my room without even asking." Elsa glanced over at her nightstand where Anna absentmindedly left one of her hair ties during a late-night visit.

"You're fine, Elsa. You're fine. You can do this," Alice's voice stayed reassuring, in contrast of the hysterics in Elsa's. "You did this all summer, you can do it again. I know you can." But it's just getting harder.

"No. I can't keep it in. I can't, I can't, I—" Don't say it out loud. You haven't even though this shit through. "I have to tell her." Goddamn. Elsa's voice was as unstable as her mind was, shaking with each syllable. She curled her toes onto the carpet of her bedroom, her heart close to stopping at the mere mention of confessing her feelings to Anna. Her bed sheet turned cold under her grasp, but she had gone past the point of caring, as she was alone in the house. Anna, Gerda and Kai had left home hours ago to run errands, with Elsa, as expected, choosing to stay home instead—a decision she started to regret.

"Elsa," Alice sharply said, "you're not thinking rationally right now. It's okay. You're coming back here Sunday, where you'll only have to see her once or twice a week, at most. And I'll be here. I'll be here for you, to vent to, to—hold you, to hug you, to ki..." Alice's words were interrupted by a sharp breath, as though she were catching herself from saying something potentially risky. "...to be there for you." Alice's tone went quieter.

Elsa took a short pause before speaking. "What were you going to say?"

"Nothing, uh, nothing." Elsa had never heard so much of a tremble in Alice's voice. "Don't worry about it, but, you'll be fine. You'll be back here. Just give it until Sunday. You'll get through this."

"But what about winter break? When I'm here for over a fucking month?" Elsa asked, a wealth of desperation in her tone. "What the hell do I do during that?"

"Just call me when it gets hard again. I'll be here. I'll even come to your place if it comes to that."

I don't deserve her. "Okay."

"I'm going to go now. I mean, I have to, I'm not leaving you. But if you start panicking again, just call me and I'll try to answer, okay? Try to find something to occupy yourself in the meantime. Please."
Alice's ability to stay composed through even the most trying times was not something Elsa took for granted. If anything, Elsa felt as though she started taking advantage of her calmness, often calling for her in the moments that felt the most suffocating. "Yeah."

"All right. And promise me you won't tell her. Please. You, you can't do that to her."

"But—" But what? But you think she'll feel the same way if you tell her? That you'll finally get to kiss her, to hold her? That she'll return all the anxieties and desperation you've been feeling about her? That she'll be okay that her own older sister is fucking in love with her? "...Okay."

"I really have to go, just don't say anything to her. We'll—we'll work this out later, all right? Don't try to focus on it right now."

Captured by strenuous breaths, Elsa collected herself before speaking again. "Okay."

"All right. I'll talk to you later, then. I—I love you."

"I, I'll uh, I'll see you later. Thank you." Elsa ended the call, composing herself for a few moments as she listened to the buzzing of the heater penetrate the otherwise quiet environment. Her heart race gradually slowed down, as did her breaths, the apprehension in her stomach untying itself. The migrating paths of ice on her sheets started to slow down to a near halt as her powers mellowed. 

*Calm down.*

*Calm. Down.*

The knowledge of Alice being available for her whenever she needed her had pacified her panic into something at least vaguely manageable, Elsa now able to take breaths that weren't labored.

Elsa stood up from her spot on the floor, wandering around her room without any set destination mind, instead staring at the accumulated possessions of a girl raised in a broken home. Nothing tangible that called her room a home could soothe the dread inside of her, but it didn't stop her from lingering on a few objects—the ceramic sculpture of Madam Purrs that Anna made in her junior year, some written notes her parents left her a few weeks before the accident, a stuffed giraffe she's had since she was seven. The smallest reminder of what life was like years prior, before all the heartache and stress, was enough to bring Elsa close on the edge again.

*Don't focus on this shit. Stop getting yourself sad. You'll give yourself another panic attack.*

Trying to snap out of her sentimental mindset, Elsa left her room, in hopes something outside of it would distract her. Her gaze, however, was caught on the open door of Anna's room down the hall, the bright lights of Anna's lamps, which she no doubt neglected to turn off, tantalizing her to go towards it. Unable to resist the urge, and simply with apathy over the consequences, she walked over to Anna's room, a sense of shame hidden in her step. She hadn't entered Anna's room in almost half a year, so far being successful in resisting the urge to snoop around, knowing very well she wasn't emotionally strong enough to leave the room unscathed—yet after already breaking down, she almost didn't care anymore.

The room was threaded strongly with the smell of sweets, either from Anna's inclination towards using food-scented body spray, or her love of sneaking food into her room during the night, something she's done since she was a little girl. Already the familiar smell twisted Elsa's stomach with an odd nostalgia for the sister she saw just an hour ago. Overwhelmed, she sat on the unmade bed that rested on the far side of the room, sulking her body up against Anna's wall, which was covered in a subdued shade of pink.
Elsa was certain Anna's room was warmer than the others. There was something cathartic about being inside of it, seeing the photos of Anna and her friends strung along the wall, and the art works she created throughout the years sloppily posted on her bulletin board. Even the articles of clothing that lay carelessly on the floor reminded Elsa that Anna was as human as she was, despite seeming nearly flawless to her at times.

It was getting for her harder to remember that.

*You're getting emotional just being in her room. You've been in here thousands of times.*

Anna's room brought back memories of their childhood, back when they'd play together all day, when Elsa's powers were at least controllable and mostly harmless, when physical contact from Anna didn't seize up Elsa's body. Evidence of their girlhood dotted around Anna's room in random sections: the spot on the wall that Elsa accidentally froze when she was nine years old, the small blood stain on Anna's light-colored carpet from when she hit her head on her dresser during an intense game of tag.

*How could you fall in love with this girl? The girl you grew up with? Who you spent your entire fucking childhood with?*

But Elsa knew why. She knew when she saw the framed photos of her parents on Anna's desk, when she was reminded of the car accident, the nights spent in absolute hysterics in Anna's room as Anna held Elsa in her arms until she passed out from crying. The days where Anna stayed home from school just to take care of Elsa, even if it meant her grades slipping and her teachers getting angry at her absences. The days where Anna had to talk Elsa out of doing something stupid just to end the pain she couldn't stop feeling.

After a few minutes spent gazing around Anna's room aimlessly, Elsa now cuddling a cat plush that formerly rested on Anna's bed, the sound of the garage door opening fractured her trance.

*Get up. Get up and get the fuck out before she sees you.*

Yet, as though something heavy were inside of her, Elsa felt unable to get up from Anna's bed, experiencing a strange comfort in the room despite its messiness.

"Hi, sweetie!" Anna's overly enthusiastic voice rang from the hallway, violating Elsa's ears like a pleasure she didn't want to experience.

*Is she—is she talking to me?*

Elsa straightened out her spine, clinging the cat toy close to her body. Although she had calmed herself down substantially, tiny fibers of its fur were now strung with ice crystals.

"How are you today, baby? Did you eat? No?...Yes? Awww, you're being affectionate today, aren't you?"

*No. She's talking to the damn cat. Of course she is.*

Elsa was suddenly aware of the abundance of cat fur that dusted Anna's comforter, the family cat choosing Anna's room as its preferred residence.

"Oh, okay, fine, just leave me. Bye, I love you, anyway."

*Lucky fucking cat.*
Anna's footsteps traveled down the hallway, growing louder with each step. *Get out. Get out get out get out—*

"Elsa?"

Elsa turned her head towards the voice, her sister standing doorway, staring at Elsa with a perplexed look on her gentle features. Her stomach sank at the sight of her sister, who was staring at her with complete oblivion over the anguish she's been causing Elsa.

"What are you—why are you in my room?"

Elsa didn't respond. She just stared up at Anna with a mouth hanging open slightly, clutching the stuffed cat as it grew colder in her hands.

"Are you okay? You look like you were just crying or something. What—what's going on?"

"I'm fine," Elsa said, not realizing how hoarse her voice still was.

"Okay. Well, uh, good. I mean, that's good." Anna paused, as though she were waiting for further clarification from Elsa. "So why are you in my room?" she asked after receiving none.

"You're always in my room," Elsa muttered.

"Yeah, but that's because you're always in there and it's the only way I can see you anymore...are you looking for something?" Anna tweaked her head to the side, as though she were deep in thought. "Are you looking for your gloves?"

*Gloves? Yeah, that's believable, right?" Oh, uh, yeah—those. I was looking for them again but I got tired, so..." You're a terrible liar."

"They're definitely not in here," Anna assured with a grin. "But you're welcome to stay in here, I guess."

Elsa nodded and stared down at Anna's floor. She felt as though something—or someone—had drained the life out of her, unable to feign any sort of observable emotion.

"Hey," Anna said softly. She walked over to her desk chair and sat down in it, spinning around so she was facing her older sister. "Are you sure you're okay?" She leaned towards Elsa, as if she were a startled animal who needed to be approached carefully.

"Yeah, I am." *Again, not really good at the whole lying thing.*

Anna leaned back into her chair, crossing her arms over her stomach. "I noticed your room was cold as I walked by it."

Elsa hid her face in the cat toy, growing embarrassed. *Pathetic.*

"If you want to talk to me about anything, I mean—"

"It's nothing. I just, I want to go back to—to Delle." Elsa brought her head up, attempting to hold Anna's gaze. She remembered Alice's warning, trying her best to hold off on confessing something hazardous.

"Oh. Yeah, me too, honestly. Uncle Kai and Aunt Gerda are driving me crazy." Anna huffed after speaking, a look of clear annoyance creeping on her face.
"Really?" Elsa asked, an actual trace of interest in her voice.

"Yeah. They've been fighting a lot. It's awkward." _Fighting? _"Uh, anyways, I did some early Christmas shopping. I bought you a present."

Elsa saw a sparkle of joy in Anna's eyes. "Oh?"

"Yeah. I think you'll like it. Or I hope you do. Kai and Gerda didn't 'get it.' But whatever. I know you, you'll like it."

"I can't wait to find out, then," Elsa added, trying her best to forge a smile. _Really._

"I wish you came with us. I missed you."

Elsa's heart began racing again, but this time with something nearer to happiness, rather than panic. "You—you missed me? But you were only gone for a few hours."

"Yeah, I know. But I hate being out when you're not with us. It's so boring. I understand why you didn't, though. But I think they're only mean to you because they're trying to take their anger out on you, when they're really mad at each other. Or something. I don't believe anything they say about you. _Great, they talk about me now?_"

Elsa nodded, straining to find something substantial to add. "Maybe. I just don't want to deal with them."

"Plus, it's cold as fuck outside. You wouldn't be wearing those," Anna said, pointing to Elsa's tattered jean shorts, "if you were outside. _I wouldn't even wear these outside if it were warm out._"

"I don't mind the cold."

"Right, I know—but—okay, forget it, but yeah."

A long silence infiltrated the conversation, each girl looking at each other expectantly. "I guess I should go back to my room," Elsa shrugged.

Disappointment annexed Anna's face, her posture dropping. "Uh...oh. Well, if you want, sure."

Elsa placed the stuffed cat back where she found it on Anna's bed, hoping Anna would refrain from touching it long enough to not notice its frosted tips. _I'm sorry for just coming into your room like that._ _Don't try to pretend like you didn't want her to catch you in here._

"No, it's fine. You can come in anytime you want. I wish you did, actually. I hate always being the one to have to come in to your room."

Elsa desperately wanted to follow Anna's suggestion, but knew that for the sake of her mental health, it was best to stay out.

As Elsa began to leave Anna's room, she paused and pivoted herself around in the doorway, looking down at Anna with deep thought glazing over her eyes. "Thanks for not taking their side."

"No problem. You're my sister. I'd do anything for you."

Elsa nodded. "You know—you're going to make someone very happy one day," she choked. _Holy fuck, that was cheesy._

Without waiting for a response, she strolled out of Anna's room. Elsa leaned up against the hallway
wall, out of sight from Anna, already feeling the colder air hit her skin.

*I just wish it could be me.*
"This is my spot." Elsa gestured her fingers over to the desk in the corner, where the afternoon light from the far window was barely able to flourish and illuminate its sparse contents. "You can use any other space in this room, or in the whole damn apartment for all I care. But don't fucking touch my stuff, all right?" Elsa couldn't battle the smile that occurred as she spoke, conspicuously excited about their day together and making no efforts to suggest otherwise, other than the playful threats she teased Anna with.

"Pfft, yeah, like I'd want to touch your crap or bug you, anyway," Anna shrugged, sitting cross-legged on Elsa's bed. "You become sort of, like, this feral, this feral—" Anna struggled hard to find a word adequate enough, miming her hands in desperation, "—thing when you get really into your work or whatever."

"The hell do you mean?" Oh, you know exactly what she means.

"Like, when someone tries to talk to you when you're working, working really hard, you go psycho on their asses." Anna began fidgeting with an acrylic brush she brought along with her, her fingers tracing along its fine bristles. "It's sort of adorable, really, when you're so concentrated on your work. Oh, but I know how you hate being called that. It's—it's charming. Or something less lame than that."

Adorable? She said I was adorable? Elsa barely fought down the questionable urges to provoke Anna further. "Bull. Shit. I'm fine when I work or study. I get a little involved in my work, maybe, but—"

"Oh, hohoho, no, no, no." Anna shook her head, her lips twisted into a smirk. "You get mean. Really mean. Like, I'm seriously surprised you even suggested this whole thing. I thought you liked to work alone."

She's right. You are kind of an asshole when you're concentrating. "Well, yeah, I do, but I thought it'd be..." Now Elsa was the one at a loss for words, scanning her brain for any plausible reason for suggesting a "finals party," as Anna had referred to it. "...Fun? Or—or helpful? I don't know." I just can't focus on anything with you always on my mind lately, so I might as well have you here with me.

"Helpful? You think I can help you with your brain stuff? 'Cause, I gotta be honest with you, I don't know crap 'bout that stuff."

"No, but it—"

"Hey, hey, I'm just messing with you, I'm actually pretty stoked we're doing this," Anna assured, softening her voice. "I hate working alone in my dorm room. Or even with Violet's there, 'cause I need a lot of space, you know? Like, a lot. And I get paint on everything—I mean everything, you should see my room right now, jeez."

I'd love to. Honestly. "Just shut the fuck up and start painting." Elsa pointed at one of the blank canvases that lay on her floor, which she foresaw being splattered with a wonderful rainbow of paint within hours.

Anna stuck her tongue out at Elsa, who responded with a rather forceful middle finger. "Oh, screw you," Anna laughed. "You're such an ass."
"Sure, but I'm an ass who's letting you use my apartment to finish your finals."

"Still an ass."

"Shut up. Work." As much as she tried, Elsa still couldn't conceal the happiness in her voice. A few weeks ago, you despised her presence. What the hell changed?

"Yeah, fine. Did you bring any music, at least? How can I paint without any music playing? What am I, a—a caveman?"

"You'd hate my music, trust me," Elsa said, leaning back into her desk chair. "It's not the sort of stuff you listen to."

"You really don't know me, do you?"

"What?"

"I don't hate your music. I listened to it with you all the time when—you know, after..." Anna's head started to sink, now hiding her face under the thin paint brush that she gripped in her fingers. "I listened to it a lot with you."

Now any trace of the previous joy and carefree attitude that trimmed the atmosphere had been ushered away by the memories of what happened years prior, when Anna took on the role of a surrogate older sister for Elsa when she needed her, after their parents' passing. Since Elsa was able to get back on her feet, or at least, somewhat, the two hadn't discussed it much since, refraining on touching upon such a sensitive subject.

_Fuck, this is awkward._ "Oh." Elsa somehow felt even more vulnerable under Anna's stare.

"So, uh, yeah, I'll be okay with whatever you want to listen to. You should put on some—some Modest Mouse, or, I don't know, some Stars, or whatever. Those were my favorites."

_She liked it? Hell, she remembers?_ "I thought—I mean, I honestly thought that you thought I was some sad hipster loser and you were just tolerating it."

"A little bit of both," Anna taunted. "But I liked it. I don't know why you think that I'd, uh, I'd hate it, 'cause I don't, really."

"Oh, really? Because whenever we're in the car—"

"I guess there's a lot you don't know about me, Elsa. Let's just leave it at that, all right?" Anna's sly tone only inspired even more interest.

_No, now you've got me curious. And sort of aroused. What the hell?_ Elsa's body boosted in a thoughtful breath, her gaze set on Anna in a concoction of interest and adoration. "I guess."

When a silence sneaked between the two, Elsa remembered why she dreaded hanging out with her sister. The obsessive desire to know whatever hidden side to Anna that apparently she wasn't acquainted with was enough to occupy Elsa's already cluttered mind. _Is she a sick fuck like me? Is she coming out to me? Or—or on to me? What the hell is she talking about?_

"I probably should start working, er, painting, whatever," Anna stated after an uncomfortable recess in the conversation, although the preoccupied manner in which she was playing with her paint brush suggested otherwise.
"Oh, yeah, I should study." Elsa twirled around, staring down at the empty clearing on the desk, in hopes that removing Anna from her sight would somehow silence the prying thoughts assaulting her.

"Gonna study that empty desk? Fascinating stuff, huh?"

"Oh, fuck off, I was going to get my laptop out to play some music for your sorry ass since you apparently like it so much." Okay, take it easy.

"Great, you better," Anna responded, brushing off Elsa's ridicule with sibling ease.

"Work. Now. This is not going to turn into a sleepover."

"It might," Anna warned, finally opening the worn-out supply case she brought, filled with disorganized art supplies that peeked out from its frayed corners. "I might even just pass out on your bed later. You're gonna have to live with me sprawled out on your bed, covered in paint, drooling, sleeping—"

"Work. Now."

God damn stupid fucking neurotransmitters. With music roaring from her laptop speakers, as well as Anna occupying the space just behind her, retaining any of the information that lay on the pages of the text book was beyond a possibility for Elsa. The girls had been "studying" for two hours now, the sun already tucked into its earthly bed, the darkness of the night hushed under the gleam of the few lamps and failing light bulbs that hardly succeeded in supplying ample lighting to the entire room. Although Anna had made significant progress in her work, Elsa glancing towards her in occasion to admire her piece—an abstract work that utilized all of the skills taught in her color theory class, as Anna explained—Elsa had barely read two chapter's worth of information, once again unable to register anything even semi-permanently in her brain.

Isn't there some mnemonic device for this crap? As Elsa frantically flipped between the pages of the book, desperation steeping in her panicked movements, her mind was glued to the threat that aunt Gerda gave her during Thanksgiving.

I'm not paying my own damn way through college. I gotta ace this stupid final. Elsa tried her best to block out all distractions, but with little progress, Anna humming louder than the depressing music coming from her laptop. God, this was a stupid idea.

Elsa's attention, or lack thereof, was interrupted by the familiar sound of her phone vibrating against her desk. She snapped her head back to check if Anna noticed the intruding noise, but the girl was too involved in her work to care, or notice.

A text from Alice. Of course. Who else would try to contact my sorry ass?

"hi, babe, how are you? want to get together later and hang out? maybe cry over finals together? :)

Haven't we "hung out" like four times this week already? Elsa stared at the dim screen, utterly void of any idea of how to respond. She enjoyed "hanging out" with Alice, as the release was something she so painfully craved, but she couldn't, in any good conscious, abandon her sister to meet up with Alice for a quick fix followed by a venting session, as their meetings had now always inevitably played out.

"Oops...uh, shit."
With her scattered head unable to concentrate on anything remotely, Elsa's focus on Alice's text was instantly lost at Anna's utterance. Dropping her phone on the desk, she spun her chair around, eyes adjusting to the sight of Anna sitting on the floor in front of her canvas, green paint caked on her fingertips. Small drops of paint were splattered on her shirt, a white tank top featuring a drawing of a fox head wearing sunglasses, a shirt she often wore. Only Anna would wear one of her favorite shirts while painting. A white one, at that.

"What? 'Oops' what?" Elsa asked.

Anna looked up at Elsa with a guilty look on her face. "I, uh, I got paint...I got it on your floor."

Elsa shifted her gaze to her wooden floor, where, as she predicted, was now stained with its own accidental piece of art, a small puddle of blue paint spreading from the cotton sheet under Anna's canvas to the floor, slipping into the cracks between the planks of wood.

Awesome. Fucking awesome.

With an over dramatic sigh, Elsa rose from her chair, spinning it in the process, and walked over to the site of the damage, Anna watching her with concern during the entire hyperbolic ordeal. She looked at the spill, then over at Anna—then again to the spill. With remorse flushed deep on her face, Anna plummeted her head into her shoulders, as though she were trying to withdraw into a shell.

She didn't mean to. And this is the least of your problems right now. "It's fine," Elsa shrugged.

"But, but I mean you hate it when things get dirty or messy, and—and I know I'm a messy person, I tried really hard to stay clean, but it just happened, I'm so sorry, I'm so—"

"Anna." Elsa's sharp voice cut Anna's frenzied ramble short. She eased herself onto the floor next to Anna, fighting the anxieties as best as she could that came with being so physically near the girl. Calming herself, her expression settled into something as close to reassuring as she could, even a small clue of a smile present. "You're fine. Trust me."

"Really? 'Cause, I understand if you're mad. I should be more careful."

"Yeah. Isn't—it basically just plastic, anyway? I mean it's pretty easy to clean up, right?"

"Yeah...yeah!" Relief washed over Anna, her posture relaxing. "I'm glad I didn't use oils. Now, that would be a pain in the ass to clean up. And it smells bad, and I mean bad."

Unsure of how to respond, in an odd moment of curiosity, Elsa dipped her finger in the still wet paint that stained her floor.

"I can clean it if you want, before it dries," Anna suggested.

"No, I'd rather do this." Elsa poked Anna's nose with her wet finger, smearing blue paint on her.

"The hell?" Anna pulled her face away from Elsa, swatting her hand away, Elsa laughing at her embarrassment.

"You got some blue on you," Elsa teased between her giggles.

"You ass. Oh, you asshole." Anna smirked with her insult, dipping her own already paint-crusted fingers into the small pool.
"No, don't you fucking *dare*, that was just payback for getting paint on my floor," Elsa warned, starting to scoot away from her sister. *I almost forgot how fun it was to just play around with her, like, you know, actual normal siblings.*

"Too late." Anna streaked her fingers across Elsa's cheek, leaving a trail of disjointed blue on her skin.

"*God*, I hate you." Elsa grabbed Anna's wrist mid-air, holding it firmly between her fingers.

The sensation of Anna's warmth pulsing through Elsa's fingertips subdued the eldest sister like a tranquilizer, whose expression fell into something strange, as evident by Anna's reaction. Despite having come into physical contact with her several times, in the form of playful fighting or accidental contact, Elsa was yet impervious to the warmth in her sister's body and the softness of her skin, as though it were coated in a toxin that seeped through her fingers and soothed her brain. *It's just her arm. Literally, just her arm. Get over yourself.*

"Elsa? You all right? Did you finally lose it?" Anna made no effort to escape Elsa's grasp, instead descending their hands to the ground, Elsa's fingers remaining wrapped around her arm.

"What? Yeah, of course. I mean, of course I'm fine." *What the hell was that? Why are you still holding her arm?*

"Aw, are you trying to hold my hand?" Anna mocked. "A rare look of the affectionate side of Elsa?"

*Don't. Fuck. This. Up. *And what if I was?" Elsa asked, her heart now racing in her chest with no sign of slowing.

Are you really going to push for this? Are you really doing this?

"Then go ahead." Although there was still a tease in Anna's tone, Elsa followed her suggestion, threading her fingers between Anna's. The wetness of the paint guided their fingers smoothly together, blue and green mixing in their hands.

*Stop. Stop before you do anything stupid.* Yet holding Anna's hand hazed Elsa's mind like no substance could.

"Oh, I like this side of you," Anna said.

*No. There's no way she's going to play along. There's no way she feels the same way. She's not like you.*

And still, rebelling against her internal warnings, Elsa scooted her body close to Anna, close enough that their arm hairs were touching each other, shooting pleasurable signals through Elsa's nerves.

*Stop.*

"I like this. I like this side of you. Even if you're just being a dick and teasing me," Anna said, leaning into her sister.

Elsa's throat was now too dry for her respond, her heart beating so fast, she was sure Anna could see it thumping through her ribcage.

*This isn't you. You're a scared little girl, not this.* Elsa leaned her head into the gap between Anna's
head and her shoulder, nuzzling her neck longingly, relishing the heat of Anna's body on her face as still-wet flecks of paint on Elsa's cheek transferred to Anna's flesh. You're pushing it. You're really pushing it right now.

"Aw." Anna's adoring response was tiny and soft, her hand gripping Elsa's tighter. "You're so sweet."

Elsa turned her head into Anna's neck, her nose settled into her sister's skin. She could smell Anna—not the body spray she used, or the shampoo from her hair, which was teasing the sides of Elsa's face, but her scent, her natural scent, an intoxicating, faint hint of one that captured Elsa and her inhibitions.

Stop.

Her thoughts grew louder, but less powerful, her body almost separate from her mind at this point. Her lips divided, inches away from Anna's neck, breathing in her scent and exhaling onto her rosy skin.

Stop.

"Elsa?" Anna's words were breaths, her neck vibrating against Elsa.

Control yourself.

But Elsa didn't, her parted lips pressing into the skin of Anna's neck—kissing her.
A breath left Anna's mouth, this time wordless.

Elsa didn't stop at one. Kidnapped by her pent-up desires and fading care of the repercussions, her lips gave another kiss—deeper, needier, wetter, sucking on Anna's flesh with a wanting flavor—and another, then another, then another, until Elsa was kissing Anna's neck with a passion yet unmatched in her young life. There it was again, the warmth of Anna's being, tantalizing Elsa's lips and shuddering through her body like electricity into her fingertips, where her pulse began to sync with Anna's faster one.

"Elsa," Anna said, her voice creaking.

Ignoring Anna's assertion, Elsa continued, inebriated in her sister's presence, almost thoughtless, having surrendered herself under the moment.

"Elsa!" Anna's cry was pained and panicked, shrugging out of the wet violation of her sister's mouth. "Elsa, what the hell?"

Elsa drew back from her sister, falling back to the ground on her elbows. Her vision was as blurry as her head was, slowly regaining to clarity, a clear picture of Anna forming, staring at Elsa with betrayal and disbelief, snapping her hand away from Elsa's. "What is—what were you doing?"

Oh my God.

Oh my God, you fucked it all up. What the hell is wrong with you?

Elsa stared up at Anna, whose face was flushed red, glittering with sweat under the lamps surrounding them.

Now is one of those times where being able to turn invisible would be pretty Goddamn useful.

"Elsa!" Anna repeated, baiting Elsa for a response.

Elsa continued to stare at Anna as if she had carrots sticking out of her ears. Her veins grew cold, her throat too closed to vocalize any response further than a panicked whimper.

Just pretend you're not here. Just pretend you don't exist. With hysteria-induced hormones surging through her body, Elsa's head was foggy, although her body was ready to take flight out of her own room. She felt numb, yet she knew there was ice escaping her fingertips, journeying down the wood of her room—but at this point, it was the least of her worries.

"What's going on? Are you okay?" Anna's tone fell more sympathetic, noting the terror on Elsa's face. "Elsa, are you—like, I hate to make assumptions, but are you on something? Is something—are you—"


"I think—I think I'm just going to go back to my dorm now." Anna looked away from Elsa, as though she were too embarrassed to meet the girls pathetic gaze. Elsa could barely hear Anna's voice, her thundering heart beat harassing her ear drums.

"Yeah." It physically hurt Elsa to speak, her throat sore and pushing hard to release the strong
breaths that berated her.

"Maybe you should put some gloves on—or something, because—your hands—"

"I know. Just leave. Please," she pleaded with a raspy voice.

Anna grabbed her bag, gathering a few of her supplies that scattered around the apartment floor, avoiding eye contact with Elsa the entire time. Not even bothering with her canvas or the sheet under it, Anna looked straight at Elsa one last time before heading towards the door, the older sister staring down at the crystallized floor beneath her paint-coated hand.

"I think I need to spend some time alone—by myself. And maybe you should, too." Elsa swore Anna sounded as though she just began crying. "Just—please don't do anything to yourself." What?

Anna left the room, leaving behind Elsa on the floor, which was almost ruined in a mixture of ice and drying paint.

What did you expect her to do? Did you expect her to like it? Why couldn't you just sit her down and talk to her about it like a normal fucking human being?

Elsa wanted to cry, but was in too much shock to respond to any of the emotions that were storming her.

It's over. You lost her. You lost the one good thing in your life because you can't control yourself or your stupid urges.

She looked down at her trembling hands, where the green and blue paint mixed into an oddly pleasing, opaque color, now frozen onto her skin like a candy coating. Pulling her fingers together in a fist, the paint cracked off of her hand, flaking onto the ground.

"Fuck." Elsa held her forehead in her hand, the shock of the situation wearing down as reality settled in. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck." Her swearing was drowned out by forming tears, the taste of Anna's sweat still lingering on her lips. "Fuck!"

Yeah, sure, do what you always do and just cry about it. That'll change everything.

Consumed by a frantic urge to do something, anything, Elsa's intrusive thoughts wandered off to a dark place it hadn't touched upon in years. A new energy coursed through her muscles, bringing in desire to do something destructive in nature, to destroy her room—or herself.

"Don't do anything to yourself." Of course she knows you can't control yourself. Of course, of all of the people in this Goddamn world, she knows you the best.

So then why did she leave me? Why did she just walk out? God, do I mean that little to her?

Alice's previously ignored advice echoed through her head, too. "No girl is worth this."

Alice. Of course, Alice. Although Elsa longed to be alone, to sleep in her bed for hours and escape the cursed reality that had plagued her, she had enough experience to know that some company would be the best sedation for her panic and regret. Standing up after a long period spent wallowing on the floor, her legs wobbled her over to her desk, grasping at her phone in her cold hands, which were still quivering. With residual hesitation, she opened Alice's earlier text, hitting the reply button.

"I'm coming over. Now."
Why the fuck did I have to do that?

Elsa's now-tepid fingers curled into themselves, small cusps of bedsheat fabric between them.

What did she even mean by "don't do anything to yourself?" What does she expect me to do?

Although normally her mind would have been glazed with images and fantasies of Anna, Elsa couldn't handle even thinking about her younger sister in that context, as Alice serviced her with increasing fervor. Instead, unanswered questions had seized power over her, an unrelenting battle raging in her head. Has she known all along? Why did she react like that? Why am I such a fucking moron?

She hadn't kept track as the time passed by, her elbows growing sorer as they continued to support her body weight on her bed. In fact, she had completely lost her grip on reality, paying no attention to what was happening to her or who was doing it to her—pleasure was the last thing she was able to experience at this moment.

"Elsa," Alice addressed, peeking her head up from between Elsa's pearly thighs. Her fingers remained firmly seated inside of Elsa, tickling her walls in a way that brought more pain than pleasure, her entrance only dampened from Alice's saliva. Her other hand remained tucked under Elsa's breast like it were a hand warmer, thumb circling around her nipple as though it would rouse any sort of response from the minuscule piece of flesh.

"What? Wait—what?" Hearing her name being called temporarily terrified Elsa, replaying the earlier incident in her head in a self-deprecating loop.

"Are you okay? It's been taking an awfully long time. I mean, I don't mean to say that I don't enjoy this—God, I'd do this to you all day if I could—but usually by now, you would have came...three times, by my experience."

Jesus fuckin' Christ. Although Elsa frequently enjoyed their time together, hearing Alice speak so explicitly when she was so detached from what was happening turned her off even more. "I—I'm good. I'm fi—fine. I'm sorry. Oh, God. Fuck, this kind of hurts.

"Are you sure? You are speaking sort of strangely right now," Alice noticed.

"It's—it's hard for me to speak so coherently when you've still got your, your fingers inside of me like I'm a puppet," Elsa said through clenched teeth.

Alice laughed, slowly easing her two fingers out of Elsa, who shuddered as she did so. "Oh, I'm sorry, truly. But oh, you're funny. You're really funny. I love that about you. You know, among other things."

"Uh, oh, thanks." Elsa sat herself up further, her body pulling away from the girl below her. "I don't think I can do this right now. I'm really sorry. I just—I can't right now."

Alice stood up from her knees, taking a seat next to Elsa on the bed. Seeing Alice's naked body sitting next to her own brought out all of the negative connotations she's made about her own body when compared to Alice's near flawless figure and skin, the remorseful girl crossing her arms across her chest in a small effort to conceal her self-perceived imperfections—her sporadically arranged freckles, the dryness of her skin, the blemishes on her thighs—anything that she could point out wrong with herself.

"All right, what's wrong?" Alice asked, placing a hand over Elsa's bare knee.
"Everything? I don't know. This was a bad idea, I shouldn't have invited myself over." Elsa paused, tightening up her back muscles into a shrug. "No, I didn't mean for that to sound—I meant, maybe all I wanted was some company. Just—company."

"That's fine, baby," Alice said in a reassuring voice. Stop calling me that. Please. "Just tell me what's bothering you." Alice's face was so near to Elsa that she could feel her warm, fresh-smelling breath caress her cheek.

"I can't." How many times have we had this conversation?

"Why not?" Alice asked, growing slightly offended. "You know you can tell me anything. Anything, really. Is it about finals? Is it about going home?"

No, it's because I tried to make out with my own sister's neck. "Yeah."

"...Is it about Anna?"

Elsa turned her head towards Alice, whose concerned expression only sickened her. Holding off on replying for a few seconds, she looked at the pile of clothes that lay dormant on Alice's blue carpeted floor next to her. "I'm going to put on my clothes." Without so much as looking at Alice, Elsa picked up her t-shirt from the multi-colored heap of clothing, putting it on with little haste.

"Oh. Well, then, I suppose I will, too," Alice said, following suit and grabbing at the garments that stacked next to her. Buttoning up her shirt, she stared almost invasively at Elsa as she struggled with the waistband of her jeans.

Once she won the crusade against the pesky articles of clothing—all right, maybe I should lay off the pistachio ice cream—Elsa entered a new battle, this time internally, fighting hard to come up with anything to say to change the subject. "So, yeah, my aunt told me if I don't get my grades up, I'm paying my own way through college. So I guess that's why I've been on edge lately."

"Well, that's awful." Once she was finished clothing herself, Alice leaned herself onto Elsa, her head resting on the younger girl's shoulder. I really don't want to be touched right now.

"You seem to be doing pretty well for yourself," Elsa shrugged, glancing around the room, which by no means boasted the life of someone who was struggling financially.

"For a while, my parents were too dense to realize I still had access to the family's finances. Cut me off for my 'disgusting lifestyle', fine. But they paid—quite literally."

Jesus, she does have a bite to her. "At least you have a job. I don't. I can't work—" Elsa buckled her fingers into her palms, remembering that Alice was still yet unaware of her powers—or simply chose to ignore them. "I don't work right now."

"You seem to be doing pretty well for yourself," Elsa shrugged, glancing around the room, which by no means boasted the life of someone who was struggling financially.

"I know." Alice's eyes momentarily shot down to Elsa's hands. Holy fuck, what? How does she know? Am I just being paranoid?

When an awkward silence found its way between the two girls, Elsa sighed heavily, her head so weighed down by Anna's rejection that her emotions couldn't rise above anything more positive than anxious melancholy. Just say something. "Thanks for having me over, though, even though I —well, even though it didn't really go as planned."

"No, no, Elsa, I always love having you over, no matter what we do. Believe me." Alice lifted herself away from Elsa, brushing the blonde hair out of her own beaming face. "I'm really going to
miss you."

"Shit. I forgot this is the last time I'll see you until next year," Elsa said, already knowing Alice's company was something she was going to achingly crave in her absence.

"You know—I'm visiting a close friend of mine for the holidays, and she lives about an hour away from you. Maybe I'll visit you," Alice informed. "Maybe you'll feel better by then."

_I doubt it. "Yeah, hopefully."_

"Also—before I forget, I did get you something, a Christmas present, if you will," Alice said, poking Elsa's shoulder.

_Until it's Anna's forgiveness, I don't want it. "Oh? I didn't get you anything."

"That's fine, I didn't expect you to get anything. I just saw it and thought of you," Alice laughed, standing up from her bed with her hand placed on Elsa's shoulder.

As Alice strolled over to her closet, Elsa checked her phone in a force of habit, hoping it would distract her from her meddling thoughts.

_Oh God._

_Oh Jesus, she texted me. Twice. Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck._ Panic set in like a gunshot to her stomach, Elsa physically cringing at the realization. Alice was saying something—she heard words, but her brain refused to translate them into anything comprehensible. With quivering hands, she opened up the first text, reading them with superfluous dread ringing through her body.

"_i'm sorry i just left. i didn't know what to say. can we please just talk about this? in person?_"

_Talk about it?_ Her heart dropping at the thought of confrontation, she continued to the second text, her entire body now shivering, the familiar need to vomit rising in her abdomen.

"Seriously? are you just going to ignore me again?"

Shit. Shit, shit, shit. _What the hell am I supposed to say to this?_ Feeling Alice sit down next to her, Elsa threw her phone a few feet away from her on the further side of the bed, dreading the inevitable return of ice in her hands—she had already ruined two phones before. Shoving her hands in her pockets, she clenched her entire body, straining to discipline the frenzy that had gripped her. _Just keep your hands in your pockets and she won't notice. Don't think about the texts right now. Focus on her. Calm down. Calm down._

"Okay, put out your hands," Alice instructed, her own hands hidden behind her back, a sly grin painted onto her face.

_Calm down. Stop thinking about it. She's talking to you._

"No, put it in my lap. My—my hands are too cold right now," Elsa said in gasps. _Well, it's not a lie._

"Fine." After an excited breath, Alice placed something light yet long in length on Elsa's lap. It was brown, fuzzy, soft, oddly comforting to look at, plastic yet lifelike eyes staring into Elsa's tortured soul—_holy crap, it's a stuffed otter._

"Oh my God. It's—it's adorable." Elsa wanted so desperately to unsheathe her hands from the shelter of her pockets and touch its velvety, synthetic fur.
"Whenever things get hard, and I'm not there with you, just pretend it's me, all right?"

"Sure." Elsa's brief moment of happiness was slayed while the texts from Anna burned in her head, her thighs nipped from the ice in her fingertips. *Ow, fuck. Stop thinking about it. Focus on the otter. Maybe—maybe you can call, and I'll put the phone on speaker and put it behind him.*

Alice giggled, playfully slapping Elsa's arm. "That sounds wonderful."

"I think I need to go home now," Elsa said, her mood only worsening in spite of her efforts. The heat of her body had relaxed her ice powers to a tamer status—for now. "Finals and all that." *Shit, you're too depressed to even hang out with Alice. Her gaze snagged on her cell phone, contemplating whether or not she wanted to respond to Anna—or how, her heart beat intensifying merely at the sight of the device.*

"That's fine. I understand." Alice scratched the stomach of the stuffed creature, a sincere smile of joy drawing at her lips. "Goodbye, little guy. Take good care of Elsa for me, all right?"

Elsa almost smiled. Almost. "I'll see you during the holidays, I guess." Elsa spoke automatically, hardly listening to Alice.

"Yeah, I'll call you, or text you, or Skype you, or whatever us kids are doing nowadays," Alice joked.

"Okay. Thank you...really." As soon as Elsa's hands left her pockets, she snapped them onto the otter, pushing her fingers into its plush fur, hoping the therapeutic feelings of soft hairs would suppress her severe apprehension—at least until she got into her car, where she was able to deal with the situation in isolation. *He's...sort of warm. It's nice.*

"And Elsa, just remember—"

"What?" Elsa asked, her stare settled onto the otter below her, the girl as somber as she's been since she kissed Anna. *He needs a name.*

Alice took the side of her hand up to Elsa's reddened cheeks, stroking them gently, catching the girl's attention as well as her gaze. "Don't let her get to you like this again."
Disinfect the Scene

Elsa's car, while normally was as suffocating and stuffy as any other college student's junked, odd-smelling vehicle was, seemed harder to breathe in, as though it were perched on top of the highest point in the country. It wasn't hot out, as the outside air bit at anyone who was brave enough to step outside without layers of clothing, but Elsa's mindset made any enclosed space unbearable for her, as if it served as an impending reminder of her increasing loneliness. Even the promise of Alice's unconditional company wasn't enough for Elsa, who fell back into her prior routine of sleeping through the hours she'd usually be awake, rising only to begrudgingly take her finals, which she was sure she had failed—or at least, had not performed "up to previous standards."

It had been five days. Five days since she last saw Anna, since her mouth met the skin of her neck, the image engraved into Elsa's mind of her frightened face after being so thoughtlessly violated—by her own sister, at that, the girl who swore to protect her and shield her from the corruption of the world, who instead thrust her into her own corruption and twisted fantasies without so much as speaking a word about it beforehand. The girl who chased off lewd men and challenged any boy who approached her younger sister with what were formerly seen as protective sisterly instincts, now surely seen in Anna's eyes as the monster in the closet she feared as a child, a wolf in sheep's clothing, with sinister intentions concealed under possessive traits.

But it wasn't mere perversions she held for her sister, it was the faults of a girl in love, coming to light in her weakest moments, as her ability to control herself had slowly eroded as her sanity did.

If she's fucked up for the rest of her life, it's your fault. If she can't function as a normal human being anymore, it's your own damn fault.

Yet as a sister, she had obligations, so while Anna continued to text Elsa daily with different variations and methods of trying to arouse a response and explanation out of her sister, who ignored these texts with increasing difficulty, the only word Elsa had responded to Anna with was a sterile "yes," after being asked if she was at least still going to remain loyal to her promise of driving her home.

Elsa's hand gripped and ungripped the aging steering wheel, knowing it was either continue to asphyxiate in the claustrophobic nightmare of her car, mental walls caving in like a trap room, or leave the car and face her sister for the first time in days, replacing the fading image she had of Anna with a fresher one in her head.

You're going to have to get out some time.

Elsa's lungs expanded with as much of a breath as she could take, feeling it throughout her entire body in the form of an ache. Harrison Hall's parking lot was sprinkled with students heading home, lugging oversized bags and bins that no doubt were filled to the brim with items that weren't completely necessary to bring home for a month-and-a-half long break.

She's waiting for you.

She's waiting to talk to you.

Betraying her thoughts, Elsa's muscles froze.

Fuck. Fine, on the count of three, you're leaving this car. No exceptions.

One...
Elsa’s shoulders hunched up.

Two...

Her eyes shut tight, taking in the last breath of artificial air.

Three.

As soon as the number burned in her head—who loud, she swore she heard it spoken in her ears—Elsa opened the car door and exited the vehicle in one swift motion, slamming the door so loud it turned a few heads from the sprawling lot.

That wasn’t so hard, was it?

Elsa’s gaze stuck to the dorm like a tongue on ice, unmoving and unable. Anna was waiting somewhere—but not outside the building, as Elsa had registered in the few seconds her eyes were focused.

Just go. See her. Confront her.

Elsa still stared at the building, as if she had lost control of her body, which had kicked in every fight or flight instinct it had, adrenaline fueling her blood.

It’s three already. She’s expecting you. Just fucking go.

Finally, she started towards the building, all the noises around her amplified—her footsteps on the asphalt, the sound of cars starting up in her proximity, the distant voices of students. Her easily conquered attention was tangled by the snarls of a recognizable voice among these, louder than the others—closer.

Crap.

Elsa turned her attention to beside her, where a few cars down, Kristoff and Sven were haphazardly loading luggage and other assorted items into Kristoff’s car. Elsa hadn’t seen Kristoff since the night of the art show, her strongly rooted grudge for him fierce enough for her stomach to knot with anger at the sight of him.

If you leave now, maybe he won’t notice you.

As soon as she started to fabricate an escape plan, however, Kristoff’s gaze met hers, staring at her for a good moment without a reaction.

Don’t move. Like all large animals, his vision is based on movement.

"Elsa!" Kristoff waved enthusiastically at the blonde, a rolled up rug coddled snug under his other arm.

"Oh, hey—uh, hi, Kristoff." Elsa looked towards Harrison Hall, hoping acting uninterested would deter him—although she wasn’t sure if she’d rather talk to him or face her sister at this point.

"Hey, go get the rest of your stuff, all right? I’ll be out here," Kristoff said to Sven, who nodded and headed off after squeezing a few more bins into the trunk, huffing and straining for a solid breath. Kristoff placed the rug on top of his car, the furniture unrolling and blanketing over the roof rack.

Oh God, go away, please. I really can’t handle this right now.
"Hey, it's been a while. Before Thanksgiving, I think."

"Yeah." Elsa still stared towards the dorm.

"You got shit on your shirt," he grinned.

"What?" Realizing her tactical attempt of looking away was growing futile, Elsa looked down at her sweatshirt.

"You got doo on your shirt."

"...No?" Elsa searched her shirt frantically.

"Get it? DU? There's a giant DU on your shirt? God, you're slow."

Elsa's posture slunk. "Oh. Wow, super clever." I really fucking hate you.

"So, what are you doing here? Oh, wait, are you here for Anna?" Kristoff asked, walking even closer towards Elsa, crossing her personal space.

Elsa reflexively stepped back a bit, backing into her car. "Ah, fuck, whoops." Her leg rang with the pain of an impending bruise, yet she still kept her focus on the man in front of her, trying to calm the negativity flourishing her in his presence; she already had enough to worry about.

"Careful," he giggled.

Trying to play off her minor collision, Elsa side-stepped away from her car. "Yeah, I'm here for her, we're going home together. Soon. Why do you care? You don't even care about her, clearly. Why are you here?"

"I'm here to help Sven. Turns out he grew up near where I did, so I'm taking him back to his place and then visiting my parents."

"Oh, you two are close now?" Elsa asked, her voice peppered with a mock.

"Yeah, I mean, I guess." Kristoff scratched the back of his head, looking uncomfortable. "We've been hanging out a lot lately, you could say."

Holy shit, are they dating? Is he gay or bi? "Hanging out?" As if a switch went off in her head that placated her restraint, Elsa couldn't silence her anger towards Kristoff any longer. "You seem to love hanging out with freshmen, huh?"

"What? Wow, what's that even supposed to mean?" Kristoff asked, seemingly unsure if Elsa was serious or just teasing him, as per her nature.

"Anna told me what happened." Elsa crossed her arms, hoping she could somehow make herself seem threatening when compared to the man that towered over her.

"What happened?" Kristoff looked away, the gears in his head slowly turning. "Oh. Yeah, you mean the night—yeah, all right. What did she tell you, exactly?"

That you're an asshole. "That you took her home, basically violated her, and left her." Elsa fidgeted with her car keys, preparing herself to flee the scene.

"That's all? That's all she told you? God, she—no, no, that's not all that happened." Kristoff shook his head, crossing his arms across his bulking, sorrel coat.
"Then what did happen?"

"Yeah, I brought her home. I'll admit to that. And we did kiss—a lot, but then she just stopped me, and told me she couldn't 'do this'. Do you know why?"

Because you're a terrible kisser? Elsa shrugged her shoulders up, sighing. "No, why?"

"Because she was sad. About you. She couldn't stop talking about you all night. She didn't want to do anything with me, she just wanted to vent about you all night."

"W—what did she say, exactly?" Elsa uncrossed her arms, perking her head up.

"I don't know? Well, she was worried about you, definitely. But she cares about you. A lot. She told me that you've been through a lot, crap like that. I mean, I know sisters are supposed to care about each other, but wow, she really loves you. If she weren't your sister—" Kristoff stopped himself, knitting his tufted brow down. "No, that's stupid."

"What? What were you going to say?" Elsa hung on his every word, as though she forgot about her harbored malice towards the man.

Kristoff threw his hands out in a shrug, pausing for a moment. "If she weren't your sister, honestly, the way she talks about you, I'd think she were in love with you."

A mesh of emotions assaulted Elsa at once, who was hardly able to save a breath substantial enough to reply with an uncommitted "oh." Jesus fuck. Is there actually a chance?

"That's dumb, I know. That was probably a really awkward thing for me to say, I'm sorry. But she obviously didn't give you the whole story. I left her because she just wouldn't shut up and I had stuff to take care of. Jesus, your whole family is weird."

You're still an asshole for leaving. But Elsa was physically unable to speak, still making sense of what he just said.

"Uh, anyway, I can see Sven leaving the building, and—it looks like he found your sister, too," Kristoff said, using his hand as a visor.

Elsa twirled around, dreading the sight, but there she was, swaddled in layers of clothing, her amber hair worn down gorgeously as it was when she last saw her, thanking Sven as he held the door open for her. Elsa stared over at the girl like an animal caught in the headlights, looking at her sister with a variety of new emotions—hope, guilt, and embarrassment. She was well aware of how pathetic she looked, her clothes oversized and dirty, her hair sloppily roosted on her head as if she had rolled out of her bed within the past hour, not even bothering to fix her hair into a braid since she last washed it the night prior.

"See ya."

Elsa didn't respond to Kristoff, gazing at Anna until the younger sister caught sight of her. Anna crossed her arms tightly against her chest, leaning up against one of the pillars that supported the building. Yeah, she looks pissed.

Elsa brought her hand up to the front of her body, preparing for any sort of gesture she could give to Anna that could both serve as a greeting and a recognizable "I'm sorry for being a jerk," but instead held it there, hoping Anna would initiate the contact first. After what seemed like an eternity of the two girls staring at each other, Elsa soaking in her embarrassment, Anna surrendered with a frustrated sigh and headed towards Elsa.
"So you showed up?" Anna asked, clearly agitated.

"Yeah."

"Are you going to help me get my stuff?" Elsa studied Anna's tone hard, scanning for hostility. It was there, but it was subtle.

"Sure."

Anna stood there for a moment, expecting more of a response from Elsa, who persisted to stare at her dumbfounded and ashamed. You do realize how much of an idiot you look like right now, right?

"All right, fine. Let's go, then."

Nothing was said since the exchange they had in the parking lot, except for a few directions from either sister when it came to packing up the car or locating what Anna wanted to bring home, and what she wanted to keep in the dorm. The tension in the air hadn't been this obvious and suffocating since the drive to college back in September. Neither girl looked at each other, Anna could have turned into a talking snowman during the drive for all Elsa cared, and she wouldn't have noticed.

With the promise of Gerda and Kai berating Elsa all break—fuck, I don't even know if I passed that exam—and Anna's new twisted perspective on Elsa, topped off with Alice not being available physically, Elsa had no incentive to stay at home, knowing it would only drag her deeper into her depression and cycle of self-loathing. She began formulating excuses she could use once she got home that would allow her to stay in her apartment during the break, knowing her tender sanity was at great risk at home. Even if there was a chance that, by some twisted miracle, Anna may have reciprocated Elsa's feelings at one point, there was no doubt that the way Elsa had acted in the past week had ushered away all possibilities of anything happening.

I'm looking for internships. That's a good one. They'd get off my back if I went back so I could get a job. Okay, so I'll just tell them that my professors and I were discussing ways to get my grade back up, and that—

"So, do you want to say anything to me?" Anna asked, breaking the silence, which Elsa had grown quite comfortable in.

That I'm sorry I'm asshole and ignored your texts? That I'm sorry I broke your trust? Elsa stayed silent.

"No? Really? Nothing? I mean—I'm right here."

Elsa saw in the corner of her eyes that Anna was now looking at her. Dammit.

"Fine. You won't talk, that's fine. Then I will, all right? So you can pretend not to listen, but I know you are."

Elsa's insides churned at the possibility of whatever it is she had to say. Focus on the road. Don't almost kill her again.

Elsa felt warmth over her left hand—Anna had placed her hand over hers on the steering wheel,
Elsa almost swerving on the road at the unexpected touch. She bit her lip, suppressing the urge to say anything. *Oh my God, is this it?*

"I know your powers get out of control when you get sad or whatever, so hopefully this will help, because I also know you get sad at everything, especially anything I say to you."

Elsa inhaled noticeably, nodding her head.

"Anyways, so uh, I don't know what that was about. You know what I mean. And I don't know why you're ignoring my texts. And ignoring me, right now, as I'm here next to you, talking to you." Anna raised her voice, clearly expecting a response from Elsa. "But—anyways, I know you're going through a lot. Like, a lot, trust me. And maybe you're looking for something to help you get through it. And I want to be that. I really do. But—you have to remember that—" Anna stopped, struggling to continue. "I love you, I really do. And I'm always here for you. And I won't judge you for what you do, or ever stop loving you, because you're my sister, and my best friend. So if you want to talk to me about something, if something is going on, tell me, okay?" *How can you be so Goddamn understanding?*

Elsa cataloged everything Anna said, one word at a time. *Just tell her. For God's sake, she already knows something's up.* Elsa pulled over the car after a moment of contemplating, parking it on the side of the back road where evergreens surrounded them in the nature that seemed preferable to live in than any other option Elsa had at this point, where she could live away from civilization and the responsibilities that were gifted to her when she became an adult.

Elsa finally looked over to Anna, biting her tongue down as she revised every sentence that came to her that she considered speaking. "I'm sick. I'm a sick person." *That's it? Seriously?*

"No, you're not, you're—"

"I'm sick, and that's all you need to know. I'm sorry. I wish I could tell you more." Elsa hated herself more as each word came out.

"Fine. If that's all you're going to say now, fine. But I'm not going to stop bugging you, every day, until you tell me what's actually going on. You're stuck with me for the next month." Anna took her hand off Elsa's as she spoke, the older girl dropping her hand into her lap after she did so.

*Not if I can help it.* Elsa pulled back onto the road, Anna crossing her arms together again and slouching into her seat, staring out the window.

*God, she's adorable. She's so adorable, it physically hurts.*
Elsa's fingers curled inside of her, a dexterity she had forgotten she had summoning a pleasure she forgot she could give herself. Mourning Alice's touch, her hips lifted off her mattress, so desperate for the sweet relief of release that even the image of Alice servicing her alone was sufficient enough for her at this point, clutching onto any Anna-less scenario that appeared in her head that maintained her arousal.

Palm rubbing the sensitive spot that had brought so much joy yet so much trouble in her life, her body settled into a rocking motion that gradually undid the carefully made sheets that swaddled her bed. Her hand, imprinted red from the waist of the jeans that constricted around it, started to cramp, having been at her beckon for quite a few minutes now.

"Ah, God," she whimpered through her teeth, feeling the anticipated swell of release ballooning inside of her. Fingers plugged deep into her opening, her body clenched all available muscles in preparation for the approaching deliverance, a rare heat flushing at her skin. It had been almost a week since she felt the satisfaction of a relief, but even her cluttered thoughts and anxieties couldn't hush the urges that were flowering inside of her.

The darkness of her room scattered like a frightened creature as her bedroom door creaked open. Elsa couldn't make sense of the person that stood behind it—but she didn't need to. "El—oh!"

Are you fucking kidding me? Panicked, Elsa tried her best to suppress the rising climax in a last-minute bid to redeem herself. Hold it. Hold it, hold it!

"Goddamn—augh!"

But as sudden as her words came, so did she. Bent over, her hand wasn't able to retract quickly enough, cursing under her breath as her body reluctantly yielded under the ecstasy she formerly pined after. For a few blissful seconds, she didn't care that her sister was standing right there, witnessing what should have been a private moment, but once the pleasure subsided, quickly mutated to panic, her body sprang up and her eyes settled on the image of Anna—pale-faced and frozen, gaping at her older sister.

Christ.

"H—haven't you ever heard of f—fucking knocking?" Elsa barked, hiding her hands between her knees. Her heart didn't calm down as her muscles did, maintaining its jackrabbit speed.

"I'm—oh my God—oh my God, I'm so sorry, I just wanted to see—I'm so sorry!" Anna still stared at Elsa as if she were on exhibit, her hand grasped tight around her doorknob.

"See what? See this? Jesus Christ!"

"Gerda and Kai are out—and—okay, I'm—"

"Are you retarded? Get the fuck out!" Elsa hadn't snapped like that at her sister in a long time. Anna responded obediently, scattering out of the room and slamming the door shut, the light extinguishing as her figure did.

Oh my God. She saw the whole thing. If she didn't think you were a freak for kissing her, this
fucking did it. Elsa zipped up her jeans, now fully aware of the wetness of her fingers. What the hell am I supposed to do? Leave my room and wash my hands? She’ll fucking hear me.

Instead, she remained perched on the bed, damning her inability to control herself or her urges. Of course my room is the one without a fucking lock. Wait until Alice hears about this.

Enough time had passed—minutes, a half hour—some increment of time long enough that Elsa’s conscious has birthed composed, almost rational thoughts, knowing if it were going to be hard to live with Anna two days into the break, there was no way she could continue the charade for a month. Broken, she stood up, leaving her room and cringing at the unwanted light of the hallway.

You’re not a fucking sparkly vampire, for God’s sake. It's just light. After washing her hands in the bathroom—I’m not a huge fan of the smell of this new soap—Elsa found it hard to ignore the closed door of Anna’s room, complimented with a sliver of light in the space between the door and the carpeting, the universal signal of an occupied room. Approaching the door as though she were being piloted against her will, she paused outside of it, her body already seizing up.

Just talk to her. You know she’s going to barge in like that every day.

Her knuckles curled into something of a fist, close to knocking on the wood. But she knew once she knocked, it was put out there—her vulnerabilities, the fact that part of her did want to talk to Anna and confess, all communicated in a simple act of knocking. So she paused longer, trying to ignore the pain in her stomach and in her conscious that told her it was going to hurt, knowing the pain would subside if she stopped holding everything inside, where it would blossom larger and become harder to suppress.

She couldn't hear anything inside of Anna's room, no movement, no commotion, nothing. Her fist was inches away from the door, but she couldn't knock. The embarrassment from the earlier incident hadn't grown stale yet, making it even somehow more difficult for her to knock on the door.

It's not worth it. Just go back to your room.

Ignoring her thoughts yet again, she hitched a strong breath and knocked on the door, ripping away from the strings of virtue that were tying her hand down, feeling a sense of relief yet terror once it was over.

Shit.

Shit, shit.

Elsa froze with fear, her head snapping back to look at her own room. It's like a five second walk, two if you run. Go, now. Maybe she didn't hear—

"Oh. Well, hey there," Anna smirked, opening her door, the illumination of her room almost matching the brightness of the hallway. The coral of her lips complimented the dark green of her t-shirt, her hair, as Elsa had just realized, now long enough to kiss her back. "Are you ready to finally talk to me?" Anna's smile disappeared, her face dropping into a pensive expression. "Did uh—are you done?"

You know I am. "Yeah. I'm so— I'm so, so sorry about what you saw."

"I should've knocked. Or at least—no, I should have knocked, and—"

"I wasn't, uh, I wasn't thinking of you, if that..." Holy crap. Did you seriously just say that? Elsa
caught herself from speaking any further, but the damage was done, clear from the shock on Anna's face in the form of betwixt eyebrows and a slightly gaped mouth. You are such a creep. "I mean, I don't know what you think is going on, but it's not that, and..." No, you're only making it worse, holy shit, just shut up.

"You should probably just come in." Anna's voice was solemnly heavy, and, as Elsa could hear, peppered with powerful breaths, as though she were nervous and straining for a consistent rhythm.

"Yeah," Elsa squeaked. Take one last look at the life outside Anna's room, because once you're out here again, your life is going to be completely fucking different.

Elsa followed Anna into her room, every other problem she had—her grades, her money, her questionable relationship with Alice—so minuscule and insignificant to her compared to the turmoil her relationship with Anna was threatened to face if this confrontation didn't go well. She mentally made a blueprint of the locations of the windows and doors, as well as the small vents on the ceilings and the walls, in case it went so tragically awry she was forced to formulate an escape plan and live in solitude for the rest of her life, since there was no way, no Goddamn way, anyone could do what she was about to do with any ounce of grace and poise.

The warmth of Anna's room was now suffocating. The smell of sweets was like a slow-acting poison Elsa knew was going to drive her into insanity. Elsa made a desperate note of everything she could that would tip her off that maybe Anna didn't hate her, that she still trusted her—she turned her back on me for a moment, that means she trusts me, right?—anything to make this less frightening for her, as she was on the edge of a heart attack.

"You know, well, what I was going to tell you was that Gerda and Kai left for the night, so I was going to suggest that maybe you and I go out to dinner or something, I mean, it'd be on me since I finally sold that piece—oh, yeah, so I think I might actually have something close to a job, by the way," Anna started, closing her laptop shut. "The owner of the gallery—"

"Stop."

"What?"

"Just stop," Elsa repeated, sterner. "How—how the fuck can you just talk to me like this like nothing's wrong? Did you hear what I just said to you? What I did to you? How could you be so good about this? Are you really this fucking stupid and oblivious, or do you just not care?" Elsa's entire body shook, watching Anna react with a look of heartbreak.

There was a break in the conversation. A break long enough to swell the tension so large that Elsa grasped the doorknob, readying herself to leave the room and never face Anna again. To call Gerda, tell her of her plans to stay in her apartment during the break, and run away from her problems as she always had.

"Your gloves were in here," Anna breathed after the grueling silence. "They were in here all along, after all."

"What?" Elsa looked at Anna as though she had gone insane.

"I hid them years ago, because I thought you could do well without them. You were sad when you wore them, and I thought you were strong enough without them." She pulled out a small wooden box from her desk drawer, tossing it on the bed without breaking eye contact with Elsa.

"What the hell does that have to do with what I just said to you?"
Anna sat on the bed next to the box, opening it, revealing the gloves—dusted with a layer of dirt, but still as ugly as they had always been, resting on the purple velvet that laced the box. "I think—I think it's a good idea—no, I want you to put them on." She picked up the gloves, blowing off the dust that settled on it. "Before you talk to me."

*Is this some sort of weird glove fetish she has? What the hell? * "Why should I?"

"We both know why."

Elsa stared at Anna, clutching her hands together in front of her. "Fine."

She sat next to Anna, who handed her the gloves. They were soft, they were warm to the touch, and yet they could have been made of spikes for all Elsa cared. The painful memories that accompanied them almost made her forget that Anna was sitting there, right next to her, watching her with hopes she'd sheathe her hands in them, physically confirming she was not strong enough to do this without them on. With hesitation, she slid them onto her hands, cursing under her breath as she did so.

"There. Are you fucking happy?" Elsa already felt an unscratchable itch form on the skin between her fingers. "Now that you've humiliated me? Are you fucking happy? *Why would she do this to me?*

"No." Anna took the box and placed it on her nightstand, moving her body closer to Elsa—not in an intimate way, but in a way that dared her to talk. She bit her bottom lip, studying Elsa's face, who was now fully aware of her facial movements. "Now—please—just talk. Just tell me everything you've been dying to tell me, because, because I know there's something—something you're keeping from me."

Elsa exhaled from her nose. Her stomach knotted into a sharp pain, her heart sped so fast, it almost stopped. She had been brought down so low within the past hour, that nothing could sink her any lower. She had nothing to lose, yet her throat went dry. "There is."

"I know."

Elsa had rehearsed this scene several times in the past few years. It had a different setting every time—in a diner, at school, in a moment of passion, in the car—but she was never wearing gloves in any of them, or had just been caught during some "alone time." She wished something would sever the encounter, perhaps Gerda and Kai arriving home unexpectedly, or an impromptu tornado forming outside the house, but, in the one time in her life she needed a distraction, the environment around them stayed in perfect harmony.

"So—what I did to you, last week—and all the times I’ve been acting strange, and what I said to you—*This would be so much easier through a text message, where I didn't have to look at her fucking face.*

Anna nodded instead of responding verbally.

"You really don't know?"

Anna shrugged. *So she's going to make me do all of the talking.*

Elsa inhaled this time, straightening her body up, her muscles so tight that it was a laborious task just to do so. *Just five words. Just say them. You've gotten this far. "You're my sister, right?" Oh, you're going down this path? Fucking really?*
"Uh, y...yeah."

"Sometimes—I—well, sometimes stuff like that—" Elsa didn't know where she was going, but Anna continued to look at her as if she were completely engrossed in what she was saying, if a bit condescendingly.

"Stuff like that...?"

"I mean, I don't—this was stupid. This was really fucking stupid. There's no point in talking to you about this."

"What? Are you serious?" Anna leaned back, throwing her hands out frustration. Strings of light from the lowered sun filtered through her hair—that's really not the thing to focus on right now—lighting up her beautiful face and making the look of disappointment on her face even more sympathetic. "You can't pull crap like this on me. God, you were doing so well—so well, and—why don't you just say it?"

"Say it? Say what?" Panic gripped Elsa's throat like a pair of cold hands.

"What I've been waiting for you to say for the past week. Just say it. Just—just fucking say it. For your own sake, because I know it's eating you up inside."

Elsa's breaths now escaped her mouth, audible and almost wheezing. There's no—there's absolutely no way she knows. Who—who would ever even assume their own sister was in love with them? "You don't know what I'm going to say."

"Try me." Anna pursed her lips together inside her mouth, gently placing her own hands in her lap. "Please."

Elsa bit her tongue down, realizing she had been rubbing her gloved hands together for quite some time now. She wanted something tangible to fidget with in the mean time, as normally the act of physical, repetitive activity in her hands calmed her down some. Where's that damn cat when you need her? Anna's eyes held little judgment, her posture told of little resentment. If she did know what Elsa was going to say, she certainly wasn't going to put up a fuss about it.

"Fine. Fuck, fine." She swallowed hard, trying to lubricate her dry mouth. "I'm in love with you."

She spoke with barely any cooperation from her vocal chords, her voice squeaked and breathy. The feeling of relief yet terror came back, this time amplified to a frightening level, both emotions battling for a top spot. She almost didn't even care about Anna's reaction, instead focused in on the emotions that came with saying those five words that had prodded at the back of her head for freedom every time she spoke to Anna. "Is that what you thought I was going to say? Because—there it is, there it fucking is."

You said it. You finally said it. You said it to her face, and somehow, you're still alive.
Anna's expression remained as it was for the most part, but the minor adjustments on her face told of the shock she was experiencing: the subtle widening of her eyes, the tightening of her lips, the inhale that was not yet partnered with an exhale. And again, as if meticulously planned by the gods to magnify the panic Elsa was already feeling—another silence, on Anna's end, this time Elsa's brain too racked with stress and anticipation to stay quiet for too long, needing to say something to fill the increasing void. "It's not like I wanted this to happen—it's not like, I don't know, I didn't plan it—I'm sorry, I—"

"So, how long have you been holding that in?" Anna finally said, abruptly ending her sister's drivel.

Elsa paused, unblinking. "A long time." Two Goddamn years.

Anna nodded, as though she were expecting that answer.

Elsa realized Anna was not going to say anything, evident by the avoidance of eye contact and the look of deep reflection that sheltered in her eyes. As if continuing to rave like a lunatic would mend the holes she was causing, Elsa spoke again. "There's no way that's what you thought I was going to say. I mean, no sane—no sane person would ever—you—"

"Just—stop talking, please," Anna said, snapping her eyes over to connect with Elsa's. Good job, running your mouth like an idiot. "I've been—I kind of expected something of the sort, but after a week of—I still don't know what to say, Elsa."

"How? How could you ever expect me to say something like that to you?" Was it really this obvious? "What kind of normal person—"

"Because we're not normal. There's nothing normal about us, God, there's really nothing normal about this screwed-up family." Anna's voice began to rise, sparks of anger present in her tone.

"You're mad, aren't you? Of course you're mad, you have every right to be." Kissing ass isn't going to help at this point, shut up.

"I'm not mad that you—that you see me that way." Anna shrunk her head into her shoulders. "You just—you could have fucking told me." Anna still quieted her voice when she swore, not as recklessly vulgar as Elsa was. "I mean, you could have told me before you just went to first base with my neck. Like, jeez, Elsa, what did you think I was going to do?"

Elsa's nose stung, a strong indication to her of how now, as always, her emotions were getting the best of her. God, of all times to start crying. "I don't—I don't know."

"You have to think before you do stuff. You can't just try to—"

"You know, you were a lot more supportive during the drive home. You told me—you told me you'd love me no matter what."

"And when did I say otherwise?" Anna asked, her voice reaching its threshold. Her tone shifted the moment she perceived the pain on Elsa's face, but as Elsa had began to realize, she was growing impervious to her constant wistfulness. "You're my sister, of course I love you. But, well—I don't love the things you do sometimes."
"So you don't care that I'm—" Elsa breathed before continuing, still hesitating to say the words out loud, "—in love with you, you—you only care about what I did?" Elsa asked, unsure of how to feel about her accusation.

"No." Anna broke eye contact with Elsa, lifting her body up. "I do care. I mean, I guess it sort of explains some things."

"Like what?" Elsa had succeeded in suppressing the sob, but now she had been consumed by hungry curiosity, although pessimistic about Anna's response.

Anna sighed, shrugging her shoulders briefly. "Like, I don't know, the whole Kristoff thing? There was more than just, just older sister protection there—wasn't there?"

Elsa nodded weakly. "Yeah. This could be going a whole lot better."

"So—you were getting possessive over me because you were, well...in love with me?"

Elsa curled her bottom lip into her mouth before nodding again, too embarrassed to look anywhere but the carpeting of Anna's room. "Yeah."

"You didn't want me to be with a boy because—you were—you tried to prevent me from getting together—do you realize how selfi—"

"Fuck, why do you have to be such a prick about this? Of course I realize how—how fucking stupid I've been. Of course I regret every thing—every Goddamn thing I've done, every Goddamn feeling I've acted on, which clearly, has been making your life a living hell. Well, well I'm sorry," Elsa snapped, jerking her head up to connect with Anna's startled stare, "I'm sorry I'm, I'm such a fucking mess, I'm sorry you have to put up with me. I'm sorry I ever thought that it would be a good idea to ever let you in on the fucked-up world that is mine. I'm sorry that I thought, as my own sister, you'd be understanding, I'm sorry that I thought the person who's put up with most of my shit would, for some unknown fucking reason, would understand when I tell her about how—how I can't stop thinking about her, every second, every Goddamn second, like a parasite lodged in the fuck-middle of my brain."

With her body and conscious confiscated by the sedation of the confession, she spoke with decreasing coherency, lost in the weep that formed as she spoke, turning her cheeks a shade of almost inhuman red. She stopped caring about releasing the information she had been harboring inside of her like a prison, her brain had shut down any fears of secrecy that dared to transmit. "So excuse me for thinking that, of all people, you'd be the person to give me the least amount of shit for this."

There was a silence again, but this time Elsa welcomed it, with salted tears streaking down her face like tattoos of her pain.

"You shouldn't have done that. You—you shouldn't have just—violated me like that," Anna said bluntly.

"I know. I fucking know, and I'm sorry. I—I can't excuse myself for that, but—"

"Maybe—maybe I'm mad at myself, too." Anna spoke with hesitancy in her voice.

"Why?" Elsa breathed, sitting up. "Why the hell would you be mad at yourself, when obviously I'm the one who fucked it all up?"

Anna stared out onto her wall, but her eyes weren't focused on anything perceivable. A humble yet
strong expression of deep thought had gripped her face once again. "I'm mad at what you did. I'm mad that—that you didn't think you could just sit me down and talk about this instead of—doing that." I know, Christ. "But—I should have, I mean, I'm disturbed by it. But I can't stop thinking about it."

"Can't stop...?" Holy shit—is she...?

"Like, I'm mad. I think about it a lot and it makes me angry, and sad—sad for you, I guess. But I also—I feel like, God, I feel like I should be more disgusted by it." Anna was close to whispering, noticeably starting to regret what she was disclosing.

"Disgusted?" Elsa repeated. "Wait, what exactly are you saying?"

"I'm saying that..." Anna bit her lip, her face rendering even redder. "I didn't—I didn't hate it, I guess. It didn't feel—"

"...Yeah?" Elsa's lungs didn't even bother to release the breath it was holding, her body shutting down most of its automatic functions as anticipation had abducted it.

"It didn't feel wrong. I mean it did, but—it didn't. Shit, I shouldn't have said anything." Oh my God. Elsa gave herself a moment to review what Anna said, wanting to make sure her head was registering what she said correctly. It didn't feel wrong? Although vague, her statement held enough weight to provoke Elsa further. "How so? It didn't feel wrong, I mean—what—"

"I don't want to talk about it anymore," Anna asserted, a rare occurrence for her. "I shouldn't have said anything, God, I really shouldn't have said anything." She put her elbows on her knees, cradling her head in her hands. "I have no idea why I told you any of that, I'm sorry." Why did she tell me that?

Elsa, incapable of conjuring up any sort of retaliation worthy enough of being said, instead stared at Anna with an odd feeling of relief inside of her. Despite Anna's rather unexpected and quite atypical reaction, which Elsa tried to justify as a strange coping method, Elsa was coming out of this confrontation in a lighter mood than she entered it.

As the seconds ticked by, Anna lifted her head off of her hands, gradually turning her head to coincide with Elsa's stare. Their gazes connected, and although there was a polluting tension in the air that boosted Elsa's heart, she felt a strange comfort in the eye contact. There was something there—something in Anna's expression that wasn't there before, the dilation of her pupils that filled her cyan irises, the way her lower jaw hung just slightly enough to separate her lips. For someone who claimed to be so mad, there surely was a lot of doubt, even poorly concealed yearning, hidden in her eyes.

Holy shit, was Kristoff right?

"Why did you want me to wear these gloves, Anna?" Elsa asked desperately. You could have asked her anything, and you go with that?

Anna looked down at Elsa's hands, which were lightly tugging on the fingers of her gloves. "Sometimes—sometimes I'm afraid you're going to hurt yourself with your powers. 'Cause, you know, it's happened before..."

And there she was with her old compassionate self, her voice so soft and solacing, it virtually made Elsa forget she just poured her heart out to the younger girl. "So—you thought I was going to get upset and—"
"Yeah," Anna said, cutting off Elsa. "I mean, I've never seen you hurt anyone else—only you."

Well, either she cares about you, or she's hiding something. "Yeah, I guess."

After a moment absent of any of the girls speaking, Elsa jerked at the tips of her gloves and pulled them off, her fingers nipped cold, but free of any surge of ice powerful enough to cause any harm. "I don't need them anymore. Not now—not ever." She tossed the gloves over to Anna's desk, where one fell short and landed on the floor. All right, so I was never that good at sports.

Too ingrained with what seemed to be embarrassment to challenge Elsa, Anna nodded.

Although there was still much more to be discussed, there was a growing silent agreement between the girls that tickled the atmosphere, an agreement that quelled any urge to speak further of the matter—at least, for now.

God, look at her. She looks guiltier than you do. Daring to defy the nag inside of her that told her it was best to leave her alone—to allow Anna some alone time to properly digest Elsa's confession—Elsa braided her hand between Anna's, an act innocent enough to offer consolation, yet test her theory that maybe, maybe, there was at least a hint of reciprocation of Elsa's unconventional fondness towards her. Don't fuck it up this time.

Anna accepted Elsa's affectionate gesture, squeezing Elsa's hand as it met hers. She stared up at Elsa, her mouth just crinkled enough to form a smile.

Does she? Elsa tried to smile, but her muscles disobeyed her, instead staring at Anna with a look of pure bewilderment drawn on her face.

"Ga-a-a-y," Anna sang after a moment, her voice almost cracking into a laugh.

"Oh, fuck you." Elsa twitched her hand away from Anna's, curling her fingers into her palms.

"Your hand wasn't that cold," Anna said, looking at her own hand. "I don't think I've ever felt it that warm. At least—not in the past, uh, four years or so."

"It's not like it's always co—"

"No, I know, but it was nice. It felt nice. Uh, it didn't—crap, I mean—"

"Gay," Elsa teased.

"I'm not," Anna breathed defensively.

"I know."

The mood of the room changed dramatically once again, toying with Elsa's emotions and hopes. Fuck, you could have fooled me. Yet despite Anna's pronouncement, there was something there that was never there before, fleeting, yet strong, something Elsa would strive to bring back if it meant devoting the rest of her life to it.

"So, thanks for finally telling me—and I'm sorry I got mad earlier, and, yeah." Anna's tone lost all of its joy, but there was sincerity in it.

"It's cool, and I guess, I'm sorry for calling you retarded—and stupid, and whatever." And I'm sorry you had to witness the trauma of your own sister masturbating.

Anna nodded. "It's okay. I can be, sometimes."
"So, I'll go—uh, I have something to do." Probably. Elsa got up from the bed, briefly disoriented as her blood pressure fell drastically. Woah, head rush.

"Sure." Normally Anna would have invited Elsa to stay, but there was far too much for both of them to reflect on to stay in each others company for much longer.

And even though the confrontation had ended, Anna's admittance replayed in Elsa's head endlessly for the night to come.

"It didn't feel wrong." So I'll make it feel right.
"You know, Alice, I really miss you." Elsa's sentiment was received with silence. "I'm sorry I haven't really taken the time to contact you. Or respond to you, really. Or—you know what, I've just been—I've just been a pretty awful friend."

She cuddled up to herself closer, her body blanketed in the increasingly dimming light that presented itself through her window. "There's a lot that's been going on. A lot. And I wish I could tell you—but I can't. You'll think I'm an idiot, but I promise I'm not. I know what I'm doing—I think."

Being met with quiet again, Elsa sighed. "Of course, I'm talking to a fucking stuffed otter, so maybe that isn't helping my case." She scratched the back of the plush's nape, savoring the sensation of something soft and flexible in her hands.

"Honestly, at first, I didn't even think being in love with your sister was a thing. She was just the little brat I grew up with who kept me company when all of my friends were busy. And now—now I think—" Elsa swallowed her words, too restricted on what she said to even say it out loud to a stuffed animal. "I should probably actually call you, or text you, or just message you. But you're so much easier to talk to when you're one foot long and semi-aquatic."

Elsa stared out her window in an odd peace, the street outside of her barren and dead as a result of winter's rough hold on the state. Kai's truck stalled in the driveway, where the hefty man was hauling firewood into the garage, his labored breaths vaporizing in the frigid atmosphere. The smells of winter started to permeate in the house as well, with the Christmas decorations gradually popping up, and a batch of Anna's famous Christmas cookies sitting on the oven, where its aroma drifted freely throughout the halls.

The holidays were stressful. That was a fact as solid and accepted as the tart coldness that cloaked the area. As if Elsa's bank account wasn't dried up enough, the burden of purchasing gifts was enough to intensify Elsa's already unbearable anxiety.

The fuck do I even buy people? What do people like? Clothes? Video games? Drugs?

And the memories—eggnog-drunk teenage Elsa coming out to her mother, breaking six year old Anna's arm when she pushed her down a snowy hill—simple synapses that forced Elsa to cringe every time they fired, although it wasn't much different than any other bad memory associated with any other part of the year. The main difference between the holidays and the rest of the year was the fact that, at least for the past few years of her life, it was the one time where Elsa had to act cordial and warm, enduring a month with her sister right across the hall, who was now aware of Elsa's formerly well concealed secret.

"Okay, I'm going to try out this whole telepathy thing. I mean, if I have ice powers, who's to say I don't have other powers I don't know about?" Elsa held the otter—whom she finally named "Lonny"—out in front of her with her arms outstretched, closing her eyes tight. "I know you're probably busy actually having a life, but call me. Call me-e-e. I ne-e-e-ed to talk to you. She opened up her eyes, her phone remaining as quiet and still as it had been for the past day. "Well, it was worth a shot, I guess. I mean, I'd call you first, but I'd feel like an ass considering I've been sort of ignoring your past two texts because—because I'm a forgetful loser." Elsa exhaled dramatically, dropping the stuffed creature onto her chest. "Shit, I'm still talking to a stuffed animal and pretending it's my best friend. I've pretty much reached a new level of pathetic."
After a moment of lying dormant on her bed, her thoughts muddled and tainted by the smells that concocted in the air, Elsa sat up, struggling as her muscles had relaxed during her small rest.

*God, that smells so good. I might as well go eat something.*

Elsa left her room, staggering over to the kitchen as her muscles regained their full ability. The air outside of her room was noticeably warmer, a change pleasant yet earnest for her, as anything even remotely warm reminded her of Anna, whom she had successfully avoided making any sort of extensive conversation for the past few days. Although she had that inkling of hope and certainty inside of her that never fully extinguished, she still felt more comfortable in her ritualistic habit of avoiding Anna as if she were a threat.

She sifted through every food item in the pantry and the fridge, nonchalantly looking for anything that could satisfy her, yet didn't require any sort of cognitive effort to make.

*Pasta? I don't have time to boil water. And who the hell wants to wait twenty minutes to make a frozen pizza?* The cookies that sat on the oven started to tempt Elsa, their smell not showing any signs of dissipating in the near future. *She put this out here to tantalize me. I fucking know it.*

Trying her best to fight against the captivating sight and scent of the treats, she continued to rummage through the pantry, finally landing on a box of unopened cereal.

*Well, cereal is a healthy snack, right? Even if it's ninety percent sugar?* She brought out a bowl—one of the few clean ones left—and began pouring the cereal into it, not even bothering to measure how much she was putting in. As she did so, the familiar noise of footsteps started at the far end of the hallway, growing closer to her. The pattern and rhythm of these footsteps were unmistakable, striking a chord of fear in Elsa.

*Crap.*

Her brain, settling into a panic mode, somehow decided that ducking out of sight behind the kitchen counter was an acceptable method of dealing with the situation.

*Fuck, my cereal!* She reached up and grabbed the bowl of cereal, bringing it down with her. The footsteps grew close enough to her, the owner of them standing on the other side of the counter.

*Okay, stay still. Maybe she didn't notice you.*

"Uh, Elsa?" Anna's voice harassed Elsa's ears, so pleasing yet unwanted.

"Hey, uh—yeah, hi." Elsa stood up, cradling her bowl of cereal. The reality of how ridiculous she looked sunk in as her body began to shake, the porcelain of the bowl audibly clattering.

"Are—what the...? Why were you down there?" Anna tucked her hair behind her ears, looking down on the kitchen floor where Elsa was recently crouched on.

"I dropped some cereal," Elsa lied, placing the bowl on the counter. "So I cleaned it up."

Feeling almost guilty in Anna's presence, she avoided looking into the alluring trap that were Anna's eyes, instead looking down at the linoleum tiles below her.

"Oh. Well, you know—I made cookies, for all of us. Like, I know I do it every year, but I made more this time. Because I know how much you like them."
Elsa felt Anna's gaze on her, fighting the fear inside of her and bringing her stare to meet the younger girl's, who returned it with an inviting, calm look on her face.

_Seriously, enough of this hiding shit. Do something daring in your life for once and go for it. She's not avoiding you, so that's a pretty damn good sign._ "Really?"

"Yeah, because you usually eat most of them. I'm not—I'm not saying that you—"

"No, I do. Because they're delicious, and you're really good at making them. You—you make them from scratch, right?" _Really? You're going to flirt with her by talking about cookies?_ Elsa's heart raced faster with every syllable, but she was able to repress the feeling enough to continue, surprising even herself. "Nothing really tastes as good as homemade."

_Oh my God, you're really bad at this._

"Uh, well yeah, of course. I would never make it out of the box."

"I know. Yours taste so much better than that pre-made stuff."

Anna nodded, a half-smile developed on her face. Elsa maintained the eye contact, starting to find comfort in it, alleviating the uneasiness that surfaced every time she talked to Anna. "So, uh—Christmas. It's coming up. Are you excited?" _Okay, well, it's a start, I guess._

Anna's face lit up substantially, the red of her cheeks complimenting her shining eyes. "Yeah, Kai and Gerda hinted that they got me something big. Like—really big. They won't say what, but they told me it's probably going to be my best Christmas yet. And I can't wait to give you what I got you—and see what you got me, obviously._ Anna bounced notably as she spoke, her small body captured by the excitement of merely talking about the holiday.

_Whoops. I should probably get on that soon. _"You're so cute when you get excited like that._ Oh, fuck. That was ballsy._ Elsa bit her lip down after the sentence left her tongue, analyzing Anna's face closely to make sure she didn't just overstep a boundary.

Anna chuckled, shaking her head slightly. "Thanks, I guess." _Good enough._

"Uh, but yeah, I'm gonna go—go eat, and I'll take one of these. Or five," Elsa stammered, pointing at the cookies. She piled a few onto the mound of cereal, realizing the cumulative calories that were in her bowl were more than substantial for a meal.

_Whatever, I'm hungry and need something sweet._

"Okay, yeah, I was just going to make some hot chocolate, anyway. Oh—do you want some? It's really cold out. I can bring you some to your room when I'm done," Anna shrugged.

Elsa looked over the heap of food in her hands. _Does she not see this? Or does she not care?_ She paused for a moment, considering whether or not she felt comfortable enough yet to invite Anna into her room. _You have to start somewhere._ "Yeah, that'd be great, actually."

"Okay. I'll be over in a few minutes, then," Anna smirked.

Elsa nodded and scurried into her room, replaying the interaction and scrutinizing every tiny detail. It wasn't a conversation worth obsessing over, but Anna's ability to talk to Elsa normally despite the earlier incident meant that there was at least _something_ worth salvaging.

All she had to do was find it.
Jesus, since when was there such a high demand for colored pencils? Elsa stared up at the shelf that towered over her, presenting a proud display of brands and various supplies that Elsa didn't even know existed. The colors were arranged carefully by an employee who obviously had dabbled in the art world, a disparity from the sterile walls and floors it was housed in.

"Hey, can—"

Elsa jumped slightly at the intrusion of the masculine voice, turning around to face the source of it. A college-aged man who surpassed her in height stood behind her, his dark skin offsetting the brightness of his eyes and smile, which appeased the frightened girl.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," he laughed, holding his palm out.

"No, I, I guess I just got a little lost in thought...like, I didn't even know there were this many art supplies in the world," Elsa said, craning her eyes up the shelves.

"Yeah—it's amazing, isn't it? It's easy to get lost here—I know I have."

"Wait, don't you work here?" Elsa asked, noting his uniform.

The man chuckled and shook his head in a way that reminded Elsa of how Anna would shake her head after Elsa said anything ridiculous. "Yes, but I don't mean actually get lost. I mean just get lost starting at everything we have. It's mesmerizing."

"Okay, yeah. I get that. I guess. "Uh, my sister—she's an art major, and I wanted to get her something nice for Christmas."

"Right," he nodded.

"So—I figured I'd go here, since it's the only art supply store I know of, I mean, at least she goes here all the time. But I've never actually been, and shit—oh, God, I'm sorry, I mean—"

"It's all right, I've heard much worse here. So, you want to find something for her?"

"Yeah," she confirmed, grasping a box of Prismacolor colored pencils. Holy shit, fifty dollars?

"Well, what does she do? What kind of art? I'm assuming she's traditional, since you say she comes here a lot."

"I don't know, I literally have no idea. Maybe you know her? She's shorter than me, long, red hair, sometimes braided, but lately—well, lately she's been wearing it down. She'll talk your ear off sometimes, and she has a great smile, and—" All right, calm down. Elsa's stomach turned as she described her sister, a clear image of her gorgeous face, cursed curves and warming features storming her mind and dampening her mood.

An expression of uncertainty snagged the man's face, his lips folding down. "Um, yeah, honestly, that describes a lot of our clients."

So there are more Annas out there? Christ. "Oh. Well, I know she likes to paint—"

"Watercolor? Acrylics? Oils?"

"Yeah, all of those," she said, nodding her head.

"Okay. Well, I'll show you over to where our watercolor sets are, and we'll start there, all right?"
As he lead her over to the watercolor section, he pointed out other various supplies the store had to offer, asking Elsa if anything she saw caught her eye as something that Anna would like. Elsa was lost in a world foreign to her, simply shrugging and responding with "I have no idea" a majority of the time. For someone who's so in love with her, you sure don't know shit about her biggest hobby. The man kept his composure, although a small lead of frustration kindled in his eyes, despite his constant grin.

As she approached the watercolor aisle, a familiar face peered at her from the small sea of people that surrounded the graphite section. Burnt hair tucked under a lighter hat, with shades of yellow swaddling the rest of her body in the form of a light jacket and rippling skirt, white lace trimming the bottom, almost daring to kiss the graphite-glazed floor below it. Her eyes widened at Elsa, scanning her figure up and down.

What the—is she checking me out?

"Forgive me for interrupting, but aren't you Anna's sister?" the girl asked, approaching Elsa. A series of journals were clutched in her hands, which held the books close to her body.

"Yeah? Uh, hi?" Wait, who the hell is this?

"Oh, good to know I wasn't going insane. I'm Jane, I took AP Art with her last year, we sat next to each other the entire time and it was honestly my favorite class, just because of her. Your sister—she's superbly talented and intelligent," she stated, her smile radiant with joy as she spoke. "Oh, wow, I really need to reconnect with her and see how she's doing. I'd absolutely—well, I'd just love to see what she's done lately."

"Uh, excuse me—but, how did you know who I was?" Elsa asked, stepping back slightly as Jane had began to step into her personal space as she rambled.

"I've met you. I've been to your house, last spring break—I'm not surprised you don't remember me, since I think you were too busy on your laptop, but—wow, I had no idea Delle had its break this early."

"I'm—okay, yeah. Uh, it's good to see you?" Elsa looked up at the man, hoping he would usher her away from the strange woman so she could hurry out of the store as fast as possible without damaging her psyche any further.

"Yes! Uh, yes. Well, please tell Anna to call me—or contact me, or anything. I would just love to get into contact with her again."

Elsa nodded slowly, shrugging. "Okay," she answered after Jane continued to stare at Elsa, her face still weaved with excitement.

"Great! Okay, I'll let you get back to—oh, are you shopping for her? You know, I remember her always getting jealous of my Prismacolor sets—just a thought."

Wasn't I just looking at those? "Oh, thanks. Really, I'll keep that in mind."

"Wonderful, well, I'll see you later, hopefully!"

Elsa waved, slightly confused, as the woman trotted off to the checkout counter. That was weird. Why don't I remember her?"
"Prismacolors? Is that what you want to get her?" the man asked, looking down at Elsa.

"Yeah, I guess I'll get—what's the largest set you have?"

"One hundred and fifty."

"And how much is it?"

"One hundred dollars."

"Fu—uh, dang. What else?"

"We have a set of seventy-two, that's about fifty-five dollars."

Elsa sighed and patted her jeans, feeling the lump of her wallet in her front pocket. *It's not like you have any bills to pay.* "All right." She sighed and nodded her head once more, defeated by the overwhelming selection when matched with her underwhelming knowledge of art. "She's worth it."
"I mean, like—seriously, flannel? Plaid flannel?" Anna teased, reaching her hand across the table and poking the softness of Elsa's choice of shirt with her finger. Her voice strained to carry over the commotion of the other diners in the restaurant, Elsa curbing the urge to react to Anna's uninvited touch. "Honestly, could you even be more of a stereotype?"

"What's wrong with that?" Elsa asked, absentmindedly twirling her straw around her soda, the noise nearly drowning out her already hushed voice.

"You're a walking stereotype, I told you. Sometimes I feel like you couldn't even be more of a lesbian if you tried."

Elsa couldn't recall the series of sentences that lead the conversation to where it stagnated now, all she knew for certain was that Anna was starting to tread in dangerous waters. Elsa managed to remained civil and slightly flirtatious with her interactions with Anna lately, although nothing came up that would rival the odd moment they shared nights ago that felt more than sisterly. She swore Anna would giggle more at her lame jokes and play with her hair in her presence much more than she used to, and she would defend to the death that she once caught Anna staring at a place on Elsa that she hadn't dared to before—yet very little evidence had surfaced otherwise to suggest that her feelings were mutual. If anything, as Elsa had slowly come to terms with, she was confusing Anna being pleasant and friendly for being flirty—a mistake she had made quite commonly in the past with other girls.

"I'm not a lesbian," Elsa said, pulling her body up to a straighter posture. "I mean, I'm not completely a lesbian. I just really like girls."

"Huh, really? Because I don't remember you ever showing any interest in guys," Anna reminded. Her Titian hair brushed up against her arm, which weighed down on the table as her hand supported her chin, resting below a twisting smile.

"I don't like guys usually. I mean, I've liked—one or two guys—maybe."

"Yeah? Have you ever been with a guy?"

"That depends on what you mean by been with a guy," Elsa muttered. High school was a confusing time, let's just put it that way.

Anna's eyebrows shot up in surprise, leaning her body back into the vinyl cushions of the booth. "But you're mostly a lesbian?" she asked after a beat of further silence, her voice dropping in volume.

"I guess, if you feel like putting a label on my sexuality. I'm whatever. This is getting really freakin' uncomfortable. Is she doing this shit on purpose?"

"Okay."

Elsa nodded for no solid reason, her bottom lip curling into her mouth. She combed her brain for any subject worthy enough of evolving into a different conversation with Anna, one that would deter from the current one, but wasn't successful in finding anything sufficient before Anna continued to prod further. "What's it like?"

"...What?" Oh, God, no. She's not seriously asking this, is she? Elsa's face warped into pure detest,
hoping Anna wasn't going to ask what she thought she would.

"Being with a girl—I mean, what's it like?"

*Why don't you come into my room tonight and find out? *"That's fucking weird to ask, Jesus Christ. You're an idiot."

"God, I just meant like—you know, two girls—what if you're both on your periods?"

"*Excuse me?*

"And you're both moody and bitchy, doesn't it make it difficult?"

*Oh.* "No. Guys can be moody assholes, too. Plus, there's really not much research that supports the theory that girls get moo—"

"Sheesh, all right, all right," Anna sighed, holding her palm out. She took a sip of her drink, tearing her stare away from Elsa and pointing it at the vacant table beside them. "Don't get your panties in a bunch."

"Fuck off." Elsa innocently swatted Anna's hand, unable to stop herself from smiling. *God, you smile like such a fucking moron when you're with her sometimes.*

"But then who's going to help you pick out your outfit for the ball next week, your majesty?" Anna cocked her head to the side, her smile smug and mocking.

"It's not a ball, it's barely a party. Didn't Jane tell you it was just like, a few people or whatever?"

"Yeah, but you want to look nice, right?"

"I guess? I don't know why I decided it was good idea to go to the mall a week before Christmas, though."

"You're an idiot. It runs in the family."

Bowing her eyebrows down in a glare at her taunting sister, Elsa attempted to take a sip of her drink before realizing it was empty, picking up the glass and swirling it around as the half-melted ice cubes clattered together, the sound echoing halfway across the dining room. "I need another drink. And where's our food?" Her questioning was only loud enough to be heard by Anna, who started shaking her head in disapproval of her sister's impatience.

"We ordered, like, five minutes ago. Calm down," Anna laughed.

"Ugh, but I'm starving." Elsa pressed a random button on her cell phone, lighting up the screen and presenting the time, just bright enough for her struggling eyes to make out the numbers in the bountiful restaurant lighting. "One-fucking-thirty."

"Be-fucking-patient."

"God. I've been patient enough. And I don't know how comfortable I feel that you're paying for *everything* today," Elsa murmured, sulking deeper into her seat, her body now close to sliding off its smooth exterior.

"I just figured—you know, why the hell not? This is the first time in forever I've actually *had* money."
"So hold onto it, Jesus Christ, didn't mom and dad ever tell you about financial responsibility?"

"Well, I sort of thought that as long as I keep painting, people will buy my pieces, right?" she asked, shrugging. "Plus, the owner of the gallery told me when I come back, he'll give me a part time job. It's not super steady income, I guess, but it's something. Also, I mean, like, what, are you going to pay for everything? Where do you make your money?"

"I still have some saved up from my last job. I'll start looking for a new one—as soon as I get back. Christ, what's with the third degree today?"

Before Anna had a chance to respond, Elsa's phone started buzzing on the table, the device aimlessly propelling around the surface from the vibrations. *Shit, please let that be Alice.*

"Oh, sorry—let me ju—hey, what the fuck?" As Elsa reached over to grab her phone, Anna snatched it up with her cat-like reflexes, holding the phone close to her chest.

"Who's so important that you have to talk to them now? You're at lunch with your sister, can't it wait?" she asked, derisively.

"Okay, I'm sorry, I'll put it away—just, please—"

"Oh, hey, it's Alice," Anna said, somehow excited over this discovery. She held the phone out in front of her, her eyes scanning the screen of Elsa's phone.

*Fuck.*

*Oh, God, no. Don't read the text. Please.*

But Elsa's internal dread could only achieve so much, the lighter haired sister biting her knuckle in frantic anticipation. Her fears became realized once Anna's expression changed from glee to absolute horror, her mouth dropping open.

"Give me that!" Elsa shouted, snapping up the phone from Anna's hands, who exerted very little resistance. With hesitance, she began reading the text that Alice sent her.

"where are you, honestly? i can't stop thinking about how badly i miss the taste of your—"

*Oh, Jesus, no. The poor thing. The poor, innocent thing.* She looked up at Anna, whose hands remained in the same position, her eyes glazed over with awe. "I'm—this is why you don't read other people's texts, okay?"

Anna dropped her hands on the table, her gaze traveling over to Elsa. "Oh. My. God. I—you and her?"

"Yeah, no, it's not like that. I mean it is—but, but it's not."

"It's not? Uh, sorry, but from what I just read—it fucking is!"

"Jesus, quiet down, all right?" Elsa demanded, sinking her head into her shoulders as the two gained stares from the diners around them. "We're just friends."

"Just friends?" Anna whispered, although shrilly. "I don't—I've never done that with any of my friends! Or—or even anyone, really!"

"Why do you even care?" Elsa barked, throwing her arms out and nearly hitting someone who was strolling by their table. "Why does it matter to you at all what we're doing?"
Anna's nose crinkled, her eyes narrowing into a small impression of a glare. "It—I—you told me you were just friends."

...Holy God, is she jealous? Elsa's heart almost froze on its own. If there was a chance of Anna being jealous, this could be the one shot she had to, rather unethically, snag a rise out of her sister. She mulled for a moment, considering seriously whether or not she was willing to risk her morality and Anna's sanity simply to arouse any sort of reaction. "I guess we're not just friends..."

"So—so you're—you're dating? I mean—" Anna began stammering, her formerly resiliency collapsing as her usual inept self returned.

"We're not dating. But there's something there, I guess." Asshole. You're going to hurt more than one person with that lie.

"Something there?" Anna's eyes widened. "You mean like..." Anna swallowed her breath, her fingers sewing together. "...You love her?"

Elsa heard genuine concern in Anna's voice, paired with what she dared to identify as distress. "Not like that. But I like spending time with her...a lot."

Anna continued to stare at Elsa as if her hair were on fire. There it was, the look of pain on her face that Elsa had sacrificed ethics to see, and it brought her as much guilt as it did curiosity, the truth slapping her in the face: she had hurt her sister just to see that she could. You're a fucking monster.

Anna's lips began to quiver; there was a sentence stuck in her throat that she was clearly hesitating on surrendering.

"So...yeah," Elsa said, lacing her braid around her hand in a distracted fidget.

Anna leaned over the table, her chin hovering above its center, close enough that the stray hairs of Elsa's braid began to dance in her breath. "Does she know?" Anna said, now in an authentic whisper. Her eyes had never shown such apprehension for a response. "About—you know..."

Elsa swallowed. Although she had just drank an entire glass of soda in minutes, her throat was dry. "No," she lied.

"Oh." Anna leaned back into her seat, not showing any relief from Elsa's answer.

"I mean, you should—you should have been the first to know."

"Yeah, that makes sense."

"But I think—I think she's falling for me, honestly," Elsa added, unable to control her twisted desire to push Anna further. Seriously, stop. She's probably only jealous because she wants to hang out with you more.

"But it's not—you're not—it's not mutual, right?" Anna asked, perking her head.

"No, but it sucks, I mean for her. And I guess for me."

"You should stop, then. Uh, stop seeing her—like that, because if she's in love with you, you wouldn't want to hurt he—oh," Anna stopped abruptly once the food arrived, detaching her attention from Elsa.

"I'll get you two more drinks, all right?" the waitress assured, Anna nodding and thanking her.
Elsa studied Anna closely, noticing whatever negative, jealous emotion she saw on her earlier had retired for the most part once the entrees arrived. *I can't blame her, this shit looks delicious.*

Before Elsa dug into her fettuccine, her vision was seized by the sight of her fingertips, which hadn't caused any damage during the entire conversation, despite how intense her emotions had peaked. "That's weird," she said out loud, hoping to prompt a response out of Anna.

"Hmph?" Anna uttered, her mouth filled with sandwich.

"I—my ice powers haven't really been that uncontrollable lately," she noted out loud, rubbing her fingers together.

"When's 'lately'?"

"I guess, almost two weeks?" Elsa longed for Anna to make the connection—quietly.

Anna's eyes stretched up to the corner of the room, eventually nodding as a look of realization nabbed her. "Oh. Oh. Well—I'm glad."

So holding it in was what was making it so fucking out of control? Elsa wrapped her fingers around her drink, taking a deep breath. The disappearing ice cubes that idled in a pool of water began to freeze as she willed it, yet the glass remained unshattered, even free of cracks. "Shit, I can still control them, but they're not—" she paused, straining to find a satisfying word "—chaotic."

"So you just unmelted ice," Anna shrugged.

"Yeah. But normally, if I tried that, I would have froze the entire table."

"...So you unmelted ice. That's badass," she said flatly.

"Yeah, I am pretty fucking badass."

Anna smirked, swallowing her food before speaking. "That's great, though. Really."

"Thanks," Elsa said, finally taking a bite. *Oh, God, actual food. This is incredible. And I'm not even paying for it.*

After savoring the taste, her eyes made contact with Anna, who was still staring at the older sister. In spite of the unappealing sight of Elsa with pasta steeping out of her mouth, and the tumult of emotions she had gone through in the past twenty minutes, Anna's eyes held honest adoration, even approval, aimed squarely at Elsa, the younger girl making no attempt to hide it. Elsa battled every instinct that she was used to obeying, the instincts that made her cover her face and turn her head away any time Anna showed any sort of affection, the instincts that nearly caused Elsa her relationship with Anna. Instead, she returned the smile, not showing any mind to the mess of food that painted around her lips—and it didn't hurt, and she wasn't being engulfed in anguishing hellfire; in fact, she was getting quite used to and comfortable with these small moments of reciprocated affections, even if they were, as she safely assumed, most likely platonic in nature.

"So, uh—are you going to respond to Alice?" Anna asked, her face shifting to unease, as though she had just remembered their previous discussion.

"No, not yet," Elsa said, shaking her head. "You're more important right now. You're—you're always more important than her."

Anna tried to hide her smile, but she was never very good at concealing her emotions.
No. No way is this fitting me. Elsa's muscles fatigued as she attempted to pull the zipper up the front of the black pants Anna picked out for her, with no success. Although she had gained a pound or two from her sporadic eating patterns, she never was the same size as Anna, whose frame was noticeably slimmer than hers—naturally, she assumed. Why does she think we're the same size?

"Are you done? How does it look?" Anna asked, her voice muffled through the dressing room door.

"Terrible. It doesn't fit me, I told you that. I'm not even sure if I can get myself out of these things. They're cutting off my fucking circulation!" Elsa struggled to pull the pants down, which caught on different parts of her legs. Christ, this is painful. Once she emerged victorious from the battle with the pants, temporarily scarred with red imprints along her waist, she hung the pair on the hanger it came on, placing it on the hook with the rest of the rejected pants, which had cumulatively succeeded in reminding Elsa how hard it was for her to find clothes that fit her lithe yet tall figure.

"Fine, just wear jeans for all I care. I own that same pair—and they're amazing, so I thought you might like them."

"They look amazing on you, you mean." They really do, actually. But anything looks amazing on you.

"Here, try this one." Anna tossed a shirt over the door, landing perfectly in Elsa's unprepared hands. How is her aim that good?

"This is a shirt," Elsa stated.

"Really? No effin' way! I had no idea!"

"All right, you don't have to be so sarcastic, you little shit."

Elsa unfolded the crumbled shirt, instantly recognizing with hardly any effort the feel of the fabric and the pattern. A blue flannel shirt. Is she serious? "Really? Really?"

Elsa could hear Anna giggling, the door rattling in what Elsa assumed was a reaction to Anna slapping it lightly. "Yeah. I saw it and I thought you'd like it. Put it on. No, seriously, put it on."

Elsa took her shirt off, momentarily lost in her reflection in the mirror. The fluorescent lighting offered no flattery to her skin tones and was merciless in bringing out the imperfections on her flesh, yet, for once, it didn't bother her. I don't...I don't look terrible. I actually look pretty good. Almost.

"Is it on?"

"What? Oh, no, not yet." Elsa split her stare away from the mirror, rushing to put on the shirt Anna had flung over.

"Now? Is it it on now?" Anna asked, growing impatient.

"Fuck, yes, yes, it's on," she confirmed, fastening the final button.

"All right, cool, I'm coming in," Anna announced, grabbing the doorknob as she spoke.

"Anna! For God's sake, I'm in my fucking underwear," Elsa said, holding her other shirt in front of her lower body as Anna intruded. Her body turned red with embarrassment, even though Anna had
walked in on worse—even recently, in fact.

"Put some pants on, then!"

"Well, it's too late for that, isn't it, asshole?" Don't even pretend to act like you hate this.

"Okay, look, I'm turned around," Anna said, gyrating herself around to face the door. "I promise I won't look, okay? Now put your pants on, miss—miss modesty."

Elsa hurried into her jeans, almost tripping onto the wall thanks to her questionable balance, staring at Anna for any sign of unauthorized peeking. Anna stayed loyal to her promise of not looking, which arose a small spark of disappointment in Elsa.

"Okay. I'm good," Elsa sighed, straightening out her jeans.

"Yay," Anna enthused, spinning around. "Oh—you—wow, you look incredible." Her focus locked on Elsa's shirt, moving her head around as she browsed the taller woman's figure. Okay, relax, she's just checking out the fit of the shirt.

"No, I don't. It's a plaid shirt. I wear this shit weekly," Elsa shrugged.

"Yeah but—you never looked this good," Anna said. "Turn around and look."

Curious, Elsa turned towards the mirror, immediately awe-struck at the fit and form of the shirt. It didn't bulge in random places, it wasn't cut too short in the sleeves or too long in the waist—in the most simple sense of the word, it was perfect. She instantly foresaw the article becoming a permanent addition to her outfit, no matter what stereotype it apparently reinforced. "Well, fuck."

"Right?" Anna reached her hand around Elsa and grasped the bottom of the shirt between her fingers, pulling it down Elsa's waist.

"Jes—what are you doing?" Elsa asked, freezing her posture.

"I'm just pulling it down, it's a little bunched up in the middle."

"Oh." Elsa held her breath, abducted by the urge to stay perfectly still. Anna's hands moved up to Elsa's ribs, traveling down her torso and smoothing out every crease and fold as she did so, unknowingly causing the girl beneath her hands to tremble at her fingertips. Her hands stopped their journey on Elsa's hips, fingers curling around and resting in the ditch of her jean-sheathed pelvic bone—lingering.

Elsa's eyes remained as fixed as they could on the mirror, the urge to breathe growing painful. "Okay, well, thanks for picking this out," she finally said, her body crumpling down as she exhaled.

"Uh—oh, yeah, no problem." Anna hastily withdrew her hands from Elsa, who still shivered in aftershock.

What the hell was that? "So I guess I'll be going as a lesbian to Jane's party—er, thing," Elsa said, attempting, quite pathetically, to ease the tension.

"Y—yeah, but you'll do it—uh, fabulously." Anna's voice shook as much as Elsa's.

Don't obsess over it. She doesn't love you back, not in your wildest dreams."Thanks."
"You okay?"

Elsa nodded. Her eyes hadn't moved from the spot on the dashboard they had been trained on for the past few moments. Stalling in an unfamiliar driveway, during the nighttime at that, had triggered a buried tier of her social anxiety that she hadn't confronted since high school. There were a few other cars in the driveway and parked on the side of the street, but not enough to signify that this was a party. This was a get-together, a few friends hanging out that Elsa had, most likely, been pity-invited to attend, where she would predictably wind up serving as an intoxicated piece of decoration that lingered on the couch, taking up space, inhaling alcohol until her worries and protests would placate into whining groans that went unheard and ignored by most of the attendees, who—

"So, are you going to let me out, then?"

"What?" Elsa asked, her stare finally choosing a different destination—Anna.

Anna chortled, shaking her head just subtly enough to be seen in the light presented from Jane's garage. "The car is locked."

"Oh." And you've had this car for how long? Elsa unlocked the car with the faded switch on her door, the loud sound of the mechanism reminding her just how much she was starting to loathe her junked metal on wheels.

"Hey," Anna said softly. "You're okay, all right? You'll like these people."

"So you know them?" Elsa's hands lifted from the steering wheel, resting in her lap.

"I know Jane, I know her boyfriend, Tarzan. I know Tiana..."

"Why the fuck does everyone we know have such weird names?" Elsa asked, severing her sister's speech.

"Yeah, okay, Elsa," Anna said, her tone thin with insult.

"Fine, point taken, Ann—no, it doesn't work with you."

The whites of Anna's teeth reflected in the finite light as she laughed. "Nah, not really, no."

"I just—I really don't have to go, you know. I know that—I was just invited because she wanted to seem polite, but I can just—I can go back home, it's not that far, and you can—" Sentence fragments dropped out of her, her thoughts racing faster than her vocal cords were able to function, trying her best to sound anything but pathetically desperate.

"No, you're going. For me. Because I told you to, and you're—you're going, okay?"

Seriously, she's asking to spend time with you. You're fine. "Okay, but if you get bored, or—"

"I know, Elsa," Anna said coolly, her smirk falling away. "I know."

You're that predictable. Wonderful. "I, uh, I hope they have free food," Elsa said, trying to detract the attention from her embarrassing social incompetence. Yet another thrilling pondering from the academic.
"Of course they have food, it's a freaking Christmas party. And—well, obviously it's going to be free, because, uh, I've yet to go to any party that charged people to eat."

Elsa tugged on the bunched-up sleeves of her shirt, pulling them down to her wrists.

"You look fine," Anna assured, noticing Elsa's physical worry.

"Are you sure? I probably could have re-done my braid," Elsa shrugged, her hands now occupied on the contours of her braid.

"Yes, I'm sure." Anna's voice was impatient and rigid. "Now let's just go inside until they realize the creepily stalling car in their driveway."

"Yeah, but—you're sure that—"

"Elsa."

"Okay, okay, fine."

Elsa's concentration was unrelenting, her devotion, unbroken. Her tongue peeked out of her lips, a drop of saliva threatening to trail down her chin, her eyes remaining unblinking for what seemed like an eternity now.

_Come on. You're so close. You didn't get this far to lose._

Her fingers trembled, yet her hand was steady. The sweat on her forehead was now pooling, forming its own large collection of perspiration that glimmered in the ceiling lights. Every muscle in her body, both voluntary and involuntary, had surrendered under her extraordinary focus, which consumed so much of her energy that her automatic body functions nearly ceased.

"Goddammit!"

"Fuck yeah! Fuck—_yeah!_ Undefeated champion, Elsa, takes first place, once again proving the blondes can, and _will_, have more fun," Elsa declared, throwing her hands up in the air and nearly flinging her controller out of her sweat-soaked digits. Washed with elation and relief, her heart regained its speed, bathing in the satisfaction she received from proving herself to be skillful in at least one aspect of her life.

"Fuck you, you cheated. And you're barely even a blonde," Tarzan grumbled, leaning back onto the corduroy sofa, where Jane consoled him with an arm around his neck.

"I didn't cheat, you're just jealous that I actually know how to play as fucking Fox," Elsa scoffed, tossing the controller on the coffee table in front of them and now fully aware of how drenched with sweat her hands were. "Get over it, you suck, and I don't."

"Fox is overpowered, anyway." Tarzan crossed his arms across his massive chest in a scowl, yet seemed amused at Elsa's excitement over her self-perceived victory.

"No, he's not. He's hard to play as. And you're one to talk, I mean, who the hell mains as Donkey Kong? God, talk about screwed up hitboxes."


"Christ, can we do something else, then?" Elsa asked, realizing Tarzan was not going to be lenient with his accusations.
"How about a drinking game? Ever play the Mario Kart drinking game?" Tarzan asked, sitting up from the couch enough that he lifted off the fabric.

"Can we do something that doesn't involve a video game?" Jane sighed.

"C—can it involve, uh, booze, though?" Anna asked from her lonesome, curled up on a single large chair that vacated the area next to the Porter's couch. Her voice, although pertaining most of its adorable sweetness, had started to gain a bit of a slur that enunciated her consonants and elongated her vowels.

She's on her fourth drink already. Fuck, I don't think I've ever seen her make it past two. Elsa looked down at the end table next to her, where a half-empty beer had lounged for the past hour. She had been too occupied in the makeshift tournament to even realize that, of all of the party's inhabitants, she had retained the most sobriety, not even bothering to finish her first drink. As the tournament had progressed, starting off with ten people and slowly dwindling down to the two as the other participants had lost and migrated to various parts of the house, Anna had been entertaining herself with hard cider, excusing herself so often to refresh her supply that she had only been present for half of the matches.

"I suppose so," Jane shrugged.

"Goooood. I never get—to drink, ever."

Funny, because I've never seen you drink at home when Kai and Gerda are out. Elsa held off on commenting, instead taking another sip of her beer—it had grown warm and flat, and the idea of inebriating herself slowly lost its appeal. She sat the beer down once and for all, instead noting the growl in her stomach that she had, up until now, neglected to address. "Can it involve food, too?"

"Yeah. Tarzan, get food," Jane ordered, leaning away from her boyfriend.

"Ugh. I have to do everything here. Where is the food, anyway?" he groaned.

"Kitchen, you—you imbecile. There should be a large plate of appetizers on the counter," Jane directed.

"Imbecile? Rude." Tarzan rose from the spot he had lazed in for the majority of the gathering, staggering around. An imprint of his muscular cage caved into the furniture, large enough that Elsa could comfortably lay in its depths.

"I'm sorry, my handsome imbecile—with a nice ass, if I may add," Jane giggled, slapping Tarzan's behind as he ambled over to the kitchen. Okay, ew.

Elsa sighed, her chest heaving up as she sank further into the sofa. She couldn't rid the haunting sight of Anna, folded and losing her sober integrity on the chair next to her. Although the living room was usually established as the main point of congregation, only the three girls had occupied it now, everyone else buzzing around the kitchen where the food and alcohol was stationed—much to Elsa's contentment.

"Anna, how are you holding up?" Elsa asked, genuinely concerned. Her previously rambunctious voice fell soft.

"Fine, Fine. Fiinee." Anna's words had morphed to laughing, wheeling over on the chair and stretching her body out. Her t-shirt had rolled up her torso, the space between the bottom of her ribcage and her hips now bare and exposed in the heated air, her navel stretched out and buried in the realm of her fit physique.
Shit, don't look, don't look. She already knows you love her, you can't get away with those innocent glances anymore.

"Why don't you mosey on over here, sweetie? No reason for you to sit over there by your lonesome," Jane suggested, sliding over the couch onto the furthest side away from Elsa. *Who the fuck says “mosey on” anymore?*

"Ugh, but then I have to stand up," the youngest girl protested, barely coherent.

"What a terrible predicament."

"Fine, but only if you go get me another—another drink." Anna stood, to a certain extent, from her chair, stumbling as much as her words did. She floundered over to the couch, almost falling over on Elsa as she attempted to pass between her and the coffee table.

"Right here, come on," Jane commanded, patting on the couch where her boyfriend had formerly sat.

Anna fluttered down to the couch, curling up on its pillowy cushions, taking to its softness and comfort immediately. Jane put her arm around Anna's neck, her limb tangled in the flowing torrent of Anna's hair, which had managed to stay as luscious and supple as it always had despite the condition of the rest of her plastered self.

*What the fuck? What are they doing?* The familiar surge of jealousy jolted through Elsa's stomach. *They're friends, friends cuddle, you just wouldn't know since it's been nearly three years since you've had a friend you weren't fucking on the side."

"My, you're hot to the touch," Jane observed, twirling her fingers in the thick offering of Anna's hair.

"Where's-s-s my drink?"

"Patience is a virtue, you know."

"Elssaaa, come join us," Anna invited, scooting her body closer to Jane, her brain seeming unable to latch onto any concern for more than a few seconds.

"I'm—I'm good, thanks."

"...Please?" Anna's plead was genuine, her eyes taken with grief. *God, I can't say no to those eyes."

"I'm—you can come here, if you want." Elsa shrugged, keeping her tone flat in hopes her suggestion didn't seem too anxious.

Anna looked over to Jane as if to gain her permission before switching over to Elsa. *Oh God, is she actually going to?*

"Sounds like your sister wants to snuggle you," Jane smirked, looking down at Anna's begging face.

"Hey—you, you—she suggested it." *Okay, this whole thing is getting pretty fucking weird. Why is Anna friends with this chick?*

Without receiving any vocal confirmation from Jane, Anna whirled her body around, bundling her body up to Elsa, who froze at the mesh of their bodies. Anna's hand curved over Elsa's shoulder,
where her head chose as a resting spot, each strand of hair at the top of her head taunting and
cressing Elsa's cheeks as if it had its own conscious, strategizing to make Elsa's discomfort even
more unbearable. The feeling of Anna's body pressing tightly into hers had brought as much
anxiety as it did unwanted arousal and heat, pacifying Elsa into a strange zone that flirted with both
severe discomfort, yet unexpected tranquility.

What is she doing? A lump in Elsa's throat had blocked any thoughts that attempted to express
themselves vocally.

"Aw, it's so nice to see sisters get along like that," Jane observed.

I don't know if this is considered "getting along." "Yeeaaah, she, uh, she hates it when I touch her,
but—she's going to have to live with it, I mean, for now." Anna nuzzled even closer to Elsa, who
grew overly receptive of how her body hauled each time she breathed.

She's touching me. Why is she touching me?

She's—touching—me.

"God, where is that man? I send him to do one simple task, and he can't even do that. Excuse me
while I go find my boyfriend in the jungle that is our kitchen. And—oh, I'll get your drink, Anna,"
Jane said, agitated. "But this will be your last one, all right?"

Anna's mind was adhered elsewhere, not even acknowledging Jane with a simple nod. Jane had left
the living room—it was now just Elsa and Anna, awkwardly fastened to each other on the couch.

Elsa half-expected a sarcastic, slurred answer from Anna, but Anna's gaze was tied on a random
spot across the room, her lips pursed in a look of out-of-place concentration. God, what now?

"Okay, so, you've had a bit much tonight, but that's all right." Elsa patted Anna's back, wishing her
shyness—who are you kidding, you're not shy, you're just socially retarded—wouldn't prevent her
from returning her sister's affections at least somewhat, secretly wishing that cuddling Anna was a
more routine occurrence, albeit a more sober Anna.

Elsa resumed speaking, wanting to fill the tense air with her words until Jane—or anyone
returned. "Sometimes you just gotta know your limits. Me, I guess I can take about seven or eight drinks
until I become a bumbling dumbass." According to Alice, at least. "But it's okay, you're just more
of a lightweight than me, I guess it makes sense since you're smaller, and y—"

Something happened that killed her speech, and it took Elsa a moment to register what. Anna's
hands weren't on her shoulder anymore. They were on her flushed cheeks, fingers digging almost
aggressively into her skin. Anna's head wasn't resting on Elsa's body—it was in front of her face—
and her lips—her lips were pressed into Elsa's, so tight Elsa could feel her sister's front teeth
scraping up against her own lips.

Fuck. Fuck! Fuck! Holy—fuck!

As soon as Elsa realized what was happening, Anna stopped, pulling Elsa away from herself
almost violently and snatching her hands back to her own body. It was only a few seconds, but the
taste of Anna stuck on Elsa's lips, citrusy, faintly alcoholic—intoxicating.
"Wai—what—the hell was that?" That was all Elsa could say after a few moments of her tongue stumbling over syllables, her head growing faint as her mind still strove to make sense of what just happened. *She fucking kissed me!*

Anna didn't respond. Her lips untethered, her drunken eyes gazing at Elsa with both shock and an intense appearance of studying, as if trying her hardest to read her sister's face.

*She—kissed me!*

And Elsa's face couldn't match up with her emotions, as there was no one emotion that dominated her. Every memory and fantasy she had that involved Anna had manifested itself into full intensity at this moment, launched by the sheer inebriated stupor of her sister. And as she had rehearsed this scene countless times in her head—usually with herself as the initiator—all the beautiful, thoughtful poetry she had spoken to Anna in these fantasies had faded out when reality presented itself. "I—you—Anna—"

Anna's eyes strayed to a random spot in the room, clearly holding back on making any sort of intentional eye contact with Elsa.

"Food's here, fuckers!"

*I am going to kill that fucking man, I swear to God.*

Tarzan sat on the spot that Jane occupied prior, placing a plate of various appetizers and finger foods on the coffee table in front of them. Paying no mind to the obviously distressed, cuddling sisters on the couch, he kicked his bare feet up onto the table, as if the tight knot in Elsa's stomach wasn't already enough to subdue her appetite. "This shit is *delicious,*" he insisted, plucking a mini quiche from the arrayed foods. "Jane's mom always buys the best food."

"I'm not hungry," Elsa muttered, cursing his existence.

"Are you kidding me? You're the one who demanded food."

"I said, *I'm not hungry.*"

"Fine, whatever, more for me."

Tarzan began talking—something about wondering where Jane went off to, which somehow turned into a ramble about how cool it would be if he could control animals—but Elsa tuned him out almost instantaneously, instead persisting to stare down at Anna, who, despite remaining firmly snuggled against her, still avoided eye contact with Elsa.

*So she regretted it. Great.*

Footsteps approached the living room from the kitchen, numerous and fast, clicking on the floor like claws. "Oh, finally, you're ba—oh, it's just the damn dog," Tarzan said, his tone dropping in elation once the household pet presented itself.

"Oh! Heeey, it's, uh, it's—it's—the dog," Anna said.

"Taco. His name is Taco."
"No, his name is Cheetah, you idiot," Jane said, entering the room with more food in her hands.

*Both of those names are ridiculous.*

"No, no, it—it's Taco. Because why the hell would you name a dog 'Cheetah'?

"Well, why on earth would you name a dog 'Taco'? Honestly, how stoned are you right now?"

*Well, it explains the smell.*

As the two entered their arbitrary argument, the dog, which Elsa could make out as a mix between a cattle dog and some sort of lab, ambled over towards the girls and sat itself on the floor in front of them, ignoring its owner completely while she debated its name with her boyfriend.

"You're so cute, yes you are." *Who, me or the dog?* "Hey, El—Elsa, why didn't we ever have a dog?" Anna asked, trailing her fingers through the dog's fur.

"Mom was allergic." *Is she seriously just going to pretend that didn't just happen?*

"I want a dog," Anna declared, sitting up from her spot on Elsa to play with it further. *It was fun while it lasted, I guess.*

"Tarzan, honey, move your ass, I need to sit down," Jane said, pointing her finger at the couch.

"Seriously? Why don't you go entertain the other guests instead of just lazing around the couch?"

Tarzan sank even deeper in the couch as an act of boycott, taking a Christmas cookie from the plate that Jane sat down on the table and shoving it into his mouth as a rainbow of crumbs fell to his lap.

"You know what, actually, I think it's time we, uh, we headed out," Elsa announced, sitting up further and tucking stray strings of hair behind her ear.

*I can't stand it here anymore.*

"What? Already?" Jane looked over at Elsa with a clear inflection of offense in her tone. "I haven't even brought out Anna's drink."

"God, Elsa, at least l—let me drink a little more, okay? Just, just a little," Anna complained, barely intelligible.

"I think I should at least take Anna home, I mean look at her. *And I need to talk to her about the hell just happened.*

"I'm—I'm—hey, you know what? I'm fine," Anna said, still occupied with slithering her hands around the dog, who still showed no mind to the intrusion of the girl's uncoordinated fingers lathering its fur.

"No, you're not. You're fucking wasted. I'm taking you home before you drink anymore."

"Look at you, taking care of your sister. Terry, give them some treats for the drive home, all right?"

"Don't fucking call me that, woman."

"Can I take Ta—Chee—uh, can I take the dog with us, too?" Anna begged. "He's so cuuute, yes you are, you are a good boy." Anna had digressed into her infant self, babbling at the dog in baby talk while she snuggled its neck, even closer than she did with Elsa, who had started to grow jealous of the canine as it bathed in Anna's affections. *I'm jealous of a fucking dog?*

"Yes, but you need to feed him, bathe him, and play with him regularly," Jane said.
"Yeah, that's fine, I'll take great care of him—I promise, like, I super—I love dogs."

"Great. Well, Tarzan, looks like we just found you a new home."

"Oh, fuck off."

Elsa closed the front door behind her, her sister holding onto her torso for at least an illusion of balance as she stumbled out of the house. The treble of Christmas music filtered out from the windows, suffocating the sounds of the cold winds that glazed over the street and buffeted the sisters' bare face, Anna shivering in an instant, but Elsa unaffected by the freeze.

Elsa's car remained unscathed in Jane's driveway, still as much of an old, cheap piece of metal as it had always been—Elsa had hoped in the back of her mind that, by some Christmas miracle, it would have transformed into something worth bragging about as they sat in that house, absorbing alcohol and tossing aside dignity. But even as her eyes adjusted to the dark and regained their ability to make out details, catching on a small dent in her car's bumper she hadn't seen before, she couldn't care less about the state of her car, or the three people that leaned up against one of the other cars on the street, drinking beer, staring at the girls as they exited the house. Her mind was snagged on Anna's gutsy act, even if it was the regretful result of a few too many, on a night that crawled on just a bit too long.

"That was—like, barely a Christmas party," Anna said, leaning onto Elsa for balance, clutching onto the sleeves of her shirt.

"They really hate each other, don't they?" Elsa's voice was soft, whispered like the wind that carried their hair.

"No, they love each other, I mean, I swear they do. They've always—uh, always been like that, you know?" Every word became progressively lazier, to the point of Elsa merely guessing at what she was saying.

Elsa stopped, unable to deny the stimulating effect of Anna's body against hers, even if it was to keep her drunken self up.

"I mean, they're super cute together, trus—"

"Why did you do that?" She's too drunk to lie right now. Elsa's heart, as if on cue, thumped hard inside of her as soon as the question slipped out of her mouth. You're going to give yourself heart problems one of these days.

Elsa was too afraid to look over at Anna, instead staring out into the sea of suburban homes on the horizon. Anna stayed silent for a painful moment, her breath vaporizing into the air next to Elsa's red face, just barely in her field of view. "I just wanted to know what it felt like."

Although the most predictable answer, it still wasn't what Elsa was expecting. Not satisfied with her answer—never satisfied—Elsa probed further, curling her tongue inside of her mouth. "Kissing me—or—or kissing a girl?" Elsa almost fell apart as she spoke, her throat running dry. Every quiet second that passed by pounded in her head, the anticipation for an answer so maddening, her vision started to blur.

"You." Anna's response was barely audible over the sounds that harmonized in the environment, in fact, it could have been mistaken for the wind—but the vibration of Anna's body when she spoke and the blast of warmth that hit Elsa's cheeks was unmistakable, the answer was clear, spoken, explicit—you. You.
Elsa's eyes darted down to Anna, who was now gazing up at her—if she had avoided eye contact with her earlier, she was making up for it now. "And...?"

"And what?"

*Jesus, you're drunk, but you're not an idiot.* "And how did it feel?"

Anna didn't hesitate this time. "Like I kind of want to do it again."

Unlike every other spoken thought Anna had in the night, this one was smooth and composed, as though she had practiced saying it before. And unlike every fantasy Elsa had, this time, she had nothing to say, as her brain was too jolted with shock to conjure up any sort of reply to appropriately vocalize her thoughts of *holyshitJesusChristdidshereallyjustsaythat?* But reality snapped to her again, reminding her that, above all else, Anna was drunk, vulnerable, and tired, a fatal combination of inhibition-loosening qualities that would make even Elsa hit on a tree in the right light.

Anna's grip on Elsa grew tighter after she responded, pulling her sister closer to her warm body, wrapped in layers of clothes. She craned her head up towards Elsa, who reflexively pushed her away, nearly causing the younger sister to stumble off of the concrete steps they were standing on, her arm catching on the tall bush that buffered the walkway. *Holy shit, you pushed her! What the hell is wrong with you?*

"N—no, Christ, oh God, no!" Elsa stammered, stepping back. "I'm so, oh, fuck, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to push you—God, I'm such a—you're way too—you're smashed!"

Anna held her hand close to her body, wincing from pain. Her eyes shut tight, her lips curling into her mouth as her body buckled into itself. "God—!

*There's no way she's in that much pain.* "Oh, crap, here, show me your hand," Elsa said, grabbing Anna's arm. *Good job, brav—fucking—o.*

Although the lighting was limited, Elsa could see several scratches, garnished with pearls of blood, scattered around the back of Anna's hand. It wasn't a terrible or gory sight, and Anna had endured worse injuries in her semi-athletic life, but the cringe on her face told of the supposed immense suffering she was facing.

"It's not—it's just a few scr—"

"No, fuck you!" Anna shouted, the outside party-goers now fully engrossed in watching the two. *Okay, ow.* "You—you pushed me! You're a fuc—you're a—you're a mean...God, what is wrong with you? I thought you told me that you—that you love—" Anna wasn't particularly one to dish out harsh words, even to her own sister, yet the marriage of pain and inebriation had, apparently, angered her to a point where her words were garbled yet biting, threaded with a strong indication of the pain she was feeling—both emotional and physical.

"I said, *I'm sorry!*" Elsa said, nearly shouting into the night air, trying her hardest to prevent Anna from saying something that could potentially harm them both even further. *How the hell am I going to get her home like this?*

"So? I thought—I thought you wanted—"

"Not when you're—"

"Look what you did to my hand! This—this—"
People are fucking staring at us! "We're going home right now," Elsa instructed. Before either of us do something even more stupid.
Beauty in Dirt

It was morning, as the winter sun had now decided to rise up into the sky, painting the atmosphere a wonderful palette of warm colors and lighting up the earth that had been previously tucked into the darkness. It was still as cold as it ever was in the biting air, yet the warmth of the promise of a new day had alleviated the bitterness substantially, shooing away the worries and feelings of isolation that the nighttime brought with it. The animals had awoken, making their presence known to every living around them with their songs and calls that permeated through the suburbs as though it were still the forest it once was, harmonizing together, whether intentionally or not, not letting the cold get to them.

"Shut the fuck up," Elsa grumbled. Stupid fuckin' birds.

Her crossed-legged pose may have made her seen carefree, yet the occasional quiver of her lower lip, paired with the nervous tapping on her laptop's keyboard told of the real anticipation she was feeling, glancing up from her screen at her sister who had fallen asleep on the living room couch sometime after stumbling home and gorging on cookies. Although, at one point, the blanket Anna had on covered her entire body, it had been kicked off into a crumpled mess onto the carpet below her, complimenting the oddly contorted pose her body assumed during her sleep, where her limbs sprawled over the back of the couch like splintered tree branches. Despite the unappealing sight and the almost inhuman noises she was making, Elsa found the appearance of Anna, lost in sleep, yelping small snores throughout the night, as endearing as any other image of her, during any other time of the day.

She was, in almost every sense of the word, smitten.

So whether it was as a result of her smitten self or her undying sisterly love for Anna, Elsa's deep fondness for her sister stationed her at the chair on the opposite side of the sofa that Anna slumbered on, laptop seated on her lap, its dim screen still brighter than any other source of light that had recessed in the room, natural or artificial. And it had illuminated the face of a nervous and impatient woman, now shaking her legs to the point of nearly uncrossing, anxious for her sister to awake from her inebriated coma, to confront her about the events of last night—or, more realistically as she had assumed, dance around the issue until either of one would blurt it out indirectly.

Anna tossed on the sofa, her sculpted body close to faltering off the furniture onto the floor, meeting the same demise as her blanket and pillow, yet some miracle of gravity had fastened her body to its cushions. Elsa instinctively detached her attention from her laptop up to the younger girl, addressing her with a timid "Anna?" before realizing Anna was as deep into her hibernation as she was an hour ago, and the hour before, and even the hour before.

"You're not—you're still asleep, right?" she called out, soft, yet loud enough to carry over across the room, regardless of Anna merely being feet away.

Anna responded with a loud snort, as though she was catching up on a few seconds void of breathing.

"God, why do I find her so fucking irresistible?" Disappointed, yet seasoned with relief as it delayed the inevitable awkwardness that would surely ensue when Anna regained full consciousness, Elsa sighed loudly and resumed her activities on her laptop, which had heated substantially throughout the night, almost burning through the thick fabric of her pants, which featured a nice array of cartoon cats on it—Anna had bought her the pair for her sixteenth birthday.
Desperate for any sort of communication with anyone to relieve at least some of her apprehension, she opened up a chat message with Alice.

"are you there? it says you're online. i mean i doubt you'd be online at six am anyway but hey i thought i'd give it a shot"

For the next few moments, as much as Elsa craved for a response from either Anna or Alice—and receiving none—she sighed even louder, gripping her fingers around the handle of her ceramic tea cup, knuckles brushing the sides of the cup and singeing her skin, the tea in the cup still fresh and considerably hot.

"Fuu—!"

Elsa tucked her lip under her teeth to suppress her yelp of pain, but the damage had been done. Anna grunted herself awake, perking her head up and scrambling to a less distorted form. "Huh?"

"I, uh, I burned—I'm sorry to wake you," Elsa said, shaking her hand out in a futile effort to quell the pain.

Anna glanced around the living room for a moment, her expression confused and intense, studying the environment closely. "Why am—where—what?"

"Wondering why you're sleeping in the living room?"

"Uh..." Anna yawned, sitting herself up and wiping the sleep off of her eyes. "Yeah, well..."

"You sort of just—stumbled onto the couch after we got home. You were pretty wasted," Elsa said, closing her laptop and carefully placing it on the carpet next to her.

"Oh." Anna bit her response short, as if she had no intentions of discussing the prior night.

Elsa nodded, pausing for a moment. "So how's your head, then?"

"My—my head?" Anna combed her fingers through her crumpled hair, a look of perplexion falling onto her face.

"I mean—are you hungover? I can't imagine that—"

"No, I'm not. I feel fine."

Weird. "Oh."

Anna shrugged. After a minute free from speech from either of the girls, she picked the blanket up, wrapping herself in its plush comfort and leaning back into the cushions. "So—where's Kai and Gerda?"

Elsa turned her head towards the hallway, which was as dark as any other section of the house. "Asleep." She turned back towards Anna, mimicking her shrug. "It's like, six A.M."

"What? Wait—how long was I asleep for?"

"Like, five hours."

"...And how long have you been sitting there for?" Anna asked, her tone ripe with judgment.

"An hour or so." I couldn't fuckin' sleep after what happened last night.
"Okay, yeah that's—kind of creepy." There was no hint of facetiousness in her voice, but Elsa chalked that up to her tiredness, unwilling to acknowledge that maybe Anna had started to grow intimidated by Elsa's reluctance to respect her personal space.

"Whatever, I mean—it's a public room, I can sit here if I want."

"And watch me sleep?" Anna asked, her voice losing its grogginess.

"Hey, I have my laptop, all right?"

"What are you even doing online at this time of the morning, anyway?"

Elsa sighed, another one of her several worries coming to light as the day did. "Grades come out this morning."

Anna blinked, the corners of her lips tugging down. "Ah."

"Yeah, so—yeah."

Anna's teeth poked out as they bit her lip down, as though part of her was hesitant about pressing further. "So you...how do you think you did?"

"Like I'll probably have to pay my own way through college after today."

"Oh." Anna looked down at the carpet, each moment growing progressively more awkward than the last, nipping at Elsa's brain to change the subject into anything that would take away from the focus from her recent academic ineptness.

Fuck it, just ask her. There's no use in pretending it never happened. "Do you—uh, do—what—do you remember anything from last night?" Her question was jumbled, almost coming out as one combined, multisyllabic mess off a word.

"...What? Wait, slow down—what?" Anna yawned again, clearly not extremely invested in the conversation.

"You don't—what do you remember from last night?" Asking it again was agonizing, her chest feeling as if it had started to cave into itself.

Anna inhaled between her teeth, fidgeting with the blanket between her fingers before replying. "Nothing, really, I guess."

"So—wait, how do you not remember anything?"

"I don't know. I just—I just don't."

"I guess you were pretty drunk," Elsa said, uncrossing her legs completely and sinking deeper into the chair.

"Yeah."

"But—you're not hungover."

"No," Anna clarified, fidgeting even more noticeably and darting her eyes around, as if she were straining for Elsa to pick up on how little she wanted to talk about it.

Elsa picked up on the signals, but refused to acknowledge them. "Really? You don't remember
anything?"

Anna halted her fret, finally establishing concise eye contact with Elsa, almost staring her down. Elsa hadn't seen such a strong expression of sternness on Anna's face in years, almost knocking some fear into her already speeding heart. "No."

Elsa's lips switched between opening and pursing together, the older sister battling over whether to bring up the exact event that she was dying to discuss, or to let it die, like every other brush of mutuality she had with Anna. "So then..." Just stop. "What happened to your hand?"

Anna brought her hand up, twirling it around in front of her face, evaluating the incremental scratches that trimmed the back of it. "I don't know. I think that's been there for a while."

What the hell?

"Is that tea?" Anna asked, pointing at the cup that rested on the end table next to Elsa, the very same cup that had charred her skin moments ago.

"Oh. Yeah."

"Is there any left? Like—can I have some?"

"Go for it."

Anna nodded, mouthing "thanks" to Elsa before scrambling up from the sofa and wobbling over to the kitchen, her posture defeated and sulking, reflecting the emotions swirling inside of Elsa.

As Anna did so, Elsa's stomach began to sting as a realization she had repressed for so long started to surface, so bottled up that it threatened to manifest as an emotional ulcer deep inside of her, acidic, yet worth facing, for her sanity's sake.

She doesn't want to talk about it. She doesn't want to acknowledge it happened. She fucking regretted it and clearly feels like shit over it.

You've been pushing this shit for too long.

Maybe it's just time you just let her go. For her own sake as well as yours.

She watched Anna, still youthful and sweetened with the innocence that Elsa had lost long ago, pouring heaps of sugar into her tea, the look of remorse on her face not even sufficing to overpower the endearing, virtuous aura she had carried with her since she was born, the one that Elsa had been bullying away with each attempt of initiation.

You don't deserve her, and she doesn't deserve to be corrupted by you.

And even if it was an important enigma, Elsa couldn't fight off the urge to cry that came with it.

You have to give up.

"You know, I really don't have to be here if you—"

"No, it's fine. I'm sorry. I'm distracted," Elsa said.

"I know. I can tell. It's—it's become quite a pattern, honestly," Alice noted. She bit on her own tongue, distinctively regretting what she had just said.
"I know. I'm sorry, I invited you over, because—because, well, I missed you. And—I guess I kind of need you here right now." Because if I were alone, I might lose it. "I wish—"

Alice shook her head, strapping her fingers together in her lap. She shifted on top of Elsa's bed, finding a more comfortable position before cutting Elsa off. "You don't have to apologize. I told you I'd always be here for you, and well, I meant it. I just wish you would—well, tell me what's been going on with you. You haven't really told me much about what's been going on for the past few weeks or so, if I can recall correctly."

Elsa calmly calculated any sort of response she could give that wouldn't cause too much of a fuss, which ruled out telling Alice that she had confessed to Anna about her feelings—and that Anna had tried to kiss her. After a moment of formulating a few options, Alice patiently waiting with her eyes raking over Elsa as she did so, Elsa finally conjured up a reply that was simple, yet effective in conveying the pain she was feeling: "I've given up on Anna." Or, at least, I've started to.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Like, I guess it's for the best. For both of us."

"It is. It really is, wow. I'm glad you—you're finally acknowledging this. Might I ask, though, what made you come to this decision?"

"Well," Elsa breathed, leaning against the windowsill that sat next to the head of her bed. "I—I mean, besides her being my sister, she's too young, I guess. And—"

"And you finally realized how detrimental it would be to her psyche—right?"

The fuck is that supposed to mean? "Yeah, I—I guess."

Alice's vermilion lips gnarled into a smirk, one of the most genuine ones Elsa had seen on her—it was almost villainous. "That's good."

Seriously? I'm in pain and she's telling me that "it's good?" "How so?"

"Oh, I mean, it's good for both of you. I'm sure it's going to be the best decision for you both, in the long run."

"I guess." The fuck?

Alice, with her apparent newfound happiness and hope in life, pointed at Lonny, who vacationed underneath one of Elsa's pillows, his brown butt peeking out. "I see he's been keeping you some company."

"Oh, Lonny? Yeah, he's been a life savior, honestly."

"'Lonny'?"

"Yeah, like—like 'Lontra'? Geez, don't you know anything about North American otters?" Elsa asked.

"Clearly, I don't."

"Well, read up, then. I'm not going to educate you about otters."

"Oh, I implore you, please do."
"I'd rather not. I'm—I'm not in the mood," Elsa sulked.

"I know. I was joking." Alice scooted closer to Elsa, leaning onto her despite Elsa showing clear discomfort every time she had done so.

"Oh."

"So where is Anna right now?" Alice asked, interlacing her slender fingers between Elsa's clammy, sweaty ones.

"In her room, I guess. I haven't seen her since this morning." And I still haven't checked my stupid grades.

"So could she hear us?" Alice purred, the bridge of her nose tickling the flesh between Elsa's chin and her neck, her lips just brushing up against her skin.

"Not now, please. I'm—I'm not in the mood for this. I really—I just wanted to hang out." I'm not even sure why I wanted to hang out with you, other than just needing some company to take her off my mind.

"So what—what do you want to do then?" Alice asked, still nuzzling her neck.

"Talk? Eat? Just—anything but that right now, please." Elsa leaned away from Alice's face, creating a substantial gap between the two girls.

"So—now that she's out of the picture, you don't want to—"

"No, I don't.Honestly? I don't." Unfastening her fingers from Alice's, Elsa turned her attention to outside, knowing whatever expression had formed on Alice's face would be heartbreaking, at best.

"Well—well, then—what if we're not friends with benefits?" Alice asked, a sense of urgency in her voice.

"Yes! I mean, yes, that's what I mean," Elsa enthused, turning towards Alice again, who had a glimmer of hope in her eyes.

"No, I mean like—what if we were, well, more?"

"...More?" Oh, shit.

"Like—"

"No, I think—I think I know what you mean. And—I—"

"Yes or no?"

"I don't—are you asking me if I want to be your girlfriend?" Elsa blurted, gripping the sheets of her bed tight.

"Well, bluntly—yes."

And for the second time that day, Elsa's heart felt as if it were sinking deep into her abdomen, nearly arresting all of her breaths and heartbeats to the point where she felt fortunate to still be alive —although she had little care to be alive at that point in time, knowing the answer she was going to give to Alice was going to possibly ruin their friendship, even if it was short-lived. The longer she took the answer, the more Alice's face fell into disappointment, her eyes begging for an answer,
any answer.

"I'd rather just be friends."
"Just friends, again—is that it?" Alice repeated, as though she were expecting some sort of further clarification from Elsa.

"Yeah, well. I mean, that's what we agreed upon from the start."

"Yes, but—really? I mean, after—after everything, and all of the, the nights I've spent listening to you, bitching and crying over her—"

"Wait, I—excuse me?" Elsa interrupted. Alice's aggressive side was not something she was acquainted with, yet as if Elsa's rejection had triggered a transformation in her, Alice's voice began to rise, as did her chest. "You—you told me that you were always there for me, and that you were—that I could vent about her—"

"Elsa," Alice addressed, holding two extended fingers out in front of Elsa's face. Oh, fuck no. You do not shush me. "I know what I told you. I also know that—that we had something, I know we did. We have something, don't we?"

"We have a friendship." Elsa squeezed her hands into her bedsheets, almost pulling them off the bottom of her mattress. "A friendship—that we ruined with sex." The accusation was so coarse, it left a bitter taste in her mouth. She couldn't pull her eyes away from Alice's, which had swelled considerably with pain. Well, if your intention was to hurt her, good job.

A rare feeling for Elsa twisted inside of her—actual sympathy. Sympathy that had switched her composure from defensive to guilty, toppling back to the wall behind her, hiding her face in her dampened hands, fingers gripping fibers of hair between them. Yet even the shame broadcasted in her posture couldn't humble the hurt on Alice's face.

"What does she have?"

Elsa lifted her head from her hands. "What do you mean?"

"What is it about her? What is it about her that you're so—what does she have that I don't?" Alice's tone was softer, but Elsa swore she could sense a seasoning of manipulation, yet Alice would never sink to such a level—right?

"You wouldn't—it's complicated."

"No, I want to hear it. I want to know what would drive someone to fall in love with their own sibling—to choose them over someone who has—"

"I don't owe you an explanation. I gave you an answer, and that's all you needed." Elsa's sympathy was short-lived, festering into something angrier, something that pushed her eyes into the closest thing to a glare she could give without seeming outright mean.

Alice breathed in noticeably, pausing before an exhale. "If you could let me understand what it is she has that I don't, that could, at the very least, give me some peace of mind."

"Why? So you could compare yourself to her? So you could—could try to win me over?"

"I have no reason to win you over anymore. Blame it on a curiosity of the unknown, but I have to know what it is. I have to know what she can offer that I can't."
Elsa sighed, her hand now unconsciously occupied on Lonny, finding a comfort in his synthetic fur. She hadn't acknowledged the reasons behind her love for Anna very explicitly herself, although she knew it was something that developed faster, rather than gradual, like a snowball rolling down a hill, toppling down everything else that mattered to her as it grew in size. "It's not something she can offer. It's something that—I don't know how to explain it to you in a way that would make sense."

"I'm listening, either way. Just try your best."

Elsa knew there was a more obvious reason to Alice's prodding other than pure curiosity, but reflecting on her affections for Anna had taken over her thoughts and emotions to the point where she didn't care to worry about it, almost accepting that things were as superficial as they seemed. As her mind traveled back in time to gather enough evidence for her to speak, her eyes craned up to the ceiling, widened as if something was interesting on it, yet glazed over in reflection.

"It's hard to, I don't know, like I said, it's not easy to explain. She was there for me when—well, uh, you know my parents died, of course. I lost..." Elsa bit her lip in for a moment before continuing, in a bid to control her emotions. "Other than my parents, I lost my friends, I lost my grades, everything I loved just sort of slipped away from me. I had a life, before they died. I was—well, I wouldn't say I was happy, but I wasn't angry, I wasn't pissed off at—God, I sound like a fucking douchebag right now."

"No, you don't. Just continue."

Her tongue hesitated against her teeth, yet the more she spoke, the less she cared about censoring herself, the venting turning cathartic, as though admitting her motives out loud was necessary for her own mental health. "And then Kai and Gerda started to take care of us," she continued, "and, Jesus, they took in Anna like she was a lost puppy who wandered onto their doorstep, but me, I was just—I was just there to them, a nuisance they refused to fix. I was a peeling strip of wallpaper that they had to feed. Fuck, I had nothing. It was my own damn fault, but I had nothing, I had nothing, except her. She didn't care that I'd start to lose my shit over the dumbest crap and punch a hole in the wall." And almost freeze the damn house. "No, she gave me fucking bandages and would make me tea and give me a snack to calm me down, telling me I had every right to be angry, telling me she loved me—that it wasn't my fault, and that she hurt, too."

"But I know she didn't hurt like I did. I know that—I know she was never really close with mom and dad like I was, but I know she was in pain, too. Yet she put it behind her, acting like whatever I was feeling was more important than what she was feeling. If she heard me crying in my room, she'd come in and refuse to leave my room until the next day, talking me through it—fucking holding me. If she didn't sleep, that was okay. If she had to miss school—well, she didn't seem to care."

"Well, she's your sister, so—"

"And then I left for college. And I couldn't sleep. I couldn't sleep without her across the hall. I couldn't sleep without there to tell me that, yes, I had every reason to cry, because, yes that squirrel did look really sad, because I had no grip on my emotions anymore. And somewhere between me calling her in the morning at three o'clock, and her more than willing to stay on with me until six, and her texting me every night to tell me she loved me—I fucking, I don't know what happened, but it—it turned weird. It turned obsessive. It turned into a longing that made my stomach churn when she wasn't there. When I couldn't see her face. When I couldn't physically have her in my hands, or be in her hands, or just—"

The mounting emotions started to topple inside of Elsa, who had lost in her draw against the sobs
she was pushing down. "So, yeah, if you want to know what it is you don't have? If you really, have to fucking know what it is—try to make up for all that she's given me, despite the fact that she didn't need to. No one was telling her to do this, no one was telling her she had to sacrifice almost everything she had just for my sorry ass, and yet for some fucking reason, she did."

Elsa's vision was blurred, at best, yet she could still make out Alice's face, who looked as though she had just witness a murder. And with blubbering mess that was Elsa, she may as well have.

"I'm—I didn't know. I'm sorry. I really—I really didn't know—"

"Yeah, well, there. You're the first person I've ever told any of this shit. I don't think—God, she doesn't even know why."

Alice looked tentative, as if she wanted to comfort Elsa in some physical way, her hands clenching and uncurling. She opened her mouth, ready to talk, but Elsa began speaking again before anything could come out of her mouth—most likely something riddled with false sympathy, Elsa pessimistically assumed.

"So let me ask you this, then—what do I have?" Her voice regained coherency, but her face stayed puffed and red, streaked with wet trails.

"What do you have?" Alice paused, her eyes darting to the side in a look of pensiveness. "Are you asking me—what I see, or what she could—"

"No, I've given up on her. Know why?" Another rage bubbled inside of Elsa, this one directed towards herself, her few moments of reflection reminding her just how little she had to offer to anyone anymore—instead, she had become a shell of her former self, a self-absorbed, obsessive shell, who demanded so much from everyone, yet gifted so little. "Because I'm a piece of shit, Alice. I'm a piece of shit who doesn't deserve her. I pushed her away, and never told her why. I hurt her, because I can't—I just can't handle my own stupid emotions."

"No—no, you're not a piece of—Elsa, don't say that about yourself—"

"Yes, I am. I have nothing to offer her, and I have absolutely nothing to offer you. Unless you're—you're some sort of sick masochist who gets off on the idea of being a shitty relationship, being with me is going to give you nothing but a huge fuckin' headache."

Alice's mouth parted, yet made no further movement, as if she was incapable of any sort of speech.

"I don't know why you want me, unless it's because you're as lonely as I am. And—I guess, if that's the case, then you really need to reconsider," Elsa said, shaking her head.

Elsa couldn't tell who her words hurt more, herself or Alice. It was a harsh truth both of them had to hear, as sharp as it was. "I suppose—I just assumed—look, Elsa, you may think, well, you make think these things about yourself, but it's not true. You're a wonderful person, I promise you. I see so much in you—"

"Alice, just—thanks for trying, but I—okay, I'll be your friend, all right? But I'm not going to buy into the bullshit that any sort of relationship between us is going to be anything other than a train wreck. For your own sake, just—let it go."

There was a silence, and Elsa expected it—even reveled in it. The whirring of the heater seemed louder, but every sound was amplified in Elsa's head, especially the heart beat in her temples, which had thumped in an aftershock of the cleansing thrill she got from the rant.
"I just thought I'd ask," Alice said after a moment.

"Well, thanks for asking, then. And if I seem like a dick—I guess, it's because I kinda am. But, trust me, it's for the best."

"Have you really given up on her?" Alice asked, almost cutting off Elsa.

"Why not? I'm, like, almost one hundred percent sure she hates me. Plus, I guess pining after your sister was—I don't know, some part of me thought I'd have a shot, but—"

"I see what you mean," Alice said, this time definitely cutting Elsa short. There was almost a sense of annoyance in her tone.

"Okay, well, then, yeah. I guess I'm done."

Alice drew in a sharp breath. "So, you really—I mean, truly, you don't think there's even a—a chance—"

"Jesus," Elsa sighed, not even hiding her frustration. "No, I don't. And I'm not going to give you any false hope. There's no chance." There's no Goddamn chance, for either of us.

"Well, then thanks for—I don't know, honestly. Thanks for being my friend, I suppose." Alice's voice as she expressed her supposed gratitude was so over-the-top, it was condescending—there was not a trace of sincerity in it. "I, I should really get back to my friend's house, though," she said, a sudden infliction of urgency abducting her tone. Oh, don't pull that cop-out shit on me. I invented that.

"Have fun, then."

Yeah, I'm never hearing from her again.

B-.

Elsa tugged at the corner of her eyes with her fingers, swirling it around as though distorting her vision would improve her grade.

A. A-. A-. A-. B-.

The pixels didn't lie, though. It wasn't a C, but it wasn't an A. It was the dreaded limbo of grades, the purgatory of academic success that could either be seen as an accomplishment, or mediocrity.

She leaned back into her desk chair, now noticing all of the natural light had faded as the sun fell into the earth. She imagined a snapshot of herself at the very moment flickering on the screen in front of her, just so she could see if she looked as pathetic as she thought she did—sitting in the dark, wearing nothing but a t-shirt and oversized boxers, unwashed hair trickling down her back in what she assumed to be the laziest braid ever attempted by human hands.

With a myriad of scenarios playing out in her head about how Kai and Gerda would react—all negative, fronted with a disturbing image of Kai's crimson, puffy face as he told her off—worries about her future suffered through her mind, as well. If Gerda were going to remain true to her word, Elsa would have to find a steady job to pay through college, and to find a steady job, she'd have to have a degree. It was the viscous conundrum of the mid 20's American that she had just found herself submerged in, with no image of a lifesaver anywhere on the horizon.
And, as though her life had started to become a caricature of itself, the first worry that popped up in her head was Anna. If Elsa were to start a new life by herself, she could not do so with the thought of Anna resenting her. She lifted her nearly lifeless body from her chair, heading towards the hallway, where Anna's door promised her presence inside with the little sliver of light streaming from the bottom.

Elsa almost wished it wasn't there; it would be much easier to walk away from the door and go back to her room and sleep. She stood in her own doorway, mulling over different ways to initiate any sort of conversation with Anna that didn't breach on creepy.

*You're not going after her anymore. You just want to be her friend again. That's it.*

Yet, overpowered by her fear of confrontation and rejection, she headed back into her room, collapsing on her bed and shutting her eyes tight, in hopes she would drift off into a sleep that would put her into a dream that was at least slightly better than reality.

She never had changed, after all.
"Wake up!"

Wake up? The hell? Who was that? It couldn't be—no, she's lying over there in that crater. Wait, why the fuck am I shaking? Is there an earthquake?

"Elsa—wake up. Oh my God, just wake up already!"

The fantasy world that Elsa's conscious was immersed in flickered to a grimmer reality, the luscious reds and oranges of the planet fading out into dull whites and a multitude of flashing colors in her vision as her sister shook her body awake. As she switched between worlds, Elsa identified each object around her one by one—the bent shades of her window, the posters on the walls—before realizing she was lying down in a self-created drool pile on her bed, confined in her own room, rather than saving the universe from an impending, full-throttle attack that would have otherwise doomed humanity.

And Anna, sitting on the edge of Elsa's bed, now fully dressed in a different, more casual day outfit than what she wore before, presented herself with a look of impatience, twisting her lips around her mouth in a bored fret. Her dainty figure still managed to appear chiseled and dangerously tempting in the slouching position she assumed, at least in Elsa's mind, the lighting of Elsa's room pronouncing her muscles slightly more than usual. But even the literal soreness of Elsa's eyes couldn't negate the strong feeling that settled into her stomach once she fully registered who the real intruder was, wide-eyed and bouncing with an excitement that she always seemed to travel with.

"Are you uuuup? " Anna asked, swaying her body side to side.

"Up? The fuck do you think? You just—" Wait, why is she even in my room if she's so mad at me?

"Okay, okay, ssh, I get it, okay. But be quiet. Kai just got home from work."

"Oh." Elsa stretched out her limbs before sitting more upright, sweeping the braid out of her face. "And—so why do I have be quiet?" she asked in a yawn. "And why are you even in here? I was trying to sleep." She pulled the sheets up as far as possible, concealing the fact that she was sparsely dressed, at best.

"I was just wondering if you've checked your grades," Anna said, crawling up to the end of Elsa's bed and positioning herself cross-legged, now preventing Elsa from lying down and resuming her sleep. "Because, well, I mean—if—"

"Aw, you—do you really care?" Elsa's voice was sarcastic and condescending, yet strapped with a hint of hope, scratching away for any evidence that Anna didn't despise her.

Anna looked at Elsa as if that were the last thing she'd expect to hear from her, sliding herself closer to Elsa, who leaned back in instinctive response. "Why the hell wouldn't I?" she asked after an odd silence.
"I don't—I don't know, I thought you were mad at me or something."

"No, what the hell? Why would I be mad at you?"

Elsa shrugged, more out of embarrassment than confusion. She nearly dropped the sheets she was clenching onto. "This morning, I thought, I mean—you seemed like you didn't want to talk to me, and well—" Elsa bit down lightly on her tongue, vaguely gesturing towards Anna's scratched-up hand, "—that."

There wasn't more than a short beat before Anna's response, yet it was still long enough to brew another feeling of uneasiness inside Elsa, a resentment towards herself at that, still cursing herself for how she handled the situation the night before.

"I'm not mad, I was tired. Jesus, I got like five hours of sleep. And I don't really care about this," she added, holding her hand out in front of her and twirling it around.

"It's just a few scratches. I've hurt myself more."

Elsa paused, mustering up enough courage to say what had been clawing at her lips for some time now, begging for release like a dog waiting to go outside. "So you really don't want to talk about last night? Oh, fuck, you actually said it. So much for letting it go. Suddenly her pathetic physical appearance wasn't such a big concern anymore, her hands completely falling to her lap, letting go of her bed sheets which crumpled to the side and unveiled her boxers like a miniature curtain.

This time, Anna took much longer to respond, holding her eye contact with Elsa who had returned it with conspicuous reluctantly, her body heaving with noticeably large breaths. Holy shit, just say something before I have a heart attack. "I told you, I don't remember much."

Then why the fuck did you take so long to respond? A large majority of the anxiety that she felt in Anna's presence had dwindled into embarrassment over how stupid she was to hope that Anna's memory had miraculously refreshed itself—if she was being truthful about her forgetfulness, that is. "Okay" was all that Elsa was able to choke out.

"I don't really understand why you always think I'm mad at you, honestly," Anna said, holding her hands out in a non-committal shrug. "You're my sister, if you ever did anything to piss me off, I'd tell you, give you shit for it, and then go back to loving you like I always do—because I'm your sister."

"Yeah, I know—but—"

"And you always seem to think that everyone's out to get you. And they're not. No one's out to get you and ruin your life, except for you. Maybe if you realized that, you wouldn't be so paranoid all the time about what other people think about you. Just a thought."

"That's fucking deep, Plato," Elsa muttered after a moment. "But I guess, I don't know. Maybe you're right."

"Maybe? Pffft, I am right. I'm always right, duh."

"Right, right, yeah, guess I forgot." Elsa smirked at her sister's confidence.

"So how about you stop dodging my question, then?"
"What?"

"Your grades. You—you checked them, right?"

Elsa's tired mind labored hard to pull up the piece of information buried in her brain, nearly forgetting exactly what her final grades were after her solid nap, still having trouble distinguishing between reality and her dreams. *Oh, right.* "Yeah, I did."

"...And?"

"I don't—" Elsa cut her own sentence sort with a sharp sigh that she felt on her own hands. "I don't know." Her enunciation was so intentionally poor that her response morphed into one barely coherent mumble, snapping her eyes away from Anna's.

"You don't know? How do you not—"

"I got like, a B. I don't know, okay? They said an A. So I don't know." Elsa said, instantly regretting the small tone of annoyance that she spoke with.

"Oh." Anna paused for a moment. "Well. I mean, they might be okay with it. But I really think you should tell them.

"Will you be there with me?" Elsa asked, re-establishing the eye contact. Her lower lip trembled in hopes that her request wasn't too desperate, yet made up for the rudeness of her last statement.

"Like—when I tell them?"

Anna's neutral expression slowly changed into a half-smile, nodding her head just slightly enough that her hair bounced on her shoulders. "Of course."

---

Elsa felt like an interrogation victim, arms folded in her lap and so stacked with anxiety that she didn't even notice how close to the edge she sat on the chair, facing the more comfortable looking couch where the rest of her family sat. She could feel the judgment from the two older adults with every breath she took, the corner of her mouth twitching down in an unconscious toil of worry.

Kai and Gerda didn't even look at each other after Elsa announced her final grades, as though they had discussed before what they would do in the situation that her grades reached the dreaded oblivion which they ultimately subsided at. Elsa examined the couple closely for any indication of a visible response they had, to at least help her predict what their final verdict would be, yet those two were no strangers to keeping a stone face, looking out into nothing with wistful stares like old statues.

"So—yeah, that's what I got." Elsa's comment added no sort of substance to the conversation, yet recaptured the gaze of Gerda.

"Well..." Kai started, clearing his throat loud enough to echo throughout the living room, "it's not a C. But it's not an A."

"Yeah." *I fucking know.* Elsa looked over at Anna, who seemed just as apprehensive as she did, staring at Kai with an almost unnecessary amount of interest in what he had to say.

"It's a B. It's a B minus." Gerda added.
"By, like, a point or two. It's not—it's not a C. It's better than I was doing. I mean, according to the school's site, I got an A minus on my final." *Because even if I barely studied, I'm amazing at bullshitting essays.*

"A B minus is good. Like, did you see the rest of her grades?" Anna said. "The rest are As. Like, all As. I don't know, I think that's pretty good."

Anna gifted a shrug to Elsa, as though gesturally apologizing for her weak attempt at cheerleading her sister.

"I don't know. What do you think?" Kai asked, turning towards his wife who retained as much of an apathetic facade as he did.

Gerda sighed in a response, offering no relief to anyone in the room. "Kai," she addressed, rubbing his leg affectionately, "why don't you go buy us some dinner supplies? I think we're running a bit low."

Kai nodded after a quiet moment, accepting with a breathy "sure thing" before standing up from the couch. He ambled over to the kitchen counter to grab his car keys without so much as looking at Elsa, who was nearly quaking from the anticipation of their final decision, knowing very well a large majority of her future was at stake, delicately placed in the hands of the two who seemed to despise her the most.

"So—"

"Anna..." Gerda paused, her dry lips parting and taking in a large whiff of air. "...Do me a favor, go into your room and paint me a picture. Paint me anything. Make it beautiful, as I know you will."

Anna blinked, as confused by Gerda's proposition as she was seemingly inspired.

"Paint you something? What?"

Gerda responded with a stare that channeled more power than any sort of vocal response could—it was one of the only times Elsa had ever seen such a stern look on Gerda's face that wasn't pointed towards herself.

"Are—are you sure? I mean, anything you want to say to Elsa, I'm—"

"Please, sweetheart." *Sure, rub it in that she's the favorite. Make it our Christmas present, if you will.*"

Anna nodded and reluctantly obeyed, walking towards her room, though she did not do so without placing a hand on Elsa's shoulder as she passed the girl. "I'm sorry, I tried," she whispered, not stopping as she made her way towards the hallway.

Somehow, it didn't make Elsa feel any better.

With Kai finally exiting the house with his trademark door slam, a wisp of cold air flushing through the living room and brushing the two women's faces, Gerda sat up on the couch and assumed a position to similar to Elsa's—although more somber than tense, looking at Elsa with the same deadpan inflection she was so talented at keeping.

*Do I say something? What the fuck do I do?* Elsa bit her tongue noticeably, trying her best to communicate her uneasiness to her aunt without explicitly saying it.
"Your mother was so proud of you." Another long breath. "She loved you more than anything she's ever loved in her life since the day you were born." Gerda's voice wasn't loud and threatening, it wasn't jabbing and teasing—it was reflective and calm, a rarity in the household as tensions took a consistent increase. "She always bragged about how you were such a good student, with so many friends. How you'd almost never come home from school without a friend, or without a report card or test you weren't proud of."

Elsa hung her head in false shame, knowing very well what path Gerda was going to take.

"I've never seen that Elsa. At least, I've never seen that Elsa since we took you in."

Took me in? Elsa fought down the urge to talk back, instead continuing her look of guilt. "I understand how hard it is to lose family. Trust me—I know. You lost a mother, I lost a sister."

Then why did you treat me like shit? Why did you take Anna in and push me on the fucking back burner? "I'm sorry I'm not who I used to be. I'm sorry I'm not perfect. I'm sorry—I'm sorry that I fuck up sometimes." Elsa took a deep breath, rising her head up to level with the floor. "I'm sorry that I'm human."

"I know Kai and I, we haven't been the best at taking care of you," Gerda continued, ignoring Elsa's quip. "I know that sometimes we may—well, we may seem a little harsh. But you have to understand, we were expecting different. We were expecting the Elsa that your parents continuously bragged about. We were expecting a happier, more—more academically successful Elsa."

"Are you—" Elsa bit her lip down to prevent herself from saying that could potentially affect the ultimate outcome of their decision. "How was I supposed to be happy? How was I supposed to be successful after my own parents died? I—"

"I know, Elsa. You're right." I'm right? Did she actually just say that? "I'll admit that we expected a bit much."

"Then how come you never changed how you acted towards me? Why are you such—" ...assholes, monsters... "...why are you so—what did I ever do to you guys?"

Gerda took another breath, this time through her nose. "Has anyone ever told you that you look exactly like your mother?" she said after a long moment of staring at Elsa, who was presenting herself with an expression of pure bafflement.

The hell does that have to do with anything? "I'm sorry I got a B minus, okay? I'm sorry I've been scratching my way through college. I don't know what you want from me, though. I got my grades up like I said I would. A C to a B. I got an A on my final. I did all I could. And yet you're still going to throw me out?"

"I never said that. We never said any of that," Gerda said, her voice gaining the rigidity Elsa was used to. "We're not going to throw you out."

"But you're going to make me pay my own damn way through college, aren't you?"

Gerda shook her head lightly after a short moment of silence. "If you can help me understand why your grades have been as they have been, then we might be lenient on that sentence."

Now Elsa was the one who was stunned into silence, leaning back into her chair.
"What do you mean?" she asked, trying to delay any sort of unauthorized confession that would escape from her mouth.

"You're a smart girl." She's just trying to butter you up. "But it's been long enough since—since the accident that I don't think that's the reason anymore that you've been like this. I think something's going on. And I want you to tell me, woman to woman, what it is. And I won't tell Kai, or Anna. Or anyone. If it's—"

"It's nothing," Elsa lied.

"Elsa, please." Gerda's plead piqued Elsa's interest, who perked her head up in a reflex. "I understand why you'd be unwilling to confide in me, or Kai. And I'll never be one of your friends that you can tell anything to, but it's going to help me make my final decision. Don't let pride or fear get in the way of your college career."

Elsa allowed herself a moment to calm herself down and ease herself into a final ruling of whether or not she'd even consider hinting at Gerda what was going on. She had sworn to keep off of Anna, yet she would be a fool to lie to herself that the feelings were gone. If anything, her settlement on keeping her hands off of Anna had made her heart ache even more, reverting back into the scared longing she was poised in two years ago, before she came to terms with her affections towards Anna.

"I'm in love." Her confession was a whisper, as soft as the tress of hair her fingers had started twirling a few minutes ago, close to pulling her own hair out of her head. It wasn't a whisper of secrecy, it was a whisper of defeat, as though she had lost the will to put any effort into even speaking.

Gerda nodded again, slowly. "Is it with another woman?"

So mom did tell her. "Yes."

And again, as though they were dispensed like candy, another silence, a quiet void in the conversation filled with deep thought from both Elsa and Gerda, who showed no hostility towards each other in this very moment—an unusual sight.

"I'm assuming this is not a mutual feeling?"

Elsa shook her head, wrestling away the soreness of a sob.

"Unrequited love is awful," Gerda said. God, is she actually empathizing with me?

"But it's no excuse for bad grades, I know. I fucking know."

"I can't imagine what being in love with another woman is like," Gerda said, her tone curious. "Women are awful. We're complex, manipulative creatures."

Internalized misogyny, or an odd attempt at empathy. "I'm trying to get over her—I swear to God," Elsa assured, holding her head in her hands. "It's going to get better. My grades will get better. I swear."

"I know they will. And that's why I've decided to give you one more semester to prove to us that you can be the straight A student your parents said you were."

"Wait, seriously? Are you—are you sure?" Jesus, shut up! Don't fuck this up.
"Yes, I am. I'll tell Kai. He might not be too happy, but—I think it'll save all of us a lot of headache."

Okay, just get up and accept it, and leave. Elsa stood up from her chair, her expression anything but neutral, not transparent in the least about her surprise towards the overall verdict. "Why are you being so nice to me all of a sudden?"

Gerda's large cheeks distorted into a smile. "You remind me so much of your mother sometimes."

Elsa nodded, acting as though she accepted that answer despite the even larger quantity of questions it brought up. Is she high? She thanked Gerda and headed down the hallway. Anna's door was shut close, the sound of music wafting in along with her loud, out-of-key humming that accompanied it.

If you truly do want to get over her, then just move on, just keep walking.

Anna's door started to creak open as soon as Elsa started to walk by, and Elsa was powerless to her temptation, succumbing to her desire to break the news to Anna instead of rushing into her room. She turned around and stared at the door as it opened, Anna popping her head out and scanning the hallway.

"Elsa? ….Elsa!" Once her eyes locked onto her sister, Anna abandoned her room and ran up to Elsa, bobbing with anticipation. "Are—please tell me—"

"I'm staying," Elsa announced. "They're going to give me another semester."

"Thank God," Anna clamored. She instantly wrapped her arms around Elsa tight, lassoing her sister towards her who remained with her hands stiff to her sides. Don't touch her, don't fucking touch her.

Anna let go of the hug as soon as she initiated it, taken over by an apparent realization that she should refrain from touching Elsa, who showed clear resistance towards the contact despite the undeniable warmth it gave her.

"I'm—oh my God, I'm so happy. I was worried. I have no idea why they'd give you so much crap over a B minus! But I mean, I couldn't even paint! I don't even know what she wanted me to to paint so I just—oh, whatever, I'm just so happy for you." Anna's face lit up like a Christmas tree, her broadened eyes and flushed cheeks especially saturated with the happiness that stole her physical composure.

"Yeah, and Gerda and I are basically BFFs now apparently."

"Well, let's hope it stays that way. Maybe it's the Christmas spirit, it gets to a lot of us, ya know?" Anna smiled so large, her lips may have well been puppeteered by strings. "But—like, this means we can hang out more, right? I mean, if you want to. If you don't, I understand. I really do."

"I mean...we'll see. It depends on my schedule, I guess."

"Yeah, of course." Anna's joy started to visibly wane as her posture flattened and her smile drew down, yet it remained in traces, in her voice and in her eyes.

"I'm gonna go back into my room," Elsa announced. "But, uh, thanks. Thanks for—for helping me and—just, uh, thanks. Really."
"Hey, it's what I'm here for."

Elsa grinned in reply and headed towards her own room again, striving her best to occupy herself with thoughts other than Anna in an actual cognitive effort to soothe—or at least, detract from—the pain of trying to get over Anna.

*One more problem down.*

She stared down at her hands, which had managed to remain clean of inaugurating any out-of-control ice storms or causing another catastrophic scene.

*Maybe my life is finally getting better.*
Mental Synchronization

Chapter Notes

these chapter titles are so dumb i apologize lmao

Elsa gripped the cat-shaped stress ball in her hand, squeezing it lightly enough to separate the small cracks on its stretchy skin, crawling throughout its surface in a system of veins. Although years of repetitive use had shown through in its worn appearance, it still functioned well as a stress reliever for Elsa, finding its way into her hands often throughout the past.

She searched her surroundings briefly to make sure her room was prepared for any sort of unexpected mayhem that could spawn from the experiment she was about to perform. Once she assured herself it was safe, she relieved the pressure on the ball, unsqueezing it into its normal shape.

All right, just freeze it. Freeze it, and don't ruin the whole damn house.

With a hint of anxiety yet a surge of determination, Elsa shut her eyes tight, pressing her fingers into the toy and willing a small flurry of ice from her fingertips. Hearing the familiar snaps and cracks permeate from the stress ball, she opened her eyes after a moment, surveying the damage.

Nothing. Her room was as archaically immaculate as it always was, and the cat in her hand was now glossed over with an ice finish, hardening its smooth surface.

Okay, well, the house is still standing. That's a good sign, at least.

She placed the now-frozen cat on a tentatively placed hand towel on her bed, turning her attention over to a small clearing on the floor in front of her.

You're no artist, but you can at least try. A deep breath, cleansing and energizing, readied her.

Something simple. Just think of something simple.

It was a large step up from freezing a small toy, but it was something she had been anxious to try since she noticed her powers deteriorating in tumult. With an image rooted firmly in her head, focusing on every feature, curve and angle, Elsa held a shaking hand out towards the clearing, where a larger towel lay. After a moment of collecting herself, small sparks of fear inevitably rising, a blast of ice shot from fingertips onto the clear spot on the carpet, almost instantly forming a simple, yet successful ice sculpture of an otter. It wasn't elegantly crafted in terms of fine details, yet its playful pose and mostly accurate anatomy made up for the lack of individually sculpted furs.

Oh shit! It worked! I made an ice sculpture. It's been, what, six years? Elsa felt something nearly foreign to her: a sense of accomplishment, a sense of success.

The sculpture wasn't any bigger than a real otter, but it ignited a kindling of genuine satisfaction inside of the girl.

Fuck, I could probably make money off this crap if I get better at it.

"Look, Lon—where the hell are you?" Still pulsed with excitement, Elsa rummaged through her
sheets and under her pillow until she found the stuffed otter. In spite of Alice at least seemingly
vanishing from her life, Elsa still held an odd connection with Lonny—as much as she could with
an inanimate object, anyway. It became almost unhealthy, how she started to prefer his presence
than she did with other human beings, but his inability to judge her or talk back had appeased the
shy side of her.

"There you are. Jesus, don't run from me again, all right?" Elsa held Lonny in her lap, staring at
her creation with joy. "Look, I made you. Or a friend for you. Maybe a girlfriend, I don't know.
She's not that pretty, I know, but she's, uh, she's pretty cool.

How do you feel about dating ice chicks?" Elsa filled the silence with a wistful breath.

"Then again, she's going to melt, and then she'll be gone forever."

Elsa began scratching behind his ear. "People are like that, too, though. One day, you think you
found someone who understands you, and then—" as Elsa spoke, she gestured with her arms,
accidentally elbowing the frozen cat on the bed next to her.

The cat flung off the bed, making abrupt contact with the side of her night stand, the ice shattering
loudly upon contact.

"Shit," she swore between her teeth, dropping Lonny on her bed. She scrambled down to pick up
the cat, tossing it over on the bed next to Lonny.

"Are you okay?" a voice called from outside of her room.

God, no. Please not now.

"I'm fine," she responded, crawling up to her bed.

"What was that noise?" The door opened just as Elsa positioned herself on her bed again.

Elsa almost wished it were Gerda or Kai on the other side, but, as she predicted, it was Anna, who
entered her sister's room with little regard for her privacy, her curious nature overpowering any
apparent rational thinking.

"I dropped something."

"No effin' way!" Anna said with awe as soon as she saw the otter sculpture, which had already
begun to drip onto the towel below it. "You—you made that?"

"No. I stole it from the fair and brought it into my room," Elsa responded sarcastically.

She held Lonny close to her, feeling oddly threatened in Anna's presence. Her efforts to get over
her sister would only be successful if her contact with her was limited at best, yet as always, their
close proximity to each other had sabotaged any of her attempts at peace.

"Jeez, could go without the sarcasm." Anna shut the door behind her, leaning back into it. For
once, Elsa wasn't stingy with the lighting in her room, perfectly lighting up Anna's grinning face as
though she were presented on stage. "When was the last time you were able to make one of those?"

"I don't know, five, six years ago? Uh, why are you—"

"I heard you talking to yourself." Well, this just got a lot more embarrassing. "And then I heard a
loud noise."

"Yeah, well, I froze—I—I froze the, my cat stress thing, and then it, I knocked it over, and it
"Wait, isn't that the cat I bought you for your birthday years ago?" Anna walked over and sat next to Elsa, picking up the cat. Elsa watched curiously as Anna fiddled with the tabby in her hand, clutching it gingerly. "God, it's cold."

"Well, I did freeze it."

"And now it's got the bed all wet. Bad cat, stop wetting the bed!"

Elsa couldn't suppress a stray chuckle. Even if Anna had breached her privacy, the now solid evidence she had of her powers regaining control had made it close to impossible for her mood to drop below a certain threshold.

"Speaking of which, I mean, aren't you afraid of that—uh—otter?"

Elsa nodded subtly. I guess it kind of looks like a fat weasel.

"Okay, otter. Aren't you afraid of it melting onto your carpet? Do you really think that towel is going to work?"

"I guess we'll just have to see, then," Elsa shrugged, keeping her tone playful.

Fucking stop.

"Ah. Okay, but if Gerda and Kai find out—"

"They won't. They never come into my room. Just you."

"What, am I not allowed to? Am I not allowed to visit my own sister?"

"I mean—last time you didn't knock—"

"I know, I know." Anna interrupted Elsa with clear intention. "I'm sorry. I should've knocked. But, like I said, loud noise, sisterly instincts kick in, gotta make sure you weren't, like, lying unconscious on the floor."

"Well, thanks for checking up on me. I'm not unconscious, or dead, or, uh, whatever else you thought I was. Just—just making ice sculptures, and shit."

"That's good to hear, but—hey, make me something!" Anna said with her usual eagerness. "Make me something badass. Ooh, like a dragon."

"I can barely make an otter. What makes you think I can make a dragon?"

"Thought I'd ask," Anna shrugged. A short pause squirmed its way into the conversation, Elsa taking advantage of the intermission to study the decay of the ice sculpture, which had left a considerable damp spot on the towel. She's right, I probably should have used another towel. "Anyway, I also just wanted to see how you were doing."

And, there it is. Elsa shielded her her head between her shoulders, preparing for the guilt trip she was about to trek. "I've been going fine. Pretty well, actually."

"Oh, good. I ask, because, well," Anna rotated her eyes to the side, sucking air through her teeth.

"Because you haven't seen me in a few days, I know. Because I've been in my room a lot, and—"
yeah, I know."

Anna nodded, looking down towards the carpet. "Yeah. I just..." Anna took in a deep breath, not hiding her distress. "I feel like you're avoiding me again."

Her voice was so doused with concern, it came close to voiding the remnants of Elsa's good mood. "I'm not." Elsa didn't even bother to defend herself, knowing there was nothing she could say to prove herself.

"I guess, I felt like we were doing so well. I mean, we were—we were sisters again. And hanging out, and, yeah. I don't mean to sound mean, maybe I'm just being paranoid. But, I miss how it was. I know I say that a lot, but it's true."

Elsa stayed quiet; nothing she could add could salvage herself or her pathetic facade.

Anna threw her head back, staring up towards the ceiling. "I know we don't talk about it much but, I miss how it was. A long time ago, you know?" She lowered her head to look over at Elsa, who was staring at Lonny, resting in her hands. "Back when—well, I mean, I know you know what I'm talking about. It was nice. It was nice when we were best friends. I really—really wanna go back to being best friends with you, all right? I hate seeing you in your room all day, it makes me kind of sad that I live right across the hall yet never see you." Anna placed a hand on Elsa's back, affectionately rubbing the girl as she sulked. "So maybe we could try, I don't know, talking more again? Especially if we're going back to school again in a few weeks. It's fun when we hang out there."

"I can't," Elsa breathed.

"What d—"

"Seriously, I can't. Did you—did you forget everything that's happened in the past few weeks?" Elsa launched Lonny over to the other side of the bed, turning herself towards Anna. "Anna, I'm in love with you." The same apprehension Elsa felt during her initial confession came back, compressing her breaths and hastening her words.

"You—you fucking know that. I can't go back to what it was, because it hurts. Jesus, it hurts. I'm not avoiding you, Anna, I'm just trying to get over you. And it's fucking hard to get over you if you literally keep barging into my life."

Guilt seized Anna's posture and expression, biting her lip into her mouth. For once, she was speechless.

"There's nothing more I want than to go back to what we were. I miss you, I really do. I miss talking to you every night, I miss—I miss everything. But for my own mental health, just, I can't. I can't even try. I'm sorry." Elsa sighed, deciding that if she were going to vent, nothing was worth holding back. "It's just been confusing as hell with you. I don't know what you want from me. You told me it didn't 'feel wrong', whatever that meant, then ruin any hopes I have by brushing off what I told you as if things were normal. Then you—I know you don't remember it, but, that party we went to..." Elsa gestured her hands in front of her, pressing her lips together in a brief, quiet beat.

"You kissed me, dude. You fucking kissed me. You were wasted, but you did. And of course you don't remember it. But it happened, I promise you."

But I know it was a mistake. Everything about this is a mistake. Elsa shot her gaze over to the
now half-melted ice sculpture on her floor. "The only good thing that's come out of this is that now I won't freeze half the city when I get upset. But I have to move on, I just have to. And that means I kind of just want my own space for a bit."

Elsa's voice progressively softened as she rambled, switching from hysterical to a reflective somber, feeling virtually relieved as she confided her true feelings.

"I wasn't drunk."

It took Elsa a few seconds to register Anna's response, expecting a more emotional reply. "What? Yes, you were. You were wasted."

"No, I wasn't," Anna said, her chest heaving with a voluminous exhale. "I wanted to be. I had, like, half a bottle of that shit—what was it? Hard cider? Whatever, I hated it. But I didn't want Jane to be offended that I hated it, so I figured, well, I could give it to the dog or something. But that's toxic to dogs and that'd just be straight up animal cruelty! So, I kept pouring it out in the bathroom every time I went to get a new one.

A little wasteful, but whatever. And I just acted drunk for the rest of the night, but I wasn't."

"What? No, that's bullshit," Elsa hesitated, refusing to accept that Anna actually had any sort of recollection of that night.

"No, I swear, I was sober. I'm just good at pretending to be drunk, you know...from watching you...and Kai," Anna said, shrugging. Her hand was occupied with the cat charm on her gold-chain necklace, communicating the uneasiness she was feeling from her admission.

Dozens of questions surged through Elsa at once, her tongue searching around her mouth as she decided on which one to ask first. "Why did you pretend you were drunk, then?"

Anna threw her hands out, slapping them down on her half-covered thighs as though she were defeated by the question. "What kind of sober person would try to kiss her own sister?"

Time stopped, or at least, it did to Elsa. A different type of anxiety had gripped her, one lighter and more energized than the normal angsty worry she was so keen to. "I would," Elsa said, breathless.

The two girls were now staring at each other, oblivious to anything happening in their environment. The otter had created a large pool of water on her floor, succumbing to the cranked-up heat of the house, yet neither of them showed any sort of concern to it, or the damage it could cause. "Why did you pretend not to remember? Why did you, you wait until now?"

"You pushed me. I guess I just assumed that meant you were over me and that—I don't know, you changed your mind."

"I would never change my mind." Elsa realized how close she was sitting to Anna now, both girls leaning towards each other. Holy shit, holy shit, this is actually happening. "But I don't believe for a second you weren't really drunk. You were freakin' hammered."

"Elsa, you can either believe what you want and tell yourself I'm lying about not being drunk. Or, you can realize that I'm telling you I kissed you on purpose, and listen to what I'm really trying to say here."

A sharp ache jolted deep within Elsa's abdomen, almost preventing her from moving any further.

"What's that, then?" Elsa asked, feigning oblivion.
"What do you think?"

_Christ._

_She loves you._

Fighting against every instinct that would dare to tell her it was a bad idea, Elsa leaned in closer to Anna, her hair falling back into her face. With her heart racing, and every muscle she had clamoring to make themselves known as they shook, Elsa kissed Anna, chapped lips against plush lips.

And, as if ripping a scene straight from Elsa's formerly hopeless dreams, Anna kissed back.
Beauty and the Beast

The kiss had inebriated Elsa to a point of calmness alien to her, the surreal nature of reality overshadowing the fantasies that often found shelter in her head. When it was over—quick yet intense, like a passing storm—Elsa pulled herself away from the kiss as quickly as she had initiated it. She hadn't had the time yet for her mind to completely catch up to what happened, and felt almost too embarrassed to directly meet any eye contact with Anna as the strongest blush she's ever felt in her short life threatened her entire face. After her heart rate had slowed to something manageable enough that it wasn't thumping inside her head, she leaned out just enough to look at Anna's face, who carried a veneer of uneasiness, almost regret, on her face.

*Oh, fuck, what now?* "I'm sorry," Elsa croaked, words dislodging from her tightened throat. "Oh, God, I shouldn't have done that. I thought you wanted me to."

"No, I did." Anna's eyebrows arched up as she talked. "I, I really did."

"Then why are you looking at me like—like—Anna—"

"Because," Anna breathed. She showed clear signs of struggling to speak, her face starting to mirror Elsa's blush. "I just, God, I just kissed you. My sister. I mean—you—it actually happened."

"Yeah, it—it did." *Is that a bad thing?*

"And it felt—it was—why did I hold back so long? Fuck."

"Hold back?" Elsa's eyes widened in an eager curiousness.

"I almost, just, I almost don't want to accept this." Anna spoke as though she were talking to herself, her eyes pulling down towards the floor. "I still can't accept that I actually feel this way. About you. It's—it's honestly hard to even say it out loud."

Verbal confirmation of mutuality. It sang through Elsa's ears and arrived at her heart, lifting it up into her throat where it nearly jammed anything Elsa could say. "I mean, it—it took me a year to accept it."

Anna nodded, a strong exhale following. "I guess I'll just learn to accept it as we go."

As we go. Like her favorite song on repeat, the phrase went on to coil in her head for hours. And—\*oh God—* Anna's hand had placed itself on top of Elsa's, fingers locking between fingers. Naturally, Elsa had wondered if she were captured in the middle of the dream, wondering if, in reality, she were passed out on the very same bed she were sitting on in this moment. Yet even in her dreams, her emotions weren't this vivid and intimidating. She was a frightened animal who could easily be startled away at any sudden movement, becoming tranquilized under Anna's hand and each word she spoke, as if she had taken a course on how to tame Elsa.

Of course, if there ever \*were\* a class on how to tame Elsa, Anna would be the professor.

"I fucking love you." Elsa didn't even think before speaking, words falling automatically. It didn't hurt to say it anymore. It brought joy. \*Joy.\*

Elsa hurt for a response, but the moment was punctured by the sound of something outside in the hallway. An unrhythmical thumping noise, preceded by frantic scratching on a wooden surface. Both girls instinctively flinched away from each other, Elsa close to stumbling off of her bed.
"God, it's just the freakin' cat. She's scratching on my door," Anna said, holding her hand over her chest as she recovered from the startle. "She wants in for whatever reason."

"Well, she's got the right idea." *If that cat wasn't so Goddamn cute...*

Anna smiled, Elsa returning it warmly. If she looked like a fool, she didn't care, for once. "You should probably do something about that before it ruins your carpet," Anna advised, pointing towards the otter.

"I'll get another towel from the bathroom. No biggie."

"All right, 'Smalls'. I'll go let the cat in and—uh—just see whatever she wants. I'll see you at dinner. You're—you're going to join us for dinner tonight, right?"

"Uh, well, yeah. I'd put up with Kai's loud chewing just to see you." *And the awkwardness of being near Gerda.*

Anna laughed, her smile had grown permanent on her face, praising the glimmer in her eyes. "That's good to hear." She began climbing off the bed, pausing for a moment before lifting her body completely off the mattress. Her eyes secured with Elsa's, which stared at her with an unrelenting look of awe, her brain still bathing in the aftermath of the kiss.

"Snap out of it. You're freaking me out."

"I'm sorry, I—"

"And stop apologizing! You're kind of adorable, though. Kind of super adorable. It's sickening." Her sentence ended with a grin, both sinister yet endearing. She eased herself off of Elsa's bed, cupping her hand around her sister's leg for support.

She turned around to look at Elsa before leaving her room, her mouth open enough to hint she was ready to say something. Yet, even with Elsa staring at her attentively, she stayed quiet, exiting the room after a strange moment absent of speech from either girl.

If Anna were anything like Elsa, she needed the time alone to excitedly digest what just happened. Elsa fell back onto her pillow, devolving into a shivering pile of bliss, tucking her chin into her clenched fists to suppress the foreign urge to cry from happiness.

*It happened. It happened, you big, dumb, happy idiot. Something went right in your life for once. Elsa hadn't experienced this level of jubilation since she were a teenager, her smile so large it exhausted her muscles.*

She rolled over and snuggled Lonny close, burying her nose in his fur. "It fucking happened," she whispered into his fur, cautious in case anyone was standing outside of her door. "I guess I'm not as much of a loser as I thought I was."

Her phone buzzed on her desk, startling her once more. *God. I can't get any peace here.* She snatched her phone, reading whatever text had interrupted her burst of glee.

*Anna! What does she want? Does she regret it? Did I actually screw this whole thing up?* Elsa read the text with a surge of apprehension.

*I fucking love you, too.*
The Christmas tree lit up an otherwise shadowed room, casting layers of opaque colors onto the furniture and shimmering reflections in the windows, like tiny fairies blinking outside. Combined with the evergreen aromas that wafted throughout the household, and the quiet hum of Christmas hymns that played through the radio, it was the glistening beacon that told of the holiday that crept closer to the world, merely a few calendar days away.

Elsa sat on the far side of the couch, her legs folded up on the cushion where her chin discovered sanctuary between her knees. On the end table next to her, an empty plate sprinkled with cookie crumbs sat next to a cup of half-drunk eggnog.

*I look like I belong in a freaking postcard.*

Her eyes found themselves often snapping back the medium-sized present from Anna that rest underneath the safety of the tree, wrapped in glossy paper that sparkled just enough in the lights to separate it from the rest of the presents, as if Anna had purposely wrapped it to taunt her sister to insanity. Whatever it was that it held, Anna had constantly reminded Elsa at how excited she was for Christmas, just so that Elsa could see what she bought her.

It drove Elsa mad. She would insist that she wasn't too mindful of material goods, but receiving presents from her sister was the one exception. Even if a lot of the gifts Anna got her contained cats in some fashion, Elsa held onto those sentimental objects for dear life—even if she had, on occasion, frozen them.

"You look a little lonely." Anna spoke from the hallway, the dim light of the hall casting her shadow across the living room in an eerily ominous fashion.

Elsa scoffed with a smile, her eyes remaining on the presents under the tree, like a child window shopping at a candy store. "I'm not lonely. The cat's over there."

Madam Purrs sat on the chair, curled up in a purring pile of cat. As far as she was concerned, she was the head of the household, and held first priority in terms of seating preferences.

"Need some company?"

Elsa switched her sight over to Anna, who had changed into her pajamas. Her obnoxiously pink lounge pants and awkward smirk couldn't distract from the shirt she was wearing, the very same red DU shirt that Elsa had bought her years ago.

"Hey, it's my shirt." As best as she could, Elsa wrestled away the overzealous smile that stalked her.

"No, it's mine." Anna crept over to the couch, choosing a seat next to Elsa, who unfolded her legs onto the ground. "You bought it for me."

"I know." Elsa bit the corner of her lip down nervously, curious about how far she could go with Anna now before crossing any boundaries that she had mentally established. Although the kiss was fantastic, it hadn't succeeded in guiding away her anxieties with initiating any sort of physical contact with Anna. *Just lean on her or something. Something sisters would do, anyway.*

"Gerda and Kai went to bed," Anna said, as if suggesting something further.

"Yeah." *Fuck it.* Elsa leaned her head onto Anna's shoulder, her shirt offering a nice, saturated whiff of Anna's summery scent, like coconuts and oranges.
Instead of verbally praising Elsa for actually initiating affection for once, Anna leaned her head onto Elsa's, retaliating the rare compassion Elsa was showing.

_Horray, you did it. And it feels fucking amazing._

Elsa released a content sigh. "I wish I knew what it was you got me. I can't stop staring at the damned box."

Anna giggled, her rising body shaking Elsa. "There's two boxes. The other one's tucked behind the tree."

"You bought me _two_ gifts?"

"I told you I did. It's a special year, all right?"

"And what makes it special?" Elsa knew there were several valid answers to that question, but was interested to see which one Anna would choose.

"I'm going to college and making money," Anna shrugged.

"I only bought you one thing this year," Elsa muttered, blowing a strand of hair out of her face. She shifted closer to Anna, reveling in her comfort. "I know, I know. I'm a terrible sibling."

"One gift? I expect dozens. I expect diamond rings and a litter of kittens."

"How about a vending machine ring and Madam Purrs with a bow on?" Elsa teased.

"To the dungeons with you, then._ Dungeons, huh?"

"I think you'll like what I got you, anyway." _At least, I fucking hope so._

"I know I will. Trust me." 

"What did you get me, though?" Elsa asked, taking a sip from her eggnog, which dribbled onto her shirt. _Smooth as fuck, Casanova.

"I'm not—did you just spill some on your shirt?" Anna leaned away from Elsa, who proceeded to wipe down her shirt with a napkin. "Is there booze in that?"

"No. We're out. I'm just extra clumsy tonight."

"I'm not telling you what I got you. That literally defeats the entire purpose of Christmas. We have this discussion every year." Anna leaned back onto Elsa, who tossed the napkin onto the table next to her.

"I bet it's something awesome," Elsa predicted. "Like—like a—"

"...Like?"


"No. Sorry."

"My own personal robot assistant?"

"Not quite. "
"A vib—a, uh, uh, chocolate."

"What were you going to say? A 'vib?'" Anna prodded Elsa's stomach.

"Nothing. Chocolate. Is it chocolate? I could really—do we have any—"

"It's not food. I'm not letting you guess. Drop it," Anna playfully said.

The climbing and falling of Anna's chest as she breathed nearly lulled Elsa into sleep. "Okay," she mumbled. "I bet I can guess, though."

Anna didn't say anything, but Elsa could see her smile in the peripheral of her vision, which was mostly consumed with the calming twinkles of the Christmas tree. It was a perfect moment, if there ever were one. Yet, all the questions that begged at the back of Elsa's mind had began to take priority in her thoughts. If she and Anna were going to enter any sort of relationship, the ramifications of being with your own sibling were challenging enough to be exhausting. Even still, she had no idea what Anna wanted, or how far Anna was willing to take the relationship in comparison to Elsa. Elsa even began to have paranoid thoughts that her feelings weren't as mutual as they seemed, that Anna was simply humoring her older sister until they were separated again.

She looked up to Anna, her eyes begging for an answer to a question that she hadn't even asked. Anna, being keen on reading Elsa's expressions, immediately expressed concern. "What's wrong now?"

Again, as if clockwork, her questions became lodged inside of her.

Anna's eyes gleamed blue in the Christmas lights. "I know you want to ask me something, so just do it."

"I want to ask a lot of things, I just don't know how. There's—there's so much I want to know, but I have no idea how to say it."

Anna took in a deep breath and nodded, consoling her sister considerably with a tender smile. "I know, I feel the same. Just try to ask me anything. Anything. I'll answer it."

Elsa nodded, giving herself an allowance of one question as to not appear too anxious. "Are you really okay with all of this?" It was simple, yet summed up a majority of her worries.

"I think, as time goes on, it'll get easier."

It wasn't the answer Elsa was searching for, but it satisfied her enough to nod with contentment. "All right. And, uh, you know—if there's anything you want to ask me, you can ask me, too."

"Good to know," Anna said, running a finger through Elsa's hair. Oh, God. A shiver ran down her spine as Anna's finger traced along her scalp, every nerve reaching its threshold upon the contact.

"Can I just ask you one more thing?"

"Anything."

"Can I kiss you? Again?" Elsa felt her heartbeat in her throat, an odd electricity flowing through her body that swelled her anticipation for an answer. Before Anna could even respond, Elsa studied her face intently for any sign of disgust or detest at Elsa's request.

But there was none. Instead, Anna replied with a kiss. A deeper one than before, a kiss that jolted
Elsa, who shuddered into the embrace and relished the pleasures that caressed every one of her senses. There was no hesitancy on Anna's part, despite her supposed reluctance to come to terms with what she was feeling. She may not be able to say what she felt, but she was damn good at showing it.

"And how did that one feel?" Elsa asked in recovery once the kiss ended. "Was that one better than before?" She was shaking, she wasn't sure what she was shaking with, but she was shaking.

"Yeah. It was." Anna snuggled Elsa closer.

_Fuck me, this is heaven._ Elsa's dominant pessimistic side expected a fire to break out in the house, something terrible to happen to ruin everything. It reminded her to look around the room frantically for any sign of Gerda and Kai, in case they had witnessed what had just happened.

"No, no one's here, Elsa. Calm down."

"Just gotta..." Elsa yawned, unable to finish her sentence.

"Sleepy, are we?"

"Fuck you, it's late and I'm tired," Elsa taunted, lightly slapping her sister's leg.

"You're not going to fall asleep here, are you? 'Cause—you know, I'm also going to go to bed soon, and..."

"What if I did?"

"Then I can't move."

"Good," Elsa said in a tease, closing her eyes. _All right, remember those boundaries we talked about?_

"I guess I could stay here for a bit longer."

"Hell yes, you are. You're not leaving me alone with the fucking cat. I don't trust her."

"Oh, if you insist, then," Anna dramatically sighed, cuddling her older sister close and securing her in the crook of her neck.

For the first time years, Elsa fell asleep smiling.
Sleepyhead

Anna wasn't there when Elsa woke up.

She hadn't woken up without a source of comfort, however. With fleece pressing against her skin, even if Elsa had an extraordinary defiance to the cold, she could never deny the pleasant softness a warm blanket offered her in the morning—even if she didn't remember falling asleep with a blanket on.

Most mornings, waking up was followed by a short pang of anxiety and dread the instant she remembered the reality she was living in. It would slowly subside throughout the days, but it was never an over-exaggeration to say that mornings were a consistently unpleasant affair for Elsa.

Not today, though. Although her brain briefly neglected to remind her of what happened in the day prior, it didn't take too long for the confused look on her face to switch to a satisfied grin. She didn't care that her hair was a bedraggled mess of frosted strands, or that she was still in the stained clothes she wore the day before.

She knew that, wherever she was, Anna was probably thinking about her, about how she had finally managed to achieve the once-perceived impossible feat of ushering in happiness to Elsa rather than the normal agony and hopelessness she had grown accustomed to. It didn't mean all of her problems had miraculously disappeared from her life, but it meant at least one problem had been tackled and tied-up, even if she did it with the grace (or lack thereof) of a clumsy newborn reindeer. Somehow, the stumbled words and awkward advances she had presented Anna with had paid off.

Kai was in the kitchen, toiling at some sort of preparation that produced a lot of noise. He didn't seem to mind that, for some reason unbeknownst to him, Elsa had fallen asleep on the living room couch. Then again, unlike Gerda, his attitude towards Elsa had become progressively more apathetic than hostile.

Elsa's eyes refused to adjust in the sunlight that poured through the uncovered windows, her eyelids shielding a good half of her vision. Once Elsa woke up enough to be on a somewhat decent level of alertness, the smell of coffee and bacon tempted a strong hunger inside of her. She rose from her cushiony throne, draping her blanket around her neck like a cape and strolled over to the kitchen with her shoulders hunched behind her back, the cold tiles pleasantly stinging the soles of her bare feet.

"Bacon?" she asked, approaching the source of the smell.

"Yes, this is bacon. Correct," Kai responded, not turning his attention away from the crackling meat.

"Can I—bacon?"

"Can you bacon?"

"I want some bacon," she said, yawning.

"It's not even ready yet."

"But—but it's—it's Christmas Eve. " Right? "Don't I deserve some—"
"Yes, but it's not ready yet, Elsa." Kai's voice became imbued with irritation.

"I'm going to take some when you're not looking," Elsa scowled, almost playfully.

"Then you're going to eat undercooked bacon and get food poisoning. Is that how you want to spend your holiday? Jesus, Elsa, just—go do something else, all right?

Wake up your aunt for me, she should have been up a half hour ago."

Well, just because you're in a good mood doesn't mean he is. "No, I—well, where's Anna?"

"I don't know."

"If you tell me where she is, I'll stop bugging you," Elsa teased.

"I really don't know. Probably in her room. Tell her breakfast will be ready in about five minutes. And wake up your Goddamn aunt for me, I swear that woman can sleep through an earthquake."

Elsa, still swaddled in her makeshift blanket cape, sauntered over to the hallway.

"Gerda, wake up," she called towards the master bedroom, not bothered enough to make any sort of extra effort to fulfill Kai's orders.

She pulled the blanket over her head, cloaking it around her face and bunching it together in front of her neck, preparing herself to sneak into Anna's room and startle her unsuspecting younger sister. Even if the status of their relationship often fluctuated, Elsa had never grown tired of picking on Anna, as though it fulfilled a sibling duty that she carried as the older sister. Reaching Anna's room, however, she noticed the door was creaked open enough to reveal the contents of her room, which consisted of clothes piles and stuffed animals scattered around her floor as though they were a permanent part of her room's foliage—but no Anna.

"Anna?" she said, peeking her head into the vacant room.

"Oh! Elsa?" a voice responded from Elsa's room on the opposite side of the hallway.

"No, it's, uh, the fucking Queen of Norway. Who else would it—" Elsa was interrupted by the sound of Kai clearing his throat, obviously listening in on their conversation.

"I'm in your room!"

"I know. I can hear." Elsa headed towards her room, where Anna was sitting on Elsa's bed, occupied with her own phone. "What the hell are you even doing in my room?" Her tone carried a flirtatious jaunt, yet her curiosity was, privately, piqued.

"Oh, well, I—" Anna shoved her phone back into the pocket of her jeans, shifting her body further onto Elsa's bed. "I wanted to see you—well, like, I wanted to, uh, I wanted to see you." There was an unusual turbulence in her voice, one that was familiar to Elsa but foreign in Anna's usual speech patterns.

"I was on the couch. You know, where I fell asleep, last night. With—with you." Elsa shut the door behind her, whispering the final two words of her sentence. With the plush comfort of the blanket creating a sense of security, she approached Anna, settling herself on an empty spot of her bed, still neatly made from the day before.

"I guess I just assumed you would have gone to bed at some point."
"Are you kidding me? I—I haven't slept that well in ages." A lump formed in Elsa's throat, not used to confessing such weakly affectionate sentiments. "Who put the blanket on me when I was asleep?"

"I did, when I left. I—well, I know you don't mind the cold, but I—it just felt like the right thing to do."

"It was. Thank you," Elsa said, pulling the fleece tight around her body, feeling an extra coziness knowing that Anna had placed it on her.

"I mean, I would have stayed, but—" Anna's eyes traveled over to the shut bedroom door.

"I know. I know." Elsa could read Anna's face with meticulous precision. She was afraid of Gerda or Kai witnessing something that could have sparked any unneeded suspicion; even if they were sisters, the past few years of their lives were so deprived of sisterly affection that an influx of such would raise more questions than relief of a supposed rekindling. "So, uh, why did you even want to see me?"

"Well, actually, I wanted to talk to you about something—just real quick." There was a zest of concern in there, somewhere.

A sharp breath entered Elsa. "About what?" The blanket fell off her body, cascading into a pile behind her.

"We—"

"Are you having second thoughts?" Elsa interrupted Anna the instant the first word left her mouth, the intense worry she was feeling over powering any desire she had to be courteous and patient.

Anna's expression stayed as it was, generically ambiguous as though she had picked up tips from Gerda and Kai. "No. I'm not. I'm really not." Elsa wasn't sure if Anna was trying to convince Elsa or herself. "I'm just scared," she confessed in a quiet breath.

Elsa nodded, looking down at the bed. "Me too, honestly." I'm fucking terrified.

"No, I'm scared for you," Anna clarified.

Anna's emphasis recovered eye contact from Elsa. "For me? Why the hell—"

"If Gerda and Kai—if they were to ever see anything, just, I'm scared. I'm scared of what they'd do to you. I mean, I want to be optimistic and assume everything's going to be fine, but, realistically—what if they see something they shouldn't? Do you think they're going to be pissed at me, or you?"

She was right. It was the harsh truth Elsa lived with daily, the favoritism Gerda and Kai held for Anna for God knows whatever reason. As the older sister, Elsa could be seen as the predator, preying on her younger sister and taking advantage of her naivety—at least, in their eyes, where almost everything Elsa did was a fault. "You're right," she said, broken. "If they catch us, I guess I can kiss college goodbye. Hell, I can kiss my apartment, my food budget—everything—"

"I would never want that to—"

"Do you just want to forget everything ever happened, then?" Elsa asked, pining for any answer that wouldn't break her heart. Her voice was calm, but her mind was in hysterics.

"Elsa, of course not," Anna assured, grabbing Elsa's hand between her own hands.
Elsa's breathing stopped abruptly, an oddly comforting chill shooting down her spine.

"I'm just saying, be careful. Be careful with what you say, and what you do—and—"

"What, you have no faith in me? Do you think I'm retarded or something?" Elsa recaptured a hint of playfulness in her voice.

"No! Not at all. It's only for, like, two weeks."

So she's in this for the long run? Any confirmation Elsa received that this wasn't a regrettable short-lived fling on Anna's end had soothed the panic inside of her, involuntarily twitching her lips up into a smirk. "I guess."

"We could go out privately, you have a car, it's not like we're conf—"

"Girls, breakfast!" Kai announced, his voice nearly a wheeze, rapping his knuckles on Elsa's door.

"Fuck," Anna swore under her breath, her posture jolting in a scare. "See? They could be listening in at any time."

"No, holy shit, that's amazing. It's like we're undercover spies. Like, they're KGB spies trying to get our intel. This could be fun. Oh, we could be protecting the fucking president."

"Well, this spy is freakin' hungry," Anna teased, jabbing her sister's shoulder. She surged from the bed, yawning and stretching her body with a flexibility that Elsa had only seen in the family cat, her muscles and skeletal structure menacing through her rosy skin—and this time, Elsa made no effort to conceal the lustful glance she surveyed Anna's body with. " Fucking pervert," Anna said at the end of her yawn, lightly slapping Elsa on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry, this spy is pretty fuckin' hungry too." Oh, shit. Elsa swallowed her breaths, knowing for certain she had just leaped across a boundary, her brain too intoxicated with joy to properly censor her words.

"Well, smells like we're having bacon this morning," Anna said, brushing off Elsa's perverseness. Shit, that could have been a lot more awkward. "But check your phone, I think I heard it buzzing a few minutes ago."

"Oh, um, okay, thanks. I'll see ya later, then," Elsa said, still embarrassed over her outburst. Anna exited Elsa's room with a loose wave, leaving her door ajar enough to torrent her room with the hallway lights.

Elsa reached for her phone on her end table, mindlessly pressing buttons around the edge until the screen lit up.

Alice texted me? What the hell? Consumed by a swell of curiosity, Elsa opened up the text.

"merry Christmas, well merry almost Christmas. I miss your face. Give me a call sometime, okay?"

The fuck am I supposed to do with this? Elsa hadn't received any contact from Alice since the day she had to so harshly reject her, assuming Alice had sworn off Elsa and moved on. Unsure of any way to respond that would satisfy both Alice and herself, Elsa shrugged and replaced the phone on the end table, her stomach warning her with brief growls of the hunger it was undergoing.

"Elsa! " Kai called from the kitchen, his voice ringing with impatience.
"God, hold on," Elsa muttered to herself, rushing towards the door. Despite her frustration with Kai's inability to wait one Goddamn minute, not even Kai or Gerda could destroy the happiness that began permanently settling inside of her, the knowledge of at least eating with Anna elating her to a level of excitement that wasn't normally felt in such mundane activities as breakfast time.

If Elsa was going to find happiness, she sure as hell was going to find it in every nook and corner she could.
No Surprises

Christmas morning. If there were ever a combination of words that could bring such an uprising of terrifying joy in a mass of children, those two would sure as hell be contenders. Whether it was the promise of various cheaply-made presents or the mountain of satisfying sweets piled onto plates in post-dinner frenzies, Christmas had something to offer almost every child in the country, even those who refrained from celebrating the holiday couldn't deny the joy a few extra hours of sleep would bring from the guaranteed absence of school.

Although Elsa could never straight-out admit she enjoyed the holidays, it certainly wasn't possible for her to declare she hated them. Christmas time for the girls was a special time during their childhood, as it was one of the only times of the year where Elsa's powers were more celebrated than hidden. Even if she had strove quite diligently to conceal her "strange ice magic," the closeness of family and joy that the holidays brought had briefly switched her powers from a feared trait to a source of entertainment. Every year, she would create an ice sculpture of varying animals and characters to serve as a center piece at Christmas dinner, even miniature, temporary keepsakes for each family member as side-gifts. In the later bits of her adolescence, her parents would create a makeshift skating-rink from layers of tarp and wooden borders, Elsa providing the ice, where friends would come over and skate on, or, as she grew older, stumble across in beer-soaked hazes.

And with that, it was one of the glaring disparities between her life with her parents, and her life with her aunt and uncle. While her parents had encouraged Elsa to keep her powers hidden, they never shamed Elsa over her unusual gift. Even the occasional slip up that publicized her powers was nothing major enough to shift their views and unmoving stance on celebrating their daughter rather than disgracing her.

On the unfortunate contrary, Gerda and Kai had never seen any positives in their niece's unique power, constantly reminding her how she was a "ticking timebomb" who needed to control herself at once. With the introduction of the gloves, it was never a secret that she had become the family disappointment.

The magic of Christmas had flickered away with her parents. Gerda and Kai never got warmer during the cold months. Anna had a small kindle of spirit inside of her that would manifest in the excitement she got from baking cookies and showering Elsa with gifts and bouts of affection, normally to the displeasure of Elsa, at least for the past three Christmases. Even if Gerda and Kai had more funds than the girls’ parents did, an excess of gifts in a pathetic attempt to purchase love or at least the illusion of familiar bonding was never good enough to thrust Elsa out of her clockwork angst.

But this Christmas was different, Elsa had reminded herself, neglecting to remove her cat pajamas and shuffling over to the living room, the wrinkles under her eyes reflecting the barren hours of sleep she experienced the night before. Her presents were encores from the year before: clothes, DVDs, books on advanced teachings of psychology, and anything else that her extended family could pass off as sufficient enough in proving they at least knew something about their strange, quiet relative.

The surprise of the year was a large hardcover book on river otters that aunt Oda sent, which Elsa accepted with a rather enthusiastic grin.

Elsa flicked through the glossy pages, filled with images of otters frolicking around with small factoids serving as captions to each picture. God, these otters are adorable. Almost as adorable as she is. Elsa logged her gaze up at Anna, who had just finished opening her latest gift, a pair of stud
earrings featuring cartoon pugs on the ends.

"These are so—freaking adorable," Anna cheered, shaking the small cardboard that contained the jewelry in front of Elsa's face. "Look at them!"

*Give her anything with cute animals on them and she'll be happy.* Elsa felt the smoothness of pages between her fingers. *Well, I guess we're not too different in that respect.*

At last, the only gifts that remained were the ones exchanged between Elsa and her sister. The two boxes that tortured her for days on end, tempting her with their almost comically placed bow and reindeer-patterned wrapping, had stood their place in queue, knowing they were the best, and were certainly going to be the last.

"Open this one first," Anna instructed, drumming her fingers on the surface of the larger one.

Kai and Gerda lounged on the couch on the furthest side, donning bathrobes and slippers as though they had gone through as little effort as they could to cover themselves up just enough to be considered decent. Their attention had fizzled away from the girls sometime between Elsa opening up her season four DVD of *Breaking Bad* and Anna shooing away the cat as she chewed on the discarded wrapping paper, the older pair so comfortable and lazed on the furniture that, for all Elsa cared, they had fused to the cushions in a strange human-couch hybrid that smelled of stale coffee and cat.

"Why this one?" Elsa asked, already tearing through the paper with as much enthusiasm as her self-deprived status could allow.

Anna didn't answer, stalking above Elsa with fingers that curled into her fists in a trademark tic of worry.

*Radio*—*holy shit.* Wrapping paper lying around like makeshift confetti, the boxed-set of musical bliss gleamed a little stronger in the cellophane that sealed it. Elsa scanned the set, registering typed words individually, Anna's worry changing to satisfaction as she read the awe on Elsa's face.

"Fucking—how?" Elsa asked, eyes locked onto the artwork that wrapped around the box.

"I just—I know you like Radiohead," Anna shrugged, looking over at Kai and Gerda, who were close to dozing off at this point. Satisfied with Elsa's reaction, she returned to sitting cross-legged on the carpet next to the older sister.

*Right, the tattoo.* Elsa tugged her pajama shirt just a bit, assuring herself her tattoo was as concealed as necessary. "Thank you, holy—thank you."

"It's kind of a joke gift, to be honest," Anna said, vaguely shrugging.

"A joke? How much did you even—"

"You know I can't tell you that," Anna reminded. "Honestly, I think—uh, I think it's a little outdated. It's a few years old, so—"

"Yeah, but who gives a shi—"

"Language, girls, for God's sake," Kai bellowed from his spot, his wife jolting awake from his loud declaration. *So they are listening.*

Elsa leaned closer to Anna, her voice falling into a whisper, as if she were speaking in secrecy.
"Who cares? It has OK Computer. That's seriously, like, only the greatest fu—uh, the greatest album ever composed in mankind. And, sure, it doesn't have In Rainbows, or—"

"Oh my God, you are such a loser," Anna chimed in, a playful smile taking refuge on her face. "I think I figured out why you have almost no friends."

"I had friends. I had friends who listened to the same sh—uh, crap that I did. I mean if anything, Radiohead was freaking cool when I was in high school."

"Sure, fine. Just keep telling yourself that."

"Fuck you," Elsa innocently taunted, as quietly as she could so her cursing wouldn't drift over to her uncle as he faded out of consciousness.

"You know, I, well, I don't think that I've ever really listened to them. I mean, besides the few times that you played them in the car, and—well, I'd love to listen to them. With you, of course, I mean."

Elsa, enamored by the shy quiver in Anna's voice, began to crumble alongside her composure. "Just—listen? Nothing else? Just sitting in a room, listening—"

"Well..." Anna's sudden avoidance of eye contact and the arch of her eyebrows planted an excitement inside Elsa so ripe it physically hurt her stomach.

Holy crap, what is she suggesting? It almost pained Elsa to have to brush away the topic, with Gerda and Kai still awake enough to listen in on their conversations and take at least a semi-conscious record of what their nieces were discussing. Elsa knew Anna's mind hadn't reached the explicit gutters that Elsa's mind was used to, but suggesting any sort of alone time with Elsa was sufficient enough in braising her mood. "Really, though, thanks. I—wow, just, thanks."

"Let me open yours now," Anna said, pointing towards the gift bag that leaned up against the base of the tree.

God, that's almost pathetic. Elsa had lazily tossed Anna's gift into a bag, stuffing tissue paper into it and somehow deciding it was satisfactory enough to pass as a present. She clearly took a lot of time to measure and cut her paper, and yours looks like a two-year old did it.

"It's, uh—" Elsa fumbled for anything that could make her wrapping job appear a little less pathetic.

Yet Anna paid no mind to the poor job Elsa achieved at wrapping her gift, tearing into the bag like a predator tearing into meat, tissue paper flung beside her in trophies of her kill. Pencils held in her hands, her permanent smile didn't fade once her gift presented itself, in its semi-expensive, colorful glory.

Seventy-two. You had to go with the seventy-two set.

There was joy on Anna's face. Joy that Elsa almost felt ashamed to see, knowing very well she could have done better.

She's worth the set of one hundred, for Christ's—

"Holy crap, where'd you find this set? I've been looking all over for a set this big."

Anna asked, switching between examining the front and the back of the box.
"Just—the place downtown, I—"

"It's freaking perfect, I haven't been able to replace my set for years. Seriously, thanks."

*Is she being serious, or is she just humoring me? Elsa could say something self-detrimental about how she could have purchased something better, stirring guilt inside of her sister in an effort to redeem herself somewhat, but had been burned enough in the past to learn to bite her tongue down, replacing words with a gentle nod. And while Anna may have been good at feigning happiness in the most disappointing times, Elsa was well-trained in the art of determining between real joy, and faux.*

And this was real. Anna had somehow graciously accepted Elsa's gift, even if it were a shot in the dark. That itself was enough to alleviate Elsa's mood and beckon her back into the gleeful spirit of Christmas, if briefly.

"Open my other gift," Anna said softly, still holding onto the edges of Elsa's gift.

Elsa's hand had unconsciously taken shelter on the gift, the paper almost worn down from her fingers as they tapped it in worry. Without speaking, she ripped the paper off the gift with much more restraint and a higher sense of cleanliness, tearing the paper off in almost perfect squares.

A wood-patterned box, sleek with minimal words printed on its surface, was the final result, each side bestowed with a picture of a small, electronic device as its focal point.

"A phone? You—you bought me a fucking phone?" Elsa asked in shock, buzzwords printed as features on the box jumping out at her.

"Yeah, well, a smartphone. An Android, to be exact. I—I'm—is it okay?" Anna's tone shook with uncertainty.

"Wh—why did—woah. " Elsa's brain had been rendered incapable of words that reached beyond primal exclamations of shock. It even didn't pay mind to the obvious fortune Anna had to shell out on this gift, making Elsa's holiday offering look like a used box of crayons. *How many paintings did she have to sell for this?*

"It's a bit much, I know, but, well, maybe I bought it for you for selfish reasons, I guess. You take forever to respond to texts and—I just figured if you had a nicer phone, maybe you'd be, uh, more inclined to respond faster or whatever." Anna studied Elsa with worry, Elsa's expression stuck in a state of shock, ambiguous as to what side of the spectrum her awe had registered. "Please don't be mad."

*Mad? Do I really have a history of getting mad at her for this type of shit? I love it."

Elsa breathed, finally prying her eyes away from her newest possession. "I—I mean, I love you. I love it."

Anna's anxiety shifted to warm elation immediately, her posture relaxing down. "I'm glad to hear that."

*There was a moment. A moment that, in any romance movie or trashy novel, would have concluded between a passionate kiss between the two girls, who were now staring each other with strong faces of admiration, sitting close enough to one another that they wouldn't have to lean very far for the familiar scene to play out.*

Even if every muscle in her body had temporarily lost function in a spark of anticipation, Elsa
struggled to move herself closer to Anna, to kiss her, to do anything to physically express the strong gratification beating through her heart.

Anna's eyes darted over to Kai and Gerda and back to Elsa, a gestural communication of how terrible of an idea it would be to do anything in front of the two, even if their focus on the two sisters had waned significantly down.

You almost just kissed her in front of them, retard. What did she say about being careful? "Thanks again," Elsa choked, snapping her body back to an upright position and resuming her examination of the phone's box. It's going to take forever to learn how this shit works.

"No problem," Anna said, a clue of a laugh hidden in her voice. "Hey, you know—didn't aunt Gerda say something to me about them getting me a 'huge gift' or something?" she asked, despite her sister's attention clearly invested in her gift, sheltering the growing redness of her cheeks.

"I don't know, I don't think I was there."

"Yeah, they—they did." Anna sound virtually defeated. Elsa knew how Anna would get over-excited over such promises, and how heartbreaking it was to witness Anna face such disappointment, teetering into the sullen composure of a girl with broken spirits.

Screw it, she splurged on you. Do something for her. "Hey—uh, Gerda?" Elsa asked, turning her head around towards the couch where their relatives hibernated in a snoring, fused pile.

"Huh? Yes?" Gerda asked, snorting herself awake.

"Is—is that it?" No, that didn't come out right.

"Is that it? What do you mean 'is that it'? You got more gifts this Christmas than I did combined in my—"

"I mean—no, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sound—"

"Give Anna her gift, dear, for Chrissake," Kai mumbled with his eyes still sewn shut.

"Oh. Uh," Gerda lifted from the back of the couch, hunching over with her hands between her knees. "Anna, open the top drawer of the end table next to you. Or, rather, near you."

"This one?" Anna asked, scooting herself close to the table in question and grasping the knob of the drawer.

"Yes."

Anna shuffled open the drawer, reaching inside and pulling out a small white box, topped with a red bow nearly as big as the box itself.

"Can I—"

"Open it," Gerda instructed, still stuck in a perpetual state of grogginess.

Elsa watched with solid interest as Anna opened the small container, pulling out a set of keys and flinging the box beside her.

"Keys?" Anna asked, curiosity drenching her voice. "No—wait, are these—car keys?"

"Yes," Gerda confirmed. "Merry Christmas. You're now a car owner."
No, shit. Don't they know Anna's terrified of driving? Elsa stared intently at Anna, who looked as if she had just seen a talking snowman. That's like giving a teddy bear to someone who was a bear-mauling victim.

"Oh, wow, I—thanks," Anna said, yet her voice was barely anything more than frantic breaths. "That's uh, wow."

"The car's outside," Gerda informed, a proud smile tagged on her tired face. "Kai, go take her outside and let her give it a test run."

"Let me—let me come with her," Elsa demanded, reading the terror on Anna's face.

"I won't stop you."

"All right, girls," Kai grunted, heaving his large frame off the couch. "You two might want to get dressed first."

"Yeah, definitely. We'll meet you outside," Elsa agreed, standing up from her spot on the ground and wobbling around as her muscles regained coherency. She extended a hand out to Anna, lifting her up to a standing position once Anna accepted it.

"Don't worry, I swear to God I'll be there," Elsa assured in a whisper, leading Anna away to the hallway. Her hand grasped the younger sister's wrist, Anna's heart racing at such a speed that Elsa felt it pulse through her fingertips.

"Please don't leave," Anna begged, following Elsa away from the living room.

"Please don't leave me alone with him, he—he drives like a lunatic himself. I—I need you there."

She needs you. Establishing they had reached a safe distance away from the room, Elsa leaned into her sister's cheek, swiftly kissing it in a fashion innocent enough that it could be interpreted as sisterly affection, should the wrong eyes fall upon them. "Anything."
Anna was shivering. Elsa wanted to attribute her shivering to the cold air pinching at her skin, basking in the car interior long enough to turn it into a mobile storage freezer, but she knew the real reason behind her sisters’ quivers, staring out the windshield as if it provided a personal window to hell. Anna had rarely ever shown any signs of fear or hesitation with other activities that would qualify as challenging, yet put her behind the wheel of a car and she froze to a skeletal representation of fear itself.

It was all Elsa could do to offer her sympathies with sunken body language and empathetic eyes, hoping Anna would see her out of the corner of her vision, but Anna's composure hadn't changed even a single degree during the handful of moments they shared after Kai left them to their lonesome.

"It's okay, he's gone," Elsa said, in a bid to snuff out at least a portion of Anna's fears.

Elsa's voice snapped Anna out of whatever nightmare was playing in her head, dropping her hands to her lap after they had gripped the steering wheel for some time now. "I know."

With their exhales evaporating in the air, Elsa realized how cold Anna must have felt, wearing only a light jacket to protect herself from the unrelenting December air. Even if Anna wasn't one to relish the coldest month's suggestion of temperature, she certainly was stingy when it came to the amount of layers she'd adorn. "Just start by turning on the car, at least. Put the heat on."

Anna nodded as she turned the key in the ignition, the car turning on without any sputters or second tries, an undeniable distraction from Elsa's car. Even while the vehicle was on, the hum of the motor was hardly intrusive, nearly soothing in its rhythmic murmurs and vibrations that pulsed Elsa's body. "Jesus, this is a nice car. I thought I was lucky to get a used car."

Anna nodded, her entire composure still challenged by dread.

"Dude, look—you gotta get in the right mindset for this. Just relax a bit, okay? It's not that scary, you've done it be—"

"Yeah, two years ago," Anna interrupted, her tone ribbed with anger. "I haven't driven in two years. Two—two fuckin' years, all right? I mean, I shouldn't even be able to have my license anymore."

"I know, that's why I'm here. With you. For you. I—I wanna help, okay?"

"God, I'm sorry for snapping," Anna groaned, cupping her hands over her face. "I just feel like—I don't know," as she shared, her hands scrolled down her cheeks, pausing at her jaw. "They bought me a car. They went out of their way to buy me a car, and instead of being thankful, I'm fucking terrified. They're going to expect me to drive it—God, they're probably going to expect me to drive to college!"

"Well, I mean, don't feel bad," Elsa shrugged, slouching down the fabric of the seat. "They know you're afraid of driving. It was a dick move on their part. Hell, I'd be pissed if I were you." Yeah, you're probably not helping.

"How did—" Anna stopped abruptly, choking on her own words.

"...Yeah?"
"How did you get over it? How can you drive like—like, I don't know, just, how does it not get to you?" Elsa's heart broke at the panic in her sister's voice, who was staring at her with widened eyes that begged for any response.

But there was no response Elsa could give to miraculously snap her sister out of her rationalized phobia, and that was a mutual understanding, shared in the silence that followed.

"I just, I don't want to drive. I can make a living without ever getting behind the wheel of a car."

"But it's easier if you do drive." Elsa took a deep breath, preparing herself to offer advice, something she normally holds off on doing. "You gotta look out for the other guy. Follow the rules of the road, remember what you learned, and just make sure you're prepared for idiots. Don't worry about yourself, worry about other people. They're the ones who will fuck you up—not yourself."

Anna's nose whistled as she breathed, staring down at the dashboard with her silence sufficient as a response.

"It wasn't their fault. They didn't cause the accident. I tell myself that every time I get in my car," Elsa said.

"Yeah, I guess."

"Something made you drive two years ago, and you're still alive. The more you drive, the easier it'll get. And, hell, I'll be in the car every time you drive until you're comfortable if that's what it takes. You can't fail with me, I'll be your second pair of eyes and second pair of ears. I'll help you look out for the other guy, you just worry about yourself."

Of course there were a series of flaws in Elsa's support, knowing very well she would never be able to react quickly enough if someone were about to plow into their car, but Anna accepted her assurance with a subtle nod. "I'm holding you to that, I swear to God."

"I'll stand by my promise, okay? I'm here for you, always. " Elsa followed up her pledge by wrapping her arm around Anna's thigh, rubbing it in an affectionate effort to comfort her sister.

Anna looked down at Elsa's hand. "This is getting a little gay."

"Well, screw you, then." Elsa scoffed with a laugh, removing her hand from her sister's leg. "I guess I am a little gay."

"You're a lot gay." For the first time in the hour, Anna smiled.

If Elsa's gayness were the catalyst to soothe Anna's fear, so be it. "Is that a problem?" she asked, her tone riling as close to a sultry purr as it could without coming off as down-right creepy.

"No." Anna's lips curled into a brighter smile, her physical composition relaxing. "I'm just pointing out the obvious."

"Okay, look, just—go ahead and get the car out of the driveway, okay?" Elsa instructed. With the tension in the air reduced after the playful exchange, she wasn't about to let the opportunity pass her by to take advantage of the lighter mood. "Kai was nice enough to back the car into the driveway, so you don't have to back up. Just drive straight."

"Well, w—where are we going?" Anna grabbed the gear shift, keeping it lingered in its stationary state.
Baby steps. "We'll start out easy. Let's—uh..."

"You were just going to make me drive and you didn't even have a destination in mind?"

"No! We're going to—going to drive to the empty lot over on Pruina Avenue, all right? Where the video store used to be?"

"That's like, fifteen minutes away," Anna said, her posture regaining its stiffness.

"I'll be here, it's an easy drive. Mostly back roads, nothing busy. Hey—I even brought—" Elsa lifted her body off of the seat, grabbing the object that she placed between the seat and the center console. "I brought OK Computer," she announced, holding her offering proudly between two fingers.

"Holy crap, you go all out." Anna's attention switched over to the freshly unwrapped album as Elsa opened it up, inserting the CD into the car's player.

"I'm going to take your car's CD virginity, sorry."

"It can play MP3s, too," Anna said, tapping on the auxiliary port located among a score of buttons and knobs.

"Fancy shit, my car can play CDs. Oh, and it has central air. Sometimes. Neat stuff."

"I guess this is a pretty nice car," Anna shrugged.

"You'll grow to love it, trust me." Elsa turned the volume up as the first track started, the digital interface telling her she had settled on the volume setting of ten, just soft enough for their conversation voices to hold power over the music. "Start by naming it."

"Name my car?"

"Yes."

Anna's eyes fixed on the corner of the car, her tongue peeking out from its wet chambers. "Casey," she decided after a quick beat, her gaze strolling around the interior.

"...Casey? A boy or a girl?"

"A girl. This car is definitely a girl."

"Casey," Elsa repeated, trying not to sound judgmental towards her sister's choice of name.

"What's wrong with 'Casey?'" Anna asked, clearly picking up on Elsa's concern.

"I guess I was expecting a more original name from someone who named our fucking cat 'Madam Purrs.'"

"It was the name of my best friend from like, third grade 'till middle school. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, shit, yeah, I do," Elsa smiled, crossing her arms against her chest. "Her dad was a cop, I remember that. And she got mad at me once for eating the last slice of pizza during a sleepover you guys had. Jesus, she was a bi—"

"Yeah, she had an anger problem," Anna breathed.
"So why name your car after her?"

"I don't know, I like the name?" Anna shrugged, slapping her hands back onto the steering wheel. "Plus, the car is red. It's angry. Like she is."

"Uh, okay, sure. Well, put 'Casey' into drive and we'll get started."

Anna exhaled through clenched teeth, her uneasiness creeping back into her posture. Elsa let her sister gather up whatever necessary mental preparations she needed, her body phasing through a series of flickering emotions before putting the car in drive with a quick, premeditated motion.

"All right, now let go of the br—"

"I know how to drive," Anna asserted, easing her foot off the pedal as the car began cruising down the pavement.

"Fuck, okay." Elsa held her hands out defensively. "Just trying to help."

"Right? Left? Right—left—straight—help!"

"Right! You know this!"

"I'm sorry, I'm—I'm just a bit freaked out," Anna choked, halting the car at the bottom of the driveway.

"That's why I'm here. Just take this right and I'll tell you how to get there."

Fortunate for the girls, even if their house was sheltered in a more scenic part of the town, where trees thickly obstructed most artificial constructions, their view of the road was fairly clear, sabotaging any chance of a car blindsiding the pair.

"Hold my hand," Anna said, her eyes darting between either sides of the road, the neighbor's Christmas lights reflecting off of the windshield, nearly taunting the tension of the situation with their joyful messages of peace.

"What?"

"Hold my hand, please. " Anna's hand fell onto the central console, like a limp, dead animal.

Obeying her sister's orders without so much as a question, Elsa gripped Anna's fingers between her own. And unlike an animal that had ceased to live, Anna's hand became animated, accepting Elsa's with a tight squeeze. "Are you—are you sure you can drive with only one hand?" Elsa's voice shuddered with her, Anna's warmth pouring through her body like a fresh cup of coffee.

"I don't know. Just don't let go."

Elsa kept her hand intertwined with her sister's, her bones close to bruising with the amount of pressure Anna was clutching Elsa's hand with. It was amazing to her how something so painful could feel so good. "I won't."

"Next left. It's that—the empty sign. That's it," Elsa breathed. And it was in part relief, as she had survived the past fifteen minutes in a car with Anna as the driver, and had escaped death, and, even more importantly, witnessing the humiliation of Anna, who had carried herself with a nervous
flavor the entire car ride—nervous, yet oddly proud, as though Elsa's presence had injected her with a confidence she hadn't found before.

"Okay, let me just—this car—this car has to move. Move. Move. Move. Please."

"Car can't hear you."

"Okay, he's leaving. Oh my God, there's a little dog in the backseat," Anna squeaked. She's happy while driving. It's a fucking Christmas miracle.

Anna jerked the steering wheel left, taking Elsa's hand with her. Elsa relaxed her muscles and tendons as well as she could to prevent herself from disrupting Anna's driving with an involuntarily spasm, her body leaning towards Anna as the car veered to the left, clearing the road and drifting into the empty destination.

"Oh God, oh God we made it! Oh God, we're alive."

"Horray! Now—park somewhere!"

"Really? Because, you know, I thought I'd just drive around aimlessly for twenty minutes."

"Are you serious? No, park, please," Elsa pleaded. She would never vocally admit how tense she felt in the passenger seat, claiming a residual fear inside of her that brought anxiety when she wasn't the one in control of the car—the opposite side of the spectrum, in Anna's case.

"I was kidding, I'm sorry. Oh, here's—is this good?"

"It's an empty lot, you tell me."

"Okay, f—uh, dumb—smartass." Anna pulled into one of the spaces, barely marked by white lines that had faded from years of neglect, nearly invisible in the sheet of ice and snow that swept the asphalt.

She parked the car with a fluidity absent in the rest of her driving, as if she had anticipated this moment the entire drive. The relief that played out on her face, red and equipped with a nose that still dripped from the cold, confirmed her anticipation, sighing in relief and flailing back into the driver's seat. "I did it. I didn't die. We didn't die."

"You did. I'm—I'm pretty proud of you." Elsa's fingers fidgeted with Anna's, hesitant to remove them from her sister's, even if they had grown sweaty in her hold.

"Thanks." It was a simple response, but the glow of her entire being baited Elsa back into the lovesickness she was so used to. "Wow, we're alone. Completely alone," Anna noted, peeking out the windows of the car.

We're alone. Those two words echoed through Elsa's head and ignited a rare courage inside of her. She lunged herself at Anna, kissing her, the younger girl welcoming her and curling her hand around Elsa's shoulder, pulling her down just enough to provoke Elsa further. The courage inside of her grew, evolving the kiss into a heavy session, their lips clumsily engaging each other as if it was their first time making out—and, as far as Elsa was concerned, it was, her upper body faltering above Anna's, so concerned with not toppling down on her sister and pushing the gear into drive that she didn't have time to process the myriad of emotions assaulting her.

Jesus Christ. This is too good to be true.
Elsa's ecstasy was severed by the gasping under her that had switched from sharp breaths to sniffs and broken groans. Fearing the worst, she tore herself from her sister, eyes adjusting to the sight of Anna even redder than before—crying.

*Christ!* "Oh shit, Anna—" Elsa coiled back into the passenger side. *What the fuck did you do to her?*

"Oh, God, I'm so sorry." Anna buried her head into her hands, the sounds of her sniffling escaping through her fingers. "It's not you. Please, please don't think it's you."

"Are you okay?" Elsa asked, snapping her hand away from Anna's and punching the volume button, cutting the music off. Her heart set off like a greyhound, threatening to seize up inside of her.

"I'm so sorry." Anna took her hands off her face, clasping them on her lap.

"I'm—oh, Jesus, Anna, I didn't—"

"It's not you. I don't know why I'm crying," she wailed, wiping a tear off her cheek. "I just am."

"Is it—is it happy crying?" Elsa asked, a spark of hope flickering inside her.

"I don't know."

Elsa peeked her tongue out, analyzing all the answers she could give at this moment to thoughtfully fill the void. "We don't have to do this.

"Elsa, I want to, I swear to God," Anna said hotly. "I swear, I swear. Oh God, I swear. I just don't know what's going on, you know?" she asked through sobs. "Please don't leave. Please don't—don't think it's you. It's me. I think it's just me."

"I'm sorry," Elsa said anyway, close to crying herself. An uncomfortable silence, just the perfect addition to follow the awkwardness that just played out. *I feel like such an idiot.* Elsa filled the silence by staring down at the fresh charcoal carpeting of the car, the silence punctuated by the occasional sniff from Anna's side.

"Is that why you wanted to bring me to an empty lot?"

Her voice wasn't shaking anymore. Elsa looked up at Anna to confirm that she had stopped crying. She did, and her lips even upturned into something close enough to a grin. "Totally."

"Look, I don't know what my emotions are doing half of the time. Don't let that stop you. If I wanted to stop it, I would tell you. I'm just—I'm pretty much a big dumb baby. I cry for no reason a lot."

"It's okay." Elsa bit her lip down. "Me too, honestly."

Anna nodded, rubbing her hands together—either to keep them warm, or in bored fidget, Elsa couldn't quite distinguish. "We could—we could try again. We could try that again. Later, I mean." Her tone was ragged and hushed with suggestiveness.

Immediately, Anna's suggestion boosted Elsa's mood. Elsa's brain was swimming with a cocktail of thoughts and emotions that extinguished any chance of coherency, not expecting such an offer from Anna. "Okay," she said after a nervous giggle. *Well, look at Hugh Hefner over here.*
"You helped me drive, anyway. I can't let go of anyone who can make me do that."

Elsa blew air out her nose in a mini-chortle. "I'm sure I could get you to do a lot more."

*Remember that whole 'thinking before you speak' thing?* Before Anna had a chance to retaliate, the sound of a default ringtone radiating from Elsa's pocket arrested the conversation. "Someone's calling me?" Elsa asked, reaching into her pocket and slipping the freshly activated phone out of her pants. "Okay, I assume I slide this green phone icon thing..."

"Yeah, who is it?"

"I—I don't know. Hello?" Elsa asked, placing the phone up to her ear. The sleek architecture of the phone felt virtually foreign against her face.

"Hey, sweetheart."

_Goddammit! I knew I recognized that number._ "Alice?"

"Just wanted to say 'merry Christmas.' You never responded to my text, so, I just figured I'd give you a little call."

"Alice?" Anna mouthed over to Elsa, visibly taken by awe.

"M—yeah, uh, merry Christmas. I'm sorry."

"Oh, I know you're busy," Alice said, her voice retaining its sweetness. *Her voice is going to give me fucking diabetes.* "But I wanted to hear your voice, too. I kind of miss you, a lot."

*Yeah, this is getting a little creepy. *"Oh, well. Uhm, yeah, hey."

"Where are you?"

"In the car."

"...Alone?"

"No." Elsa looked over at Anna, who stared at Elsa with bewilderment, as if she were trying to decipher their conversation.

"Anna?"

"Yeah."

"Oh." A pause. "How's that going?"

"Okay? Look, I'm kind of busy. I'll be home in a few weeks if you want to hang out then, or something." Elsa shrugged at Anna, who responded with gesticulate confusion.

"Okay. I'll leave you to whatever you're doing. Just remember what I told you, she's not worth the pain. I hope you're doing okay with her there."

_I sure fuckin' am._ "Okay. I'll see you then. Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, babe."

"What the fuck," Elsa said, struggling with the touch screen of the phone until the call ended itself.
"Are you really going to hang out with her?" Anna asked, her tone fused with worry.

"I don't know, God," Elsa groaned. "She's going to forget about it. I'll deal with it it then."

"I didn't know you two were still talking."

"We're not. I don't know where that came from."

Anna nodded, sinking her head into her chest. "We should go back home."

"Yeah." Elsa sighed and shifted her body up to a more proper position, staring out the windshield into the barren American suburban settlements that laid out in front of them, desolated in surreal emptiness that came with holiday closings. "I'll drive if you want."

"I can drive. I have to get used to it, like you said."

Elsa nodded.

"Hey," Anna softly said.

Elsa looked over at Anna, who proposed a warm smile.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm—I'm fine. I just don't want to hear from her." **Hell, I'm almost scared of her.**

"You'll be okay. You have me now."

Anna could bring a smile on Elsa's face even during the Goddamn zombie uprising.

"I do," Elsa said. *I do.* Suddenly, the threat of Alice had toppled over in her mind like a domino, Anna's affection taking dominance.

"Don't worry about her. Worry about other things. Like how you're going to take your sister out for a nice dinner, because she bought you a nice phone."

"You asshole," Elsa teased. "I thought you did it out of the kindness of your heart."

"I did, but I only have so much kindness in there, you know?"

"You're a fucking loser." Elsa was smiling like there was a coat hanger lodged in her mouth, her face turning hot with a blush.

"Yeah, but I'm your loser," Anna smirked.

"This is getting a little gay."

Anna looked at Elsa up and down, studying her for a quick moment before returning her sights to Elsa's face, her smirk growing wider. "Maybe I am a little gay."
"I can't believe you convinced me to hang out with those poor bastards again," Elsa sneered, an amused chuckle hidden in her voice. She tossed a crumpled mess of stray wrapping paper into the kitchen waste bin, surveying the room one last time to assure herself it was clean enough to pass her own finicky inspection.

"What? Jane told me she wanted to see me before she went back to school. And she said she wanted to see you, too."

"Yeah, that's—that's a huge lie." Elsa tidied the coffee table, straightening out its contents and sweeping the cat fur onto the carpet. "I don't think either of them are too fond of me."

"No, they are. She said you were pretty cool."

"Huh, really? That's all they said about me?"

"I mean—sure, they said you were kind of quiet, but—they do want to see you again."

Anna was versed enough in reading Anna's body language to decode her uncertainty, communicated in the way she bit her lower lip and gazed off to the side. "I think they want to see you, but—just assumed we were a package deal, or something," Elsa said, sighing and joining her sister on the couch, settling into the seat adjacent to her.

"Yeah, but—aren't we?"

Elsa paused, swaying her head in a moment of deep thought. "I guess so."

"You like them—right?"

"I don't know. Their relationship sort of scares me. They sure do give each other a lot of shit for two people who claim to be so in love."

"They're not bad people. Jane has a dog. No one who owns a dog is bad people."

Elsa ejected a quick laugh. "Does that make us bad people, then?"

"No, but we should get a dog, just to be sure."

Elsa grinned at Anna's comment, finding a charm in nearly everything she said. "I'll put that on the list of shit you want me to get you."

"Besides, if you didn't like them so much, why did you go through the trouble of making the living room all nice and pretty for them?" Anna nudged Elsa with her elbow, the sharp bend of her limb surging a brief pain into Elsa's arm.

"I like shit to be clean. That's not anything new."

"Pfft, sure. You want them to like you, don't you?" Anna's mouth twisted into an impish smile.

"Hey, shut up, I just like things to look nice."

"Don't tell me to shut up. Maybe that's why people don't like to hang out with you, because you're
Anna leaned her head onto her sister's shoulder, plainly trying to counter her accusation with affection. And, of course, it worked, Elsa reflexively turning red at the contact of her sister's body. "I'm an asshole to you, because you're my sister. You can take it."

"One day you'll be nice. You'll treat me like the royalty you know I am."

*You deserve to be treated like a Goddamn queen.* "We'll see."

A void in the conversation gave Elsa enough time to prod the room further with her gaze, realizing how fast the living room's atmosphere had switched from homely, to a charming, scenic Christmas, so perfectly landscaped that it appeared to be for a local access commercial. The cat had curled in front of the fireplace that flickered a few strong flares before its inevitable extinction, and the overall coziness that blanketed the room had made the slight physical contact between the sisters all the more amorous. Yet, of course, like every other near-perfect moment she had experienced in her life, it had been rudely interrupted, as if fate had rolled trick dice on her.

A knock on the front door—heaving, tenacious, rapid—drowned the solitude in the room.

"Oh, God, they're finally here," Anna cheered, rising from the couch.

"Great." Elsa struggled to hold down a sarcastic response.

"How the hell are ya?" Tarzan howled, wrapping his muscle-trimmed arms around Anna after she opened the door.

"Oh, wow, uh—great, yeah, wow." Anna returned the hug, hardly able to wrap her arms around his large build.

Once the hug ended, Tarzan turned his sights towards Elsa, who rose from her couch in an effort to appear at least semi-polite. "So, uh, hey," she shrugged, reaching over and slapping his arm in an attempt at a masculine greeting. *Yeah, no.*

"Yeah, what's up?"

Elsa looked over at Jane and Anna, who had engaged each other as though they were long-lost friends who had run into each other in a coffee shop, exchanging giggles and brief pleasantries. "Nothing. Uh, Christmas. You know, holiday shit, I guess."

"Yeah," Tarzan sighed, scratching the back of his head, where a tidal of brown hair rested in the most luscious display of a hairstyle Elsa had ever seen on a man. "I know all about holiday shit, trust me."

*It's like talking to a parrot who works out.*

"Hey, babe, she's taking me over to her room to show me some of her works. Just hang out here with Elsa, all right?" Jane crooned, resting her hand on Tarzan's shoulder.

*Crap. "Sure, have fun," he shrugged.*

Anna and Jane huddled into Anna's room, talking to each other about how their former high school teacher had been arrested on some sort of assault charge, ignoring the awkward situation they had placed their suitors in, standing in front of each other in a polite duel to see who could go the longest before succumbing to the comfort of the couch.
"So...uh, cheat in any more video games?" Tarzan said after one of the more uncomfortable moments in Elsa's life.


"Oh right, yeah, I forgot. Blondes don't cheat, right?"

"I never said anything like that."

"At least you play, though. God, it's hard to get Jane into anything I like. She never seems to care." Tarzan went quiet, checking the hallway for any sign of Jane eavesdropping.

Anna would get into fucking piranha fishing if she thought I liked it. "I'm sorry. You—you guys must share something in common, right?"

Tarzan shrugged. "Some things. I still love her, though. God, do I love her, even if she drives me crazy sometimes."

"That's...pretty sweet." At this point, Elsa had lost their unspoken duel, reeling down into the couch.

"It's a nice thing to have. I don't know, I've never been in love before her. It's kind of a weird feeling, like—it's such a human feeling that alienates us."

"Deep shit," Elsa scoffed with a smirk.

"Fuck, I don't know." Tarzan fell down onto the couch, outstretching his arms across the back. "I don't understand love. I'm confused as hell but it's worth it. She's worth it. I'm a huge, dumb idiot, but at least I'm something when I'm with her."

Not used to having people confide such intimate thoughts to her, Elsa offered an elongated shrug, scanning her brain for any coherent way to speak her emotionally charged thoughts on the subject. "Being in love is scary. It's scary as all hell and you're terrified because everyone else seems to have it figured out but you, so when you finally find it—it's like trying to navigate a maze with a burnt-out torch."

"...Yeah, something like that."

"It's nice, though. Jesus, it's nice," she sighed.

"What, are you in love?" Tarzan prodded.

Elsa withdrew her head into her shoulders, hoping her blushing face would be obstructed by her arms.

"Who is it?"

"Why do you want to know? You don't even know anyone I know."

"Just wondering what kind of person you would fall in love with."

"Wait—what's that supposed to mean?" Elsa perked her head, spinning it towards Tarzan.

"Look, I don't mean this in the assholish way, but—I don't know, you just don't seem like the type of person to let someone in so easily, you know? Like, in your heart? Or something?" Even if he spoke stinging words, his sincere inflection and relaxed pose showed no animosity. The fleeting
moments where Elsa was able to get a glimpse of how other people saw her were painful, yet enigmatic, a cathartic necessity if she really were to achieve any sort of self-growth. "Fuck, does that sound retarded?" he added at the end, as if realizing his words rang without a sense of masculinity.

"No, but—" God, she was right, I come off as a huge asshole. "...Yeah, I don't know."

Elsa shrugged again, trying her best to convey her displeasure of suddenly becoming targeted.

"Hey, I mean no offense," Tarzan assured, holding his hands out. "I think it's great. Love is a beautiful thing, dude. Don't let that shit go."

Shit, maybe this guy isn't so bad. "Love is amazing, but terrifying." Her contribution, though short, elicited a nod out of Tarzan, who stretched his head back and breathed loudly towards the ceiling.

"—no, no. He's majoring in political science now, last I heard, and at least he's in college now, where he won't be forever reminded of the Caesar salad incident."

Jane's voice traveled from the hallway, growing louder as she entered the living room with Anna beside her.

"Well, hello, you two. Did you bond at all in our absence?" Jane asked, turning her focus from Anna.

"Yeah, a little. This chick's deep." Tarzan gestured his thumb towards Elsa.

Elsa sunk into the chair in heavy embarrassment. "I'm not deep, I'm just—you know, not...deep."

"Nah, she is. Hey, Anna, you know she's in love?"

Anna's face flushed a shade of red that rivaled her hair, her top row of teeth curling over her bottom lip. "Well—yeah, I...I know." She stared at Elsa with a smile almost mockingly sweet.

Oh, God, I don't want to be here.

Elsa's heartbeat audibly thumped against her eardrums.

"Sounds like we've all found love in this room, huh? Hell, maybe you'll find love pretty soon, Anna."

Elsa's embarrassment switched to keen interest so fast it practically made her nauseous. She studied Anna closely, shamelessly investing the future status of her emotions into Anna's reaction.

"Yeah, maybe," Anna shrugged, clearly uncomfortable.

Maybe? That's her response? Knives jammed into her stomach, her lips had curled down and her face grimaced. A conversation took place between the trio, but Elsa had tuned it to white noise, digesting Anna's bitter response with reluctant processing that pained every organ in her body.

What am I to her?

It shouldn't hurt this much, but it did, captivating her focus and tuning out the world around her.

"Elsa?"

Anna's loud call snapped Elsa out of her dread. A few minutes had passed since Elsa zoned out, the other three inhabitants of the room all staring at her as if they were expecting her to say something.
"What?" she asked, her eyes frantically switching between everyone.

"Jesus, space out much?" Tarzan teased. "We're going out."

"Out?" Elsa asked, incapable of multi-word responses.

"Yeah. Anna's gonna take us all out for a drive in her new car. We're going to drop by somewhere. Probably the zoo."

Wait, she's driving? "Zoo? Is that even open?"

"Why not? There's an elephant there who I swear I know. It's weird, dude, it feels like there's a bond between us, like we were friends in a past life or some shit."

"How much pot did you even smoke before we left?" Jane asked in a huff.

"I didn't smoke anything! Why do you always accuse me of being high?"

"Wait, wait, Anna's driving?" Elsa repeated, staring at Anna with transparent disbelief.

Anna shrugged. "Yeah."

Elsa's stomach still hurt, and now the realities she had known distorted. Anna hated driving, that was a given fact, and she would never volunteer herself as the designated chauffeur—unless pressured.

If Elsa were dreaming, she better wake up soon.

"Dude, let's go, I'm fucking starving," Tarzan groaned from the back seat.

"Hey—give her a moment, all right?" Elsa demanded. Even if she did hurt, she would always jump at the opportunity to defend her sister.

"Starving? Are you going to eat these poor animals?" Jane's tone carried judgment that even made Elsa wince.

"No, there are restaurants there, and—"

"Guys, please."

Anna's anxiety manifested in its physical form, her eyes uncertain and her hands hesitant to engage any of the parts of the car necessary to drive.

"You got this, okay?" Elsa assured, not letting her own emotions overpower her duties as a big sister.

Anna nodded, turning the car on and completing the task with a relieved sigh. She didn't speak much after, and neither did Elsa, although the two in the back grew into a chatty pair, ignoring the two girls in the front who remained silent.

The drive wasn't long—growing up in the suburbs, most services and offerings of entertainment were within a twenty-minute drive, at the longest. Elsa had driven around the town aimlessly several times during the spells she spent at home after her parents passing, needing to escape the
house to the one safe haven she had left, and this had given her a mental map of the town and the surrounding area that made navigation for her as easy as navigating her own home. Transferring this knowledge was difficult, as Anna's anxiety with driving had made it hard for her to process directions longer for a few minutes. She appeared calm, but Elsa saw the faint apprehension that her eyes couldn't shield behind ocean-kissed irises, and with the winter season bringing earlier sunsets, the fresh nightfall in the state didn't do anything to appease her fear, relying on street lamps and headlights to distinguish the road.

But she did it, and she even parked the car into the empty parking lot with little guidance from her older sister, falling back into the seat in success and exhaustion.

Elsa congratulated the younger girl with a half-smile, still pushing down the pain that hadn't shown any sign of subsiding.

"Awesome," Tarzan said, opening his door and stumbling out. "Hey, it's pretty empty here, we won't have any crowds."

"Terry, I think—" Jane's voice faded into obscurity as she exited the vehicle, Elsa and Anna following suit.

"That wasn't so bad," Anna sighed.

Elsa nodded.

"Ticket booth is closed, gates are closed—babe, I think the zoo is closed." Jane put her arm around her boyfriend's shoulder.

"What? No! Why? It's only, what, five?"

"It's the winter time, darling. It's dark and the animals need to sleep."

"Bull. Shit. There has to be a way in. Stay here, I'll find one, all right?" Tarzan took off towards the enclosure, his long legs and fit build enabling him to run at a rather impressive speed.

"Dammit! God, I'm so sorry about him," Jane sighed with frustration. "I'll go get him before he gets our butts thrown in jail."

Elsa and Anna remained the car, Anna leaning up against passenger side next to Elsa and releasing a strong exhale. "I would not have the energy to keep up with him."

Elsa nodded, again, the anguish inside her saturating, now that she had time to review it. Her doubts and fears about her relationship with Anna had began to consume her life, dreading the almost certain fact that she was more emotionally invested into what they had than Anna was.

"God, honestly, I don't even remember the last time I was at the zoo. Probably some field trip in middle school or something," she shrugged.

Elsa refrained from verbally responding, again, staring out into the dark parking lot.

"We should go sometime. I mean, when it's open. Hey, I bet they have otters," she theorized. Elsa saw her smiling the peripheral of her sights, still stubbornly refusing to look away from the spot her eyes had focused on.

"Fuck, Elsa, what's wrong? What did I do to piss you off this time?" Anna's voice was strung with irritation, regaining Elsa's focus.
"Don't—don't worry about it."

"Was it because I left you alone with Tarzan?"

"No," Elsa sighed.

"...Was it because I said 'maybe' to him?" she asked, quietly, as if she knew the answer. Hearing Anna say it loud virtually made Elsa realize how asinine it was to hold a grudge over it, cringing at her own stubbornness—yet it still hurt, as her heart wasn't as smart as her head. "I guess."

"What was I supposed to say? That I did? That I'm with my own sister?"

"I don't know, just—"

"Elsa, I'm going to say things differently in front of people. I'm going to be careful, because that's what we need to be. I don't—I don't want to use the 'i' word here, but—"

"Do you even love me, though?" Elsa asked in desperation, turning her entire body towards her sister.

"Of course I do, Jesus, Elsa, of course I do."

"No, you know what I mean—"

"Yeah, I know what you mean. There are lots of type of love, all right? And I have a lot of feelings for you that are confusing and weird and they're swimming around in my brain and sometimes it's hard for me to figure them out. But I am figuring them out, and so far nothing has scared me away from this. From you. Does that make you feel any better?"

Elsa shrugged, feeling a small kindle of relief. "I guess." It was a lot to analyze, and like everything that Anna said, it would take Elsa a long time to digest, subjecting her through a series of emotions until she logged it into the large cache of ambiguously sweet things Anna had said to her in the past few years.

"Will this, then?"

Anna kissed Elsa, and this time her lips were chapped and cold, yet they tasted just as sweet as any other time, and Elsa shook just as much as she did every other time. She wondered if she'd ever grow out of the ecstasy Anna's lips brought her.

"Y-yeah," Elsa blushed, hiding her mouth behind her hand once Anna finished the kiss. Goddammit, she's too good for me. It was a lot to analyze, and like everything that Anna said, it would take Elsa a long time to digest, subjecting her through a series of emotions until she logged it into the large cache of ambiguously sweet things Anna had said to her in the past few years.

"Hey, if we're going to do this, you can't keep stuff from me, okay? If you have a problem, tell me. I'm your sister, don't ever be afraid to tell me anything. I can't have you get all paranoid on me."

Mimicking Jane's act of affection, she wrapped her arms around Elsa, pulling her close to her jacket. "I'm not a mind reader, as much as I'd like to be."

She's right. God, it's going to be so hard, but she's right. "Okay, fuck, you're right, I'm sorry. It's just hard," Elsa breathed, accepting her sister's warmth. "I'm just as confused as you are. All I do know, honestly, is that I love you."
Anna kissed Elsa's cheek as a response, and it was enough for Elsa, smiling for once.

"How did they get you to drive?" Elsa asked after a few minutes, idly kicking pebbles on the asphalt.

"They didn't. I just figured as long as you were there, I'd be okay."

"I don't know if that's sweet or not," Elsa teased.

"I think it is," Anna sneered.

"Do you think you'd ever get used to driving without me?"

Anna shrugged, leaning her head on Elsa's shoulder, barely covered by a single layer of a thin, plaid shirt. "I'm sort of hoping I won't have to go many places without you."

*Shit, that's sweet.*

Tarzan's loud voice echoed from the entrance to the empty parking lot, the sisters detaching from each other as the shadow of the large man and his girlfriend trailing behind him emerged on the horizon.

"Yeah, they were closed," Tarzan huffed, rushing up to the girls.

"He tried to climb the fence. The Goddamn fence, this man."

"They were keeping the animals inside, I couldn't see anything."

"God, I love you, and I don't even know why sometimes," Jane sighed.

"Because your life would be boring as hell without me."

"I can't deny the truth, I guess." Although panting with exhaustion, Jane still managed a smile.

"Hey, we're going to IHOP, all right? On me," Tarzan grinned, slipping behind the girls and putting his arms around both of their necks. "I could use some fucking pancakes."
Sweet Troubled Soul

Elsa stretched in the living room, releasing a night's sleep of tension on her muscles with a yawn that concluded with a quiet squeak. It wasn't *early* in the morning, as she had rarely awoken before lunch time, but the morning aromas of coffee, Gerda's berry shampoo, and wet cat food, concocted into a disturbing scent that lingered in the air, reminiscing of the morning that Elsa had slept through. She fell down onto the couch, reaching for the remote as the cushion bounced in waves from the impact.

*Shit, I might as well catch up on all of the Law & Order clogging the DVR.*

The instant the TV turned on and the sound of the local news anchor poured into the house, Gerda called out from the master bedroom down the hall, somehow loud enough to dominate over the TV volume.

"Elsa? Is that you?"

*Crap.* "Yeah, I'm up," she responded, attempting to distill the grogginess in her tone.

"Can you go..." Gerda's voice faded out, drowned out by the news report about a fire that broke out in a nearby town.

"What?" Elsa sighed, turning the volume down.

"Could you get the paper?"

Elsa groaned and threw her body forward. As Gerda was so "kind" enough to overlook her grades, Elsa had unofficially become on call for all of her bidding, even if the requests were usually small and petty, disguised as normal domestic chores that had coincidentally increased in numbers the past week or so.

*It's almost eleven. How the hell did they not get the paper earlier? Do they even deliver on holidays?* Suppressing resistance, Elsa headed towards the door with a posture that bore protest, even if no one was around to witness it. Slipping into her shoes, she opened the front door, a cold gust shrilling through the door frame and buffeting Elsa in the face, who shook it off with an apathetic demeanor.

Snow. A lot of it. It piled on every surface that the heavens could have aimed it on, evolving from a powdered dusting from the day prior to a cotton blanket of cold that lay virtually untouched by the foot of man. After a moment of staring at the snow with primitive awe, a slight pressure brushed up against the side of Elsa's jeans. She looked down at her legs—nothing. A dark blur in the peripheral of her vision, contrasted against porcelain snowfall, caught her attention.

*Fuck! The cat!*

Elsa, abandoning rational thought, left the house and slammed the door behind her, rushing towards Madam Purrs who predictably evaded Elsa, stalking over to the neighbor's yard. The cat weaved her way through the bushes, trotting across the snow for a few seconds before pausing in the middle of the lawn to scratch the side of her head, apparently oblivious to how the darkness of her fur outlined her in the white of the snow.

"Oh God, no, no, no." Elsa relieved some of the weight off of her footsteps, but the cat was wise to her presence, prowling further across the snow which had reached up to her torso, clumps of snow
clinging to her fur.

"How the hell can an indoor cat not mind the snow?" Elsa cursed, ambling across their yard and stepping over the bushes that created a makeshift border of their property.

Madam Purrs had chosen sanctuary under the neighbor's car, where the snow hadn't piled above more than a few centimeters. Her head poked out from below the vehicle, as if she were taunting Elsa from her newly settled home, staring at Elsa with interest as she crossed the neighbor's yard, treading through the snow with heavy footsteps—for someone who had claimed ice powers, she certainly had trouble navigating through the snow.

*This cat hates me. I fucking know it.*

"Else!"

Elsa threw her sights towards the front of the neighbor's house, where her middle-aged neighbor stood, pulling a sad looking Christmas tree out from the house.

Wrapped in layers of dull colored jackets and sweaters, his shining face poked up from a maroon scarf that nearly covered his mouth. "Else! What's going on?" he asked, almost shouting, letting go of the tree and pulling his scarf down, revealing parched lips almost invisible in the redness that flushed his entire face.

*No one's called me 'Else' since high school.* "Hey, Mr. Thatch. I'm sorry, the cat—she got out, and she's under your car," Elsa huffed, wiping snow off of her jeans.

"Oh, no problem at all! Do you want me to move it?"

"What? No, it's okay. *You'll run her over!* "I think I can get her, but—"

"You know, I haven't talked to you or your sister in years—has it been years? Yes, at least two. Your aunt and your uncle have done a great job with the house, I must say."

"Y-yeah, sure. I guess."

"Oh, wait, wait, wait. Hang on there a moment. I think we get your mail sometimes.

You know, that new mailman, he's great, but he can't read addresses very well apparently. I don't understand why the post office would hire someone my age to read such tiny addresses. But he works hard, and—well, I hope my wife doesn't take a liking to him, you know what I mean?" Mr. Thatch laughed.

"...Yeah." Elsa glanced back over at the car, where the cat had stagnated, licking her paws and bathing herself care-free.

"Oh, uh, the cat, yeah. I'll go—I'll go get the mail, just, uh, just don't touch too much, I wouldn't want that little feline getting too banged up."

Elsa watched as the rail-thin man twirled around and headed back into his house, the tree blocking the door from fully closing. She walked slowly towards the car, her body bent over and hands curled towards her torso. The cat responded to her advancement by lowering her head, positioning her body in a composure that threatened take-off at any moment.

"Come on, don't run away, please. Anna would fucking lose it if you ran way," Elsa pleaded through gripped teeth, feet away from the car.
The cat jolted out from the car, attempting to race past Elsa, who had prepared for such movement, snapping down and plucking Madam Purrs up in a solid, fluid motion. She held the evasive feline close to her body, feeling quite impressed with herself that she had out-reflexed a cat, one of nature's stealthiest critters.

"You little shit, don't ever do that again," she sighed, the cat purring and bearing no resistance, as if she had prematurely accepted defeat. She scratched behind the cat's ears, never immune to the calming effect a furry animal gave when nestled in her arms. *God, she's so soft. I can see why Anna loves this furry bastard so much.*

"Oh! You got her! Good—cats are very agile creatures, docile yet cunning. I don't have the agility or the patience to keep up with a cat, like I did in my youth and—am I rambling?" Mr. Thatch mused from the doorway, holding a small pile of mail in his gloves. "Anyway, I got your mail. A few pieces, what I can find." Mr. Thatch headed towards Elsa, who made small efforts to meander back towards her house.

"Oh, thanks," Elsa said, grabbing the mail in her free hand from Mr. Thatch, who smelled of pine needles and old books.

"Yeah, no problem!" Mr. Thatch said, giving Madam Purrs a quick scratch on the top of her head. "Tell your uncle he's welcome to come over any time and discuss the politics of neo-Assyria again. That man has quite a few ideas."

"...Yeah, definitely. Uh, thanks for the mail, and—yeah, the mail," Elsa said, offering a feigned smile.

"No problem, really, no problem at all. Oh, and happy new year. Well, almost new year. I'll see you around," Mr. Thatch said, holding up his hand in a wave as he headed back towards his front door.

"Thanks, you—" Madam Purrs attempted to jump out of Elsa's arm mid-sentence, prompting her to fumble over and almost drop the mail. "Goddamnit, fine, I'll take you back inside."

Elsa went back to the house, struggling to carry both the cat and the mail in her hands while simultaneously opening the front door. After a few moments of wrestling with the doorknob and keeping the cat secured in her hold, she succeeded, greeted by the presence of Anna, who rose from Elsa's former spot on the couch.

"Elsa! You're—oh, Purrs! Did she get out? How did she—"

"She ran out when I went out to get the pap—*fuck*, I forgot to get the paper."

"Oh my God, is she okay?" Anna said, hurrying over towards her sister. Elsa swapped the cat over to Anna, who hugged the cat tight in her arms, burying her face into the snow-caked animal like a mother reuniting with a child. "Ahh, chilly kitty!"

"She's fine, but I ran into Mr. Thatch and apparently they've been hoarding our mail or something."

"Really?" Anna asked, lifting her head up and bouncing the cat up and down softly.

Madam Purrs rubbed her head against the exposed skin of Anna's neck—if Elsa didn't know any better, she'd say the cat was purposely teasing her.

"Yeah, you know, they probably stalk us and are looking through our mail because they're so in love with us and jealous of our totally lavish lifestyle." Elsa flipped through the multicolored
offering of mail—junk, card from aunt Oda, junk—a letter to Anna. "Oh, hey, something for you," she said, holding the thin letter out towards her sister.

Anna bent down and let the cat go, taking the letter from Elsa. "Wait, really? Oh—it's from—Aren Arts."


"Yeah, but it's a great school. God, I'd do anything to go there," Anna said, ripping the letter open and skimming over its contents. "Holy s—it's a recruitment letter. From seven months ago." Her calmness had quickly imploded into excitement, reading the letter with fervor, her brow arching up gradually as she processed each word. "One of their representatives saw my art in one of our high school's art shows and—wow, how the hell could I have missed this?"

"Wait, you—you wanna go to Aren Arts?" Elsa asked, a feeling of uneasiness introducing itself into her abdomen.

"Nah, it's fine. I mean, Delle has a decent arts program. I just wish I would have known about this earlier," she emphasized, dropping her hands down to her side.

"If you found this letter earlier, do you think you would have gone there instead?" Elsa asked, bracing for an answer that could potentially hurt her fragile nature.

"I don't know, but I'm glad I went to Delle, honestly," Anna shrugged. "I like being near you all the time."

"Really? Even though I, well, was kind of a—"

"It's gotten a lot better between us, all right?" Anna followed up with a swift kiss on Elsa's cheek, and like butter thrown into a seething pan, Elsa melted at the touch.

"I've put all of that crap behind me."

"Okay, yeah—uh, good." A kiss on the cheek, that was all it ever took from Anna to calm down Elsa, a girl who had grown impervious to most anxiety-coping methods she had coached herself with. *A kiss on the fucking cheek.* And yet, she smiled to herself, as at least Anna's acts of affections were now on the same caliber of gayness that Elsa had acted with for the past two years. Her hardened emotions had turned soft and soluble when in the hands of Anna, who had handled them with almost nothing but care and love for the past week.

"Hey, it's 2014 for like, ten more hours. Wanna do what we do every year and waste the final day by watching mind-numbing crap on TV together?"

"I should probably get the paper first," Elsa said, hoping the redness of her face would hide her blushing.

"All right, I'll be here," Anna said, falling down to the couch.

*This New Year's Eve might actually not suck, for once.*
Gerda, watching her husband use the holiday as an excuse to indulge on more champagne than could be healthy for one human's liver. Anna and Elsa remained surprisingly modest with their alcohol consumption, even between Kai's teases to Elsa to "not get her sister too drunk" and trying to push a third glass onto the younger niece, claiming it was New Year's, and to "live a Goddamn little."

Gerda and Kai's presence had, as planned, hindered any sort of unsisterly initiations between Anna and Elsa, who sat on either side of the couch to downplay any possible suspicion, watching news anchors clamor about how wonderful 2014 was and how surely 2015 was going to surpass the year, according to their journalistic expertise. The occasional glance wasn't enough to satisfy Elsa, who had spent the final two hours of the year repressing urges to jump her sister, even cuddle her, to welcome the new year with the one thing—or person—she loved the most in her arms, as a mostly shitty year had become but an old, discarded calendar.

Gerda and Kai had went to bed, after almost half an hour of Gerda nudging her passed out husband's monuments gut and demanding he head to bed before he rang in the new year "like every other year." Anna and Elsa sat in front of the TV, humming silently with post-celebrations and end of the year sale commercials. Elsa had expected the awkwardness that followed, yet had no plans on coming up with any sort of conversation starter or move that could segue the situation into where she wanted it to be, concluding the night with a round of snuggling each other to sleep—or more, if the time had called for it.

"2014 was great," Anna said after a long silence, her eyes still glued to the flat-screen television.

"It kind of sucked, for the most part."

"For the most part?"

"I mean—" Fuck, now's your chance. "—you were a nice touch. I mean, this. Us—you know." Elsa gestured between the two, swearing silently under her breath at her submerging social incompetence. "Shit.

"Any year I get to spend with my sister is a good year," Anna responded, traveling down the couch towards her sister. Success.

"Then this year should be a fucking party." Elsa welcomed her sister with an arm around her neck, pulling her already warm body into hers. So far, the year had yet to disappoint.

"Were you expecting something?" Anna said after a few moments worth of silence, her tone suggesting something more than superficial.

"What?"

"Gerda and Kai being there the entire time—kind of ruined it, didn't it?"

"Well—it's not like—I guess, I wish they weren't there."

"So no New Year's kiss for us, I guess." Anna burrowed closer into her sister, nuzzling the fabric of her shirt.

"I guess, yeah."

"Wow, you're terrible at this," Anna laughed.

"What?"
"Let me try again. Gerda and Kai are gone. It's New Year's day. We haven't kissed—yet."

"Oh. Oh. " Elsa's head ducked between her shoulders, happily cursing herself for her obliviousness.

"You're so cute, though. Really. It's gross." Anna giggled, and even if it were a mocking laugh, it drew a smile out of her sister.

"Shut up." Elsa lifted her head up, meeting her sister's lips with hers, finally achieving their first kiss of the new year. It was familiar and exciting, naturally evolving to the make-out session that Anna had promised her a few days prior, and it was well worth the wait, Anna responding with as much initiation and excitement as the older blonde. It was scary, exciting, happy—all of these emotions had crawled up to Elsa's heart and claimed their own chamber, speeding up her heartbeat and pulsing a familiar feeling through her that ignited in her lower body.

And it seemed to have slipped through Elsa's mouth and entered Anna's like a contagious inflection, as the younger sister was wriggling on the couch, her hands occasionally passing through between her clenched thighs, as Elsa had picked up in the brief moments she opened her eyes.

"What's wrong?" Elsa asked, severing the kiss.

"Huh?"

"You're, like, wiggling," Elsa noted, displaying fraudulent ignorance, despite knowing very well what Anna was doing.

"Oh, I don't know. I was getting really into it, and—"

"You're turned on, aren't you?" Elsa breathed. Her own arousal had cut the synapses in her brain that censored her, like a drug blocking her receptors.

She expected protest, but Anna had paused long enough before an answer to validate her question. "I don't—I don't know."

"Well then, go ahead." Jesus Christ, tone it down a little.

"Go ahead—what?" Anna asked, crossing her legs tight.

"You want to touch yourself, right? So—do it." Elsa couldn't believe the words falling out of her panting mouth, yet she couldn't think straight in the haze that flooded her mind, her desire to see Anna please herself in any form overriding any common sense in the doomed democracy that was her brain.

"Are you—you're serious? " Anna asked. Elsa saw in the limited light offered by the TV that Anna's expression showed as much intrigue as it did disgust.

"It'd be hot. You don't—you don't have to," Elsa affirmed, worrying she was coming off as too pressuring. "I'd love to watch it, I just—if you want to—I wouldn't mind. At all."

Anna paused and then parroted an earlier response. "I don't know."

Elsa wanted to plead her sister, but knew better. "Okay. You don't have to. I'm sorry—I didn't mean to make it awkward."

"It's not." Anna bit her lip down, her eyes gaining the intensity she did when she was deep in
thought. "I don't know. I could. I don't—you want to see it?"

"Yes," Elsa panted in reply like a sweltering dog. "Oh, God, yes."

"It's not weird, right?" Anna asked.

"No. I've done it before with other girls. It's not weird, it's—it's amazing. And who better to try it with than someone you're really comfortable with?"

Anna became the physical manifestation of nervousness, but nodded her head.

"Okay."

_Jesus. Christ._ Elsa physically couldn't respond, all of the conscious effort she had being invested in watching Anna as she unbuttoned her jeans and pulled the zipper down—a zipper had never sounded so sweet to Elsa, jolting an even more intense wave of heat between her legs. Anna stopped. She looked up at Elsa, who was staring at her as if she had presented her with the most mouth-watering dish of steak ever made in humankind.

"Okay, I—okay," Anna breathed.

Her hand slipped under her jeans, the low light too obscure to completely present what was happening underneath the denim, but Anna's body, suddenly stiffening, was sufficient enough for Elsa. It was surreal. It was not a sight she had even imagined coming to life in front of her, though she had imagined it several times in her head, during the lonelier nights. Anna's eyes were shut lightly, her head fluttering back as her hand moved in a strange rhythm beneath her jeans. It went on for minutes, punctuated by sharp breaths from Anna and the augmenting breathing from Elsa. Her body rolled in a slow beat, nearly driving Elsa to join her sister in the self-pleasure.

Elsa slithered a hand over Anna's thigh, who didn't protest in the slightest at her sister's touch. Gradually, her hand traveled like an animal in stealth to Anna's hand, following its motions as it contoured over the back of her sister's jean-sheathed hand.

Anna didn't protest.

Elsa's hand stayed where it was for a good minute before Anna slipped her hand out from her jeans, depositing them at her side, leaving Elsa's hand where hers formerly played.

Elsa looked at Anna, so captivated by shock and lust that she wasn't sure how to continue—or if to continue. But Anna looked at Elsa expectantly, her mouth hung open just slightly enough for her breaths to appear wanting.

Elsa, not one to disappoint her former, fantasy-ridden self, glided her hand under her sister's layers of clothes with a hint of a struggle between the thickness of her jeans, greeted by an offering of soft hair and an even more vivid warmth. Her entire body shuddered, never having felt this level of titillation in her young life, her finger slipping through flesh to a small, swelled bulb coated with wet, lathering her fingers.

Anna jerked her body in response, Elsa almost losing her place. "Okay, stop. Stop, stop stop," she commanded through clenched teeth.

"Stop? I—oh, God," Elsa withdrew her hands so fast, she scratched herself on the zipper of Anna's jeans. "I'm so sorry, oh, Jesus. Was it my nails? I'm so sorry, I try to—" Elsa looked up at Anna, who looked virtually panicked. "It wasn't my nails, was it?"
"I'm so sorry, shit, shit," Anna heaved, zipping her jeans up. "God."

"Goddammit, oh, Goddammit, fuck." Elsa curled her fingers into her palm, unsure of where to put them—she almost wanted to hide them, feeling as though they were an accessory to whatever crime she had just committed against Anna. Her heart went from racing with excitement to seizing with guilt and a pang of frustration she would never confess to.

"I'm so—I'm so sorry. I just, I can't. I can't, not yet."

"You can't—what?" Elsa asked, already knowing the answer.

"You—you know what I mean. I'm not there yet."

"You looked like you were pretty fucking close to me." Seriously? Elsa bit her lip down to punish herself.

"You know what I mean! With this, I'm not there yet with this, " Anna affirmed, her panic receding into shame.

"Of course not. Christ, I'm sorry. It was my fault, I pushed it too far, again." Elsa held her head in her hands, her self-hatred flourishing at the thought that she had just unintentionally violated her sister.

"No, it's not, it's me. It's my stupid emotions getting to me, because I'm, well I'm still getting used to this. Hell, I just got used to the idea of—being with you, let alone kissing you."

"Wait, used to me? Am I like—am I beer? Something you have to get used to and acquire a taste for?" Face it, you're certainly as bitter as beer.

"No, I already acquired a taste for you. I'm just—I'm not used to this. A girl. You. My sister. Everything. I want it, but, you know, I have to just sort of dip my toes into the waters first, I guess."

"Jesus, yeah," Elsa sighed, leaning back into the couch and loudly breathing out her mouth. "You're right. I'm sorry, I just, I've never had a girl tell me to stop before. I need to learn my boundaries, I guess."

"Don't blame yourself. We're still learning." Anna leaned onto Elsa's shoulder again, and like always, it calmed her down substantially, the guilt evaporating into tranquility.

"I'm still sorry."

"...You don't have to do this. You don't have to put up with this, you know."

"F*ck, I'd put up with anything for you. I'd put up with anything to be with you. Don't ever think for a second that will change."

"...But you shouldn't have to."

"You've yet to do anything to make me think twice," Elsa shrugged.

"I'm so frustrating, I know." Anna nuzzled her nose into Elsa's arm. Elsa glanced up at the TV, where a couple in New York City were still celebrating the new year with public displays of affection in a confetti-blanketed Times Square.

"You're worth all of it."
"God, that's cute. I love you."

Goddamn, she's got you smiling like an idiot now. Elsa handled Anna's declaration of love with as much delicacy as her panicked mind would let her. "I love you, too. A fucking lot." Informal and crass, it slipped through grinning lips with a grace that managed to prevail over her organic awkwardness. "Even if I am a dumbass."

Anna kissed Elsa for a brief moment, Elsa's mouth awkwardly parted and unprepared for the affectionate act. "You're my dumbass, though."

Elsa reacted the same way to Anna's kiss as if it were still the first time, clumsily stuttering over syllables and turning an unconcealed shade of red. "Uh, p—probably a, a uh, a good thing they didn't hear us, anyway."

"Oh crap, do you think they heard something?" Anna asked, turning her head towards the hallway. "Naw, I don't think they did. If they did, I'd be in the back of a fucking police cruiser right now."

"Is it even illegal?" Anna asked, snapping her attention to Elsa once she confirmed the coast was clear of any unwanted spies.

Elsa had avoided the topic of what it was—incest—with her sister the entire duration of their affair so far, stepping around the topic as if it were a starved predatory animal waiting to attack. "I don't know, I didn't research the laws on—"

"Yeah."

"They'd find a way to get me arrested over it," Elsa predicted, tossing her braid out of her face where it had assaulted both her and Anna.

"They'd find a way to push all the blame on you."

"Yeah." Elsa had no will to deny the truth—they would find a reason to kick her out in a heartbeat.

"Then I'd spend the rest of my life pining over my prison girlfriend," Anna teased.

Fuckingsgirlfriendholyshtidshesaythat. "Yeah." Elsa pathetically bit down a grin too advanced for her to battle, deranging her face—yet she almost didn't care. She was Anna's girlfriend, after all.

"Oh, happy new year, by the way," Anna snorted, poking Elsa in the stomach.

"Jesus, we really find a way to fuck up the holidays, don't we?" Elsa laughed, swatting her sister's hand away.

"We do. Man, can't wait for Valentine's day. I'm sure that's going to go just swimmingly."

"I think it'll be a good year," Elsa sighed, watching the TV, although her real focus was on the girl in the periphery of her vision.

"It's going to be a great year, I hope."

Elsa nodded, trying to let her faint trace of optimism beat out the pessimism and insecurities that usually held the majority of her thoughts. "It will be."
"Got all your clothes?" Kai asked, standing in front of the girls with a proud yet exhausted composition, his face beaded with sweat.

"Yes," Anna replied, sharply and obedient.

"Have your, uh, your—computer?"

"Yes."

"Supplies? Towels? Um, uh—winter jackets?"

"Yes, yes, and yes." Anna's smile hadn't faded, but her tone started to ripen with annoyance, the younger girl swaying subtly with her hands clasped behind her back as if she were reciting manners she learned in a nineteenth century courtesy manual.

Gerda wiggled her way into the conversation, patting Kai on the back before he ambled over to the living room chair, settling onto it with a relieved groan. She leaned closer to Anna, speaking in a hushed voice. "Did you pack your—well, femini—"

"Yes! Oh my God, mo—uh, aunt Gerda." Anna glanced over at Elsa, her cheeks hot with embarrassment.

Did she almost say "mom?"

"Okay, okay, I'm just making sure. I don't want to receive any calls about how you for—"

"I'm an adult, I can take care of myself," Anna reminded with a huff. "I'm going to be fine. And—and, I mean, plus, if I did forget anything, I can just steal stuff from Elsa."

Gerda hugged Anna, who flinched in the embrace. "I'm sorry, sweetheart, I'm still getting used to you not being around the house. It's just so strange to see you all grown up and independent."

You didn't even fucking raise her. She's not your baby. Elsa twirled her braid idly, glancing behind her at the front door where she had been patiently waiting to exit through for the past fifteen minutes as her uncle and aunt groomed and preened her sister, as though she were about to head off for an arctic expedition into the unknown. Anna was as transparently agitated as Elsa—if not more —apologizing to Elsa with subtle shrugs and annoyed exhales as Gerda re-lectured her in dorm safety and what not to eat at the dining hall.

"I know, I've already survived like, three months," Anna said, her posture starting to reflect her restlessness. "If she can do it," Anna added, gesturing towards her sister, "then I can."

"Fuck you," Elsa mouthed over to Anna, a wide smile anything but absent on her face.

"All right, all right. But if I don't consistently remind you about how unsafe dorms are, you could end up like that young lady down on Duratus Roa—"

"I am not going to be jumping out of any balconies any time soon. I promise you. Really."

"Yeah, I'm—I'm gonna head out," Elsa announced, throwing a thumb towards the front door.

She twirled around in a beat, making no effort to gauge a response from Gerda or Kai. Perhaps in
the past few hours they could have miraculously conjured up familial love towards her, but she knew better than to hope the final glance they gave her was anything evolved from their normal forced simper, as if their smiles had been painfully sewn onto their faces by a blind surgeon.

It was cold outside. Elsa could feel it on her skin, yet unlike any other unpleasant sensation that made most people grimace, it tickled her flesh like a pleasant air. She wore long-sleeved shirts to at least create the illusion of having some sort of awareness to the nippy weather, but her wardrobe achieved very little beyond aesthetics.

Elsa glanced down at her fingers, where her ice powers had remained consistently behaved in the past few weeks. Anna's love was all it took, apparently, for her former out-of-control "flaw" to diminish into a controllable feature. She wouldn't ever dare question it, but she couldn't help but occasionally wonder if it was going to last—but even the rare bad feelings that surfaced in the former weeks couldn't even ignite a tiny snowflake. It was refreshing to look out upon a landscape furnished by snow caused by nature, rather than her own incompetence.

With an ambiguous sigh, she walked over to her car, heaving her backpack into the passenger seat with a huff. A lighter load than the haul she had to bring over in September, yet she always dreaded carrying her insufferably worn suitcase anywhere, one-wheeled and tearing at the corners. It sat in the trunk, with bed sheets swaddling around it, as if to protect its failing structure, an old blanket tucked below. Her car was messy—she had neglected her winter break goal to deep-clean her car, cursing herself under her breath as various receipts and food wrappers littered the interior. She kept her general living space clean, yet her car was the receptacle for her hidden messy side that even she had trouble confessing to.

With the distinguishable sound of the front door opening, a wind of muffled television noises wafting out, Elsa watched as Anna left the house with a backpack slung over one of her shoulders. Her car, new and boasting a bright blue color, contrasted against the sun-faded paint of Elsa's car, waiting for Anna to enter its cold-kissed chambers and fulfill its duty of meaningless human transport. Anna froze at the sight, as if she had completely forgotten about being brought back to Delle.

"Shit."

"Seriously, you don't—I'll drive you, it's not a big deal." Elsa trotted over to the bottom of the steps on the walkway, where Anna stood on the highest platform, her eyes glazed over with worry, staring at the enemy breaching the horizon.

Anna shook her head slightly after a moment. "No. I gotta get over this. I'm getting better, I mean—it's only five hours. That's not super long, I think." Her stare hadn't moved from its fixated hold.

"You don't really even need a car. You're a freshman, it's a closed campus. I—"

"I know, I know, I remember from the last time you told me all this." Anna's stiff composure broke, whining at Elsa with fallen shoulders. "You're also the one who told me driving's not so bad. And I've gotten over it, I mean, some of it. I just—you know, I have a few more bumps to get over. Uh, literally, I guess."

"If—if it gets too hard for you, we can just turn around."

"No, no, no—we're not turning around." Anna descended the steps down to the front walkway, gripping onto the strap of her backpack. "I'm not a coward. I'm not a—I'm not scared. I'm pretty strong, at least I'd like to think. I can survive uncle Kai and aunt Gerda's boring rambles about absolutely nothing. That means something, right?"
Anna turned to Elsa,shrugging,her half-smile suggesting her words carried more optimism than her mind did.

"Uh—yeah, definitely. You've done fine so far. And, hell, I'll be in front of you the entire time, so you literally just have to follow me."

"Exactly, I mean, you're practically driving me. Except—well, you're not. I'm driving myself, but—"

"You're going to do great, because you're great." Elsa bit down her lip, glancing down at the gravel below her. *Yeah, one day you'll be able to look her in the eye after you say something nice.*

"Aww," Anna crooned. "Look at you, being all sweet on your sister."

Elsa mulled a few words around before settling on the perfect retort. "Sh—shut up." She hid a thriving grin behind her hand.

"Hey, it's cute. And you should stop hiding your face like that, too. I like seeing your face." Anna paused. "Is—is that weird?" Genuine worry laced Anna's voice.

"What? No," Elsa said, lifting her head up towards her sister. *Weird?* "It's—that's what's supposed to..." Elsa's chest tightened, alarming her that it wasn't the place to discuss any other topic but getting their sorry selves back to college. "We should probably go."

"Yeah, it's ten o'clock. We can get there at four if we haul ass right now. So get your butt in that car and drive before my random spurt of courage ends." Anna walked over towards her car, nudging Elsa on the way.

Elsa wasn't used to taking any orders from Anna, much less witnessing her handing them out. "Yeah, fine. But we're stopping to get some food on the way, all right?"

Elsa huffed, following behind Anna.

"You say that like it's a punishment." Anna idled next to the driver side of her car, propping herself against the door.

"Yeah, but as the leader, I'm choosing." Elsa called out, grabbing the door handle of her own car.

"Whatever, creep." Anna smirked. "As long as it's edible. So, uh, not that place down in Moors."

Elsa nodded, going quiet for a few seconds. "Hey." She discarded the tease in her voice, the grin falling off her face.

"...Yeah?"

"If you get like—I don't know, overwhelmed, or something," Elsa shrugged. "You can just call me. I have my phone, the one you got me."

"Wait, *call* you? While driving? Pfft, I'm not breaking the law. I'm not calling you while I'm driving, that's not even safe."

"No, I—" Elsa hitched her breath. Her heart broke every time her sentiment met with resistance. "I'm just trying to be ni—"

"No, you're right, I'll just pull over and call you if something happens. Really, it does mean a lot, I'm just—well, I'm still nervous, and—"
"So you turn into a fucking safety PSA when you're nervous, huh?" Elsa attempted a smile. "I'm sort of expecting you to burst into a school auditorium at any moment now, lamely rapping about the importance of looking both ways before crossing the street."

"Fine, you want me to call you? I'll call you every ten minutes, how's that? I'll make sure you get an earful of whatever 'crap' I'm listening to on the radio." Anna opened the door to her car, playfully scowling at her sister. "I'll even tell you about all the pretty trees we're passing by, in explicit detail."

Elsa laughed. "Yeah, you'd never do that."

"No crap, I like to pay attention to road. My goal is to not die today."

Elsa snorted. "Well, that's a noble goal to have."

"Hell yeah it is. So—please, let's go. I'm getting really cold out here."

*Right, right, other people don't like the cold.* Elsa nodded, lightly slapping the exterior of her car. "Don't fuck up on me today, all right?"

---

*Shit, she's doing pretty well.*

Elsa occasionally glanced into her rear-view mirror to confirm that Anna had kept up behind her, which she had done so proficiently in the past few hours as they trekked across the various roads of the state, both busy and deserted, windy and straight.

Anna would even periodically wave from her car, and although the windshield had significantly obstructed her face and any expression she may have held, Elsa swore she looked fairly content driving, even on her own.

Elsa lounged in the driver side with only one hand on her steering wheel—something she normally couldn't do without being verbally reprimanded by her sister—listening to whatever melodramatic song was playing on her favorite radio station as it faded into static. They just passed the shady-looking abandoned drive-through about twenty minutes ago, one of Elsa's official trademarks she used during the drive to gauge how much travel was left until they reached Delle. The multi-laned freeway had deteriorated two-laned road that spanned through the forests of America, void of any settlements or buildings, instead dotted with power lines that spanned adjacent to the roads like man-made waves of thick thread. Although a stray car would sometimes drive past them from the opposite side of the road, it was virtually only Anna and Elsa at this point, nearing their destination as the sun made its own journey across the sky.

Elsa held a hand out from her car window, extending her middle finger out to Anna for no real reason other to mess with her younger sister. Although Anna had kept so far loyal to her promise of not calling Elsa while on the road, they began communicating with hand gestures once they reached the open road, trying to distract themselves from the calming monotony the sprawling asphalt offered, which could put even the most hyperactive driver to sleep. Anna sarcastically responded to Elsa's gesture with a thumbs up. Driving with Anna behind her was almost as fun as actually driving with Anna next to her, Elsa had began to realize, laughing at Anna's gesticulate reply.

Elsa's phone began to ring, "Creep" by Radiohead radiating from her pocket (as Anna had jokingly adopted the pet name "creep" for Elsa). Elsa almost slammed on the brakes as she stumbled for her
phone, answering it with a quick swipe of her thumb.

"Hey, fucker," Elsa smirked into the phone.

"Pull over!" Anna was in hysterics, her voice choked with panic.

Elsa's heart dropped into her stomach, swerving to the side of the road so fast she nearly veered off into the evergreen foliage. "What the hell? What happened?"

Anna responded, but unintelligibly, sobbing into the receiver of her phone.

"Crap, just—just hold on, okay? I'll be there in a second." Elsa shoved the phone back into her pants, exiting her car without even caring to remove the keys from the ignition.

Anna's car parked about twenty yards behind Elsa's, teetering on the shoulder of the road. Elsa ran towards Anna's car, her breath already escaping her as it had been years since she's ran with such devotion, banging on the window of Anna's car when she arrived. Opening the driver side door, she pulled Anna out, hugging her as tightly as she could as Anna sobbed into her shoulder.

"Holy shit, what happened?" Elsa asked, her heart racing into a blur. "Your car looks fine—did you—are you okay?"

Again, Anna responded incoherently, muffling hysterics into Elsa's shirt with her arms stiff against her body.

Instead of telling Anna to calm down as she normally would have, Elsa instead decided to let Anna recollect herself on her own, holding her as tight as she could as her cries dwindled down to small sniffs. After a few moments of comforting her sister, Elsa pulled away, her sister's face red and swollen, a sight Elsa would never be able to witness without her heart settling into dread. "What happened?" she asked, trying to mask the own panic she was feeling.

"S—something—a deer. It jumped out, and I—"

"Did you hit it?"

"No." Anna shook her head, wiping a tear away from her eye.

"...You didn't hit it?"

"No."

"It's okay? You're—you're okay?"

Anna nodded.

"So...a deer—it jumped out, and you didn't hit it—"

"I almost did!"

Elsa nodded after a breath-filled moment, knowing it was best to hold off from undermining her sister's emotions. She would never attempt to make Anna feel as though her feelings were invalid, as she herself was already used to that sort of emotional abuse from Kai and Gerda—it was a sting that one could never fully heal from. "I'm sorry. That's awful."

"It—I mean, as far as I know—it could have been the same deer that kil—"
"If it is," Elsa said, intentionally cutting her sister off. "Then it failed. It failed to take you. You stopped, instead of swerving, like they did. You did the right thing." She kissed Anna on the top of her head, lips almost snagging on soft strands of auburn, pulling the younger girl into a less-panicked hug. "I'm proud of you. You showed that deer who's boss."

Anna stayed quiet for a moment, finally returning the embrace. "I overreacted, didn't I?"

"No." Elsa removed herself from the hug, leaning up against Anna's car and staring into the thick forest across the street. Somewhere in there, a deer was gloating to its wildlife friends about how it terrorized a poor, innocent girl. "Once I—" Elsa sighed. "I hit a raccoon once."

"You hit it?"

"With my car."

"I mean—yeah, I got that, but—"

"I couldn't stop. There were cars behind me and I would have caused a Goddamn pile up if I stopped. So I hit it. I fucking ran over it, the poor bastard."

"You killed it."

"I think so."

Anna curled her lip under her teeth. "That sucks."

"It was years ago, like—I think I was still in high school. But I remember crying, a lot. It could have been a mom, a dad, or whatever. It probably had kids, a family. Something."

"Cars are evil," Anna hissed. Her face had nearly returned to its normal, rose-tinted shade, freckles popping out against her lighter skin tone. "Humans are evil."

"Yeah. Poor animals, having to deal with our shit all the time." Elsa held her head up towards the sky, releasing an ample breath. She wasn't sure why she felt as though she felt the need to share that brief anecdote with Anna, but it seemed to succeed in calming her down at least some. "Are you feeling any better?" She looked towards Anna, who had joined her in leaning against the vehicle.

"A little. I'm just—I guess I'm freaked out. I'm always afraid of unexpected crap like that happening."

"Like I said, you handled it like a pro. A fucking badass. You're showing the road who's boss," Elsa smirked. "You're doing fine."

"I guess." Anna's tone lost its panicked edges. "Fuck that deer, though."

"Do you think you're ready to go?" Elsa asked.

"No, I—I wanna just take a few more minutes. Just a few."

Elsa glanced over Anna's body, enrobed in a light jacket certainly not adequate enough to shield her from the harsh cold. "Aren't you cold?"

Anna shrugged, leaning her head onto Elsa's shoulder. "I guess the cold doesn't really bother me that much anymore."
Sleeping Sickness

Elsa huffed, lugging her old suitcase into her room, her last bits of energy surging through her muscles before stumbling back through the doorway. "Ugh," she grunted, wiping beads of perspiration off her temple with the sleeve of her shirt, smearing a trail of sweat across her forehead. She had officially passed the point of caring about sanitation, her priorities dropping one by one as her sanity did, fatigued and ready for a few hours of vegetative bliss.

Elsa would still do anything to spend time with her younger sister, even if that meant carrying the contents of Anna's car up five flights of stairs—is this really time to have a broken elevator?—just for the occasional glimpse of Anna in her dorm room, resetting her jungle of a room for the next semester. She had began to curse her unconditional love for her sister, as it had manifested this time with a pulled back muscle and sore legs, unrelenting and consistently painful, as her love for her sister had been in its current prime.

Entering the living room in a strut of pure exhaustion, she fell back onto the couch, dozing off for what could have been minutes or hours. It wasn't until Nani's voice shook her awake that she realized she had done so, her back crooning with pain, legs curled over the arm of the couch like an arched bridge.

"What?" she groaned, scrambling her body to a position somewhat close to sitting.

"Oh, so you're not dead," Nani said from the kitchen, sorting food in the pantry.

"No, I'm—ugh."

"Ugh? Am I supposed to guess what you were trying to say? Because, you know, I really hate guessing games."

"I just moved in my sister, again, after driving five hours across the fucking state."

"Sleep? You looked like you had suddenly lost consciousness while performing some kind of freak circus act. I didn't even know bodies could bend that way."

"My bed's covered in shit right now, so I passed out on the couch," Elsa shrugged.

Although, she realized, it would have been substantially more comfortable than the position she had ultimately succumbed to.

"You must have had a pretty exciting winter break if you could pass out like that."

Nani leaned up against the kitchen counter, resting her arms on the surface.

"It was—yeah, it was pretty exciting." Elsa straightened herself out, hiding her face behind her hand as it flushed red.

"Yeah?" Nani smirked, staring at Elsa.

"Yeah, just—something happened, that I've been waiting a long time for, and—well, I don't—how did yours go?" As badly as Elsa wanted to gush about the endeavors she experienced in the month of December, she knew she had to be as equally cautious; there was no chance of anyone
understanding and sympathizing with her situation, let alone someone who had their own younger
sister.

"It was okay. Hung out with my boyfriend, visited my little sister—hung out with aliens. You
know, normal stuff."

"Aliens? The—"

"I was joking. Maybe your sense of humor will come back as you wake up more."

Nani winked at Elsa— what the hell?— heading towards her room. "Oh, oh, right, I almost forgot,
your girlfriend dropped by." Nani paused, twirling herself around.

Elsa's level of alertness jolted a few tiers higher. Jesus, how does she know? "Wait, she—when?"
Elsa hoisted her back off the couch cushion, steadying herself with her hands.

"Yesterday, I think. God, I don't remember. I barely remember what I ate for dinner last night."

"Yesterday? She came here?"

"Yeah, like I said. She was just looking for you, but I told her that you had turned into a werewolf
and were busy prowling the streets for victims."

"Hold on, wait—who exactly was this?" Elsa asked.

"Alice? Is that her name? I don't know, I met her, like, twice." Nani leaned up against the wall,
displaying more investment in the conversation.

"Oh. Oh, God, no. She's not my girlfriend." Although relieved, Alice's apparent curiousness on
behalf of Elsa had introduced a different anxiety. "We were never—well, that."

"Seriously?" Nani asked, her face reflecting genuine disbelief. "You don't have to
hide it. The walls are—well, they're kind of thin here. You two certainly did—"

"Argh," Elsa grumbled, scrolling fingers down her head in frustration and a twinge of
embarrassment. "No, we were never like that. I promise you. What the hell did she want, anyway?"

"I don't know, I think I scared her off. She said she'd try to contact you some other way and
scampered off into the shadows, like a cat. It's probably a good thing she's not your girlfriend, I get
some weird vibes from that chick."

"Fuck." Elsa collapsed into the back of the couch, mentally and physically surrendering.

"What? Is she—"

"I have this— crazy suspicion that I know what she wants."

"Hey, if you need someone to fight her off, I have connections."

"I think I'll be fine."

"All right, but my offer still stands. You know where to find me," Nani called out, walking towards
her room.

Once Nani had completely exited, Elsa stumbled her hands around her jeans until she found her
phone. Nothing. No trace of any sort of contact from Alice, at least not in any technological form.

It was good enough to pull a sigh of relief out of Elsa and subdue a slice of her worries—after all, it was not the time to get worked up over irrational paranoia.

Sufficiently content, she slipped back into her exhausted coma, into the dream world that had began to pale in comparison with her own satisfactory yet bizarre reality.

---

God, seriously?

The buzzing of Elsa's phone startled her back into consciousness. She wasn't sure how long she had been asleep for, but the last thing she needed was any sort of human communication after the long day she had trudged through. Groggy and slightly annoyed, she reached for her phone, fallen between the couch cushions, half-paranoid that it was Alice finally deciding to contact her.

In her illiterate, tired state, she answered the phone without making effort to read the name of the caller.

"What?" she groaned, her voice nothing beyond a legible murmur.

"Wow, really? That's how you're greeting me now?"

"Wha—wait, Anna?"

"Uh, yeah. Didn't...you read the phone? Or—"

"No, I was—was kind of expecting someone else."

"Jeez, you sound asleep. I'm sorry I woke you up."

"No, no, no, it's fine. Really." Elsa rose from the couch, wiping her eyes free from traces of her slumber. "I'm sorry."

"For what? You know, it doesn't matter. I just wanted to call—I mean, I was going to text you, but you're crap at responding."

"Yeah? Why? Uh, why are you call—"

"It's kind of weird."

Elsa paused. "Weird?"

"Yeah, it's just—I don't know." Her voice was losing decibels. "You're going to think I'm weird."

"Try me, seriously," Elsa yawned.

"I just..."

"What? I can't hear—you're quiet."

"Yeah, I'm, uh, I'm calling you from the hall of my dorm. Violet's asleep. And I can't sleep, and that's why I wanted to call you."

Elsa was certainly more awake now, walking over to the wall and switching on the dimmest light
to offer at least a hint of life in the room. "...Yeah?"

"I don't know, it's weird. I can't sleep, and I think it's because of you."

"Yeah?" Elsa repeated, her heart experiencing a strange twinge of elation. Because of me?

"I don't like sleeping without you being, like—across the hall, or right there. I'm sorry, it's weird."

"Weird? How is that weird?"

"I don't know, it feels weird. Like I shouldn't feel this way, but I do. But I really can't sleep, at all, and I kind of hate it."

Elsa paused, again, registering everything with a cloud of different emotions consuming her. "I don't get how that's weird." Seriously, you could have said anything but that. "You're my—"

"God, Elsa, I just—"

"No, no, Jesus, I'm sorry." Elsa leaned up against the wall, cupping her free hand over her face in shame. "I guess I can understand how that might be weird. Look, if you want—you can, well, you can come here, and—we haven't done it in years, but—"

"Yeah, can I sleep over?" Anna asked. The way she asked it, rushed and quiet, hinted that she had been hesitating to ask.

"Of course you can, Anna—God, of course you can." Elsa didn't even take a beat to process her sister's request, accepting it was at natural as breathing. "Do you want me to pick you up, or—"

"No, I'll drive. I need to learn how to get to your apartment, anyway. I'm pretty sure I know where it is, but..."

"Are you sure?" Elsa asked, sisterly panic settling in. "It's really not a pr—"

"As long as I don't run into any more rogue deer, I should be fine."

Elsa stayed silent for a moment, unaware of the smile curling her lips. "Okay. I'll see you in a few?"

"Oh, uh, yeah. Just give me a few minutes to pack, but I'll—yeah, I'll be there."

"Okay." Elsa wanted to say those three words, crowding at the back of her throat for release, but somehow she still hesitated to say them—she was still afraid she'd announce them someday without reciprocation. "See you then."

A knock at the front door interrupted Elsa's last-minute cleaning frenzy, tossing the unpacked contents on her bed into her closet in an effort to make her room look at least decently presentable and livable. Knowing very well there was a slim chance her room would look any better without investing at least an hour to unpacking and tidying, she accepted her room's fate and rushed over to the front door, deeply hoping Anna would refrain from making any comments about the rare messy state it was temporarily holding in.

"Hey-y," she whispered to Anna, opening up her front door as silently as she could—although the rusted, creaky hinges rendered her attempt null.
"Hi. Are we—are we whispering?" Anna said, in a normal volume.

"I think Nani's sleeping. Or at least, she's in her room."

"Ooh. Oh." Anna lowered her voice. "Well, that—that kinda sucks."

"Sorry, I should have told you."

"If I had known, I would have just texted you instead of knocking," Anna shrugged.

"It's fine, it's fine. Don't guilt me over it, Jesus." Elsa tried her best at laughing as quietly as possible.

"Shut up. And let me in, it's freezing out here."

Elsa moved away from the door frame, extending her hand out towards the living room with a zealous bow. "This way, your majesty."

"Cut it out, asshole," Anna scoffed, lightly punching her sister's arm as she entered the apartment.

"No, no, I insist you be treated like a princess. Here, let me take your jacket, and your bag, your royal highness," Elsa insisted, closing the door behind Anna and pulling her lightweight jacket off her sister's shoulders, snagging on the younger girl's elbows.

"Seriously, stop. It's annoying," Anna giggled, raising her arms up and dropping her bag next to her.

"Then why are you laughing?" Elsa yanked the jacket off, throwing it over to the couch where it barely landed on a cushion.

"Because it's cute, like you are."

"Hey, shut up." Elsa couldn't resist the hotness flushing on her face.

"Struck a nerve?"

"No—I just—"

"Then why are you blushing?" Anna teased, elbowing her sister.

"Be quiet and go change," Elsa muttered, returning the elbow assault. "I'll be waiting."

Elsa stood outside her bathroom, exponentially more nervous than she expected herself to be, which, by default, was pretty damn nervous. Like most sisters, the girls were no strangers to sharing a bed, yet they had not done so since Anna grew wise to Elsa's affections for her—in fact, they hadn't even done so since puberty, Elsa had painfully recognized. And of course, from her youth, she remembered that Anna was a kicker, a blanket thief, a light snorer, everything that had bugged her about girlfriends past, but she also knew that any qualities she found infuriating in other girls would be endearing when brought out in Anna. She had missed the blanket stealing, the snoring, the kicks on her back when they shared hotel rooms in the rare, fleeting trips they went on with their parents.

Most of all, though, she missed the warmth.
So why was she so *fucking* nervous, she pondered to herself, unaware she had bitten her lip so hard in her anxious toil that she drew a drop of blood, the distinct taste pulling her out of her trance.

Silently enough to not carry over to Nani's room, she rapped on the bathroom door, pressing her ear up against the wood for any sign of a response from Anna.

"Okay, I'm—the *hell??*" Anna opened the door, Elsa losing her balance and stumbling into the wall. "What are you doing? Were you—were you listening to me?"

"No, I was just leaning against the door," Elsa whispered, sharp and agitated. "What would I even be listening to?" Peeling herself off the wall, she stiffened her posture, exerting what was left of her energy into not staring at Anna's barely clothed body, at least not conspicuously. She didn't remember when the envy she held for her sister's body and shifted to lust, but it had done so so forcefully that it quivered her legs *in* conspicuously, Elsa cussing under her breath at her damned inability to control herself.

"I don't know," Anna said, either ignoring Elsa's obvious amorous bouncing, or completely oblivious to it. "Sorry I took so long."

"It's fine. Why couldn't you get changed in my room, though?" *God, just shut up, you thirsty idiot.*

"I don't want you to see me naked."

"...Seriously?" Elsa asked, dreading Anna's answer. She knew better than to badger Anna further, but she couldn't suppress the disappointment that followed.

"Not yet? I don't know, just, not like this, I guess. Let's not talk about that."

"Okay, but—I—yeah, fine."

Silence. *God, she's right. This is weird.*

"So—want me to sleep on the couch?" Even knowing the answer, Elsa was naturally cautious she was interpreting the situation in the wrong manner.

"What?" Anna asked, in her normal speaking voice.

"Sssh."

"Crap, okay, sorry. What? Why would I want that?"

"You want to—do you want to sleep in the same—"

"I mean, yeah, that was the plan."

"Oh, all right—good." *No, not good, don't say that, you're just making it more awkward.*

"God, I'm making this weird, aren't I?"

"No, you're not. It's not," she lied, congruently.

"I'm such a freaking idiot. I don't know how to make anything, uh—not weird."

"It's *not* weird," Elsa emphasized. "But let's just go to bed before we wake Nani up.

And besides, if you keep standing here insisting that it *is* weird, then it will get weird."
"You're right, you're right."

Elsa twirled around and headed into her room, raising her hand above her head and gesturing for her sister to follow. She entered the bed from the furthest side, as naturally and gracefully as she could to hide the undeniable fact that her heart was hammering in her chest, warning her that it was ready to give up at any moment—but she wasn't.

"I can't see," Anna said in the darkness.

"Just follow my voice."

"Oh, there it is," Anna announced, discovering the bed and crawling in the side opposite of Elsa.

It was weird. It was weirder than Elsa anticipated. The fantasies she conceived in her head at least consisted of them snuggling, nuzzling—gay as fuck, she acknowledged, but comfy, blissful, warm, good enough to lull her into a sleep much better than any sort of sleep she's experienced before in her short life. Instead, they lay there like planks, or at least she did; the darkness left her only to imagine that Anna was as stiff and wide awake as she was.

"Does—is it helping?" Elsa asked, her abdomen nearly swollen with a feeling of anxious discomfort.

"...Huh?"

"Do you think you'll be able to sleep now?"

"Oh, uh, yeah. I think so."

Why is this weird? Why is it so Goddamn uncomfortable? We're sisters, for fuck's sake. "Good."

"I hope..." Anna trailed off into silence.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"No, tell me. Just tell me." Elsa wasn't sure what she was hoping Anna to say.

"I hope you're not expecting something to happen." Elsa could practically hear Anna cringing at her own statement.

Elsa could interpret that in several different ways, some cheerier than the other—but she knew what Anna meant. "No," she admitted, after a painful silence.

"I didn't mean it like that, like you are, but—just, not yet, okay?"

Jesus Christ. "I know."

"God, I'm sorry, that sounded so mean. I didn't mean for it to sound mean, but...yeah. It'll happen someday, I think. If you want it to, but—"

"Just, just stop, okay?" Elsa interrupted. It hurt, she didn't know why it hurt, but it hurt. It didn't hurt that she didn't want it yet, it hurt that Anna had to actively tell her she didn't want it yet, as if she expected Elsa to bug her about it, or be persistent.

Doesn't she fucking know me? "I don't care. It's fine." She curled her lip into her mouth, stale blood
staining her tongue. She knew being mean in response to her sister's concern was the worst possible way to react. "I just want to be here with you," she said into the blackness of her room. "Don't ever think for a second I'd want something from you that you don't want to give," she added, in hopes of mending her outburst. Although she wasn't feeling extraordinary sentimental, with the sharp pain that decided to settle in her chest, she would never let her own petty issues get in the way of making Anna feel loved.

"Okay. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sound mean. I shouldn't have said that."

Unsure of how to respond, Elsa lay there silent and still, only the sound of her breathing signaling that she was still living.

"I love you."

Elsa began to suspect that Anna began using those words as gauze to heal the emotional wounds she would inflict on her sister's fragile ego, but she always felt the sincerity in that statement, even in the most troubling times. Anna didn't even wait a beat for Elsa to return her vocal declaration, she snuggled up to Elsa's side, wrapping heated arms around Elsa's, pressing balmy lips against the skin pulling across her neck before nuzzling her nose into her shoulder. "I think I'll sleep a lot better like this."

And even in darkness, Elsa felt Anna's beauty.
"Do you always snort yourself awake?" Anna asked, stretching her arms out above her head.

In the youth of the sunrise, Elsa had woken up quite unpleasantly, as if something—or someone had applied sudden pressure to her chest, knocking the air out of her.

"Jesus—what?" Anna? Elsa's mind rewound the events of the day before until she mentally confirmed the reason as to why her sister was lying half-naked on her next to her, her body cringing in reflex as soon as she remembered the ripe awkwardness the night before presented. She momentarily passed it off as being a dream, yet the vividness of her emotions and the fact that Anna was physically there holy crap had left that notion null faster than she conceived it. "I don't think so," Elsa groaned.

"God, did I stop breathing or something?" Elsa crossed her arms across her chest, capturing her strayed breaths and folding her knees.

"Sorry. I gave you a little push, because you looked like you died or something."

"That seems to be a pretty popular misconception lately."

"Well, maybe you should work on looking less dead when you're sleeping."

"Maybe you shouldn't shove people while they're asleep."

"I got bored," Anna shrugged, pausing to yawn. "I've been awake for, like, twenty minutes, and you showed no signs of waking up." She paused. "Or life, for that matter."

"Yeah, well." Elsa sighed, rubbing her eyes and stifling a smirk. Awkwardness withstanding, there were worse ways to wake up.

"...Well what?"

"Hm?"

"Uh, nothing, I don't know."

"Idiot," Elsa teased, consonants lost as her mouth hung in a laugh.

"Oh, shut up. I'm still tired and my brain's catching up." Anna pushed Elsa's shoulder, curling her fingers around it and grasping her just long enough to switch the act from playful to affectionate.

"Yeah, sure." Elsa leaned her head onto Anna's hand, not even caring about the giant smile on her face that countered her taunts.

"How did you sleep last night, anyway?" Anna asked, removing her hand before tucking a strand of Elsa's hair behind her ear. "I mean, assuming that I didn't accidentally wake you up several times during the night with my snoring, or whatever."

Even if Elsa preferred more serene, silent mornings, she'd never find Anna's unwillingness to stall in quiet anything but endearing. She postponed her response, contemplating telling Anna about how she had woken up hours prior, unable to sleep for some time as she awed at the sight of the beautiful human passed out next to her, bathed in moonlight, how she had never found such satisfaction sleeping next to a girl without any prior sexual engagement, and how even the tension
of the night before couldn't tame the lovesick excitement that fueled her rapid heartbeats. And in her pondering state, it seemed that she had taken too long to respond, as Anna's expression had quietly changed to bewilderment.

"Not—not good?" Anna said, incorrectly reading Elsa's troubled face.

"No, I slept—I slept very well. Yeah, I—yeah. *You can spare her the gay details.*

"Oh, good." Anna recovered her normal lively disposition. "Me too."

"Yeah." Elsa ran hands through the developing rat's nest that was her hair, completely undoing her braid, blonde hair flowing down to her back in its newly-acquired freedom.

"Do you want me to braid your hair for you?" Anna asked, tracing Elsa's head with her gaze.

"Why don't you start by rebraiding your own hair?" Elsa swirled her finger around in front of Anna's face, pointing at her free-falling hair.

"What—you don't like it down?"

"Uh—no, I do. It's fine, I didn't mean it like that. I'd like you if shaved your head completely bald."

"That's a bit much," Anna laughed, dipping her head down in judgment. "But hey, I could do that. I could get a mohawk, or something cool. Would you still lov—"

The conversation was interrupted by a polite, yet firm knock on the front door, virtually inaudible as it filed through the walls of Elsa's room. *Why doesn't anyone use the fucking doorbell?*

"What? Wait, who's that?" Anna asked, looking at Elsa expectantly.

"How am I supposed to know?" Elsa mumbled, pulling herself more upright.

"Is it Nani?"

"Why the hell would Nani knock on the door of her own apartment?"

Anna shrugged.

"I'll get it. Just hold on."

Stretching out tense muscles, Elsa headed towards the living room, opening the front door in hopes it was just a package delivery, or something much less menacing than someone actually wanting to speak directly to her.

And, as her life had yet to deal much but disappointment, she was wrong.

"Jesus," Elsa gasped.

Alice stood there, posture upright and proper, as though she had never removed from that stick in her ass Elsa was starting to suspect she was hiding. Swaddled in sky-blue layers of clothes, yet still managing to fashionably present herself, she clutched a *Coach* bag in front of her, cheeks singed with red from the cold she had mercilessly subjected herself with. Her smile—*God*, that smile—was as taunting and condescending as always, her lipstick still bright enough to distinguish itself from her pink face.

"No, it's just me."
"Uh, hey?"

"Hi, can I—can I come in? It's rather cold out. I mean, goodness, it's really cold out."

"Well, the thing about that is," Elsa started, sucking air through her teeth. "I just—I don't really want to let you in."

"...What? Did I—excuse me if I'm reading this wrong, but did I do something to you?"

"Mmm, no, not really," Elsa shrugged, glancing behind her to make sure Anna remained in her room. "It's just—"

"Whose car is that?" Alice asked, nearly demanding. She pointed towards Anna's car, which was parked quite unsuccessfully on the curb.

"How am I supposed to know? Maybe it belongs to the upstairs neighbors." Elsa crossed her arms, leaning up against the frame of the door.

"Why are you being such a—"

"A bitch?" Elsa said, her face remaining neutral.

"Well, if you want to use such a—such a rude word, then—"

"I don't know, Alice. Maybe it's because you fucking show up at my apartment at ungodly hours of the day without so much as taking the liberty of at least, like, texting me or something beforehand? Like—God, it's the 21st century. It's okay to use that little mobile device you carry in your pocket. It's more than just a timepiece, you know."

"You weren't here a few days ago, so I wa—"

"Yeah, you wanted to show up again, I get it. No, I know." Elsa sighed, leaning into Alice closer and lowering her voice. "Why don't you just tell me what you showed up for?"

"Fine. Jeez, I don't know what you're so mad at me about. I didn't do—"

"Aren't you getting cold? Just tell me."

"I just, I want to talk to you about something. I want to—I have to ask you something."

"...Which is?" Elsa prodded after silence.

"Can you just—" A rare spark of frustration rose up in Alice, heaving her chest. "Can you please let me in?"

Elsa looked behind her again. Anna was either still in her room, or a hide and seek champion. "Yeah, fine." Elsa held the door open effortlessly.

"Thank you," Alice huffed, slipping through the small space Elsa offered.

"Yeah."

Alice took a seat on Elsa's couch, as if claiming her apartment as her own. "Do you wanna sit down?"

"No, I'm fine right here," Elsa said, crossing her arms and leaning against the front door. Even with
her eyes set on Alice, her peripheral was prepared to spot any sign of Anna leaving her room and breaching the conversation.

"God, Elsa, what's wrong?"

Elsa shrugged, her arms remaining staunchly crossed. "What?"

"What did I—why are you..." Alice shook her head, agitation surfacing in the subtle muscle tics on her face. "I don't understand—"

"Look, it's just, you're just like every other friend I've ever had," Elsa said, lifting herself away from the door. "You left me at the slightest Goddamn hint that I'm human. I open up to you about who I really am, and you just—"

"I left you?"

"Well, yeah."

"Okay, right. Then tell me, when was the last time you tried to contact me?"

Elsa's words had, once again, nipped her in the butt. She kept the scowl on her fact as genuine as possible, but the corner of her lips twitched. "I didn't think you wanted to talk to me."

"So—okay, I walked out on you. I'll admit to that."

"And why'd you do that?" Elsa asked, noticeably calmer.

"Fine, you got me. I suppose I was upset that you didn't want—well, you didn't want to—"

"...Be your girlfriend."

Alice winced, embarrassing easily. "Yes."

"So you just walked out on me, because you never wanted anything from me but that. That and sex."

"No. I was upset, but I got over it, and now I genuinely, truly just want to be your friend. That's why I've been contacting you lately. Honestly, Elsa, it's almost jarring to me how quick you are to always assume the worse of other people."

"So if you just want to be friends," Elsa began, brushing off Alice's criticism.

"Yes."

"—you'd be okay with the fact that I am currently involved with someone?" Holy shit, keep your mouth shut. Elsa drew in a sharp breath in hopes she could suck her own words back into her throat, dissipating with the rest of the dribble she had filtered somewhere between conception and spoken word.

"Oh—you are?" Alice asked. Elsa heard a nuance of crushed hope in her voice, but even she recognized the possibility that she was searching too hard for it.

"Yes." Good luck following up with that one.

"Wh—you know what, it's fine. It doesn't matter. As long as you've moved on from Anna, that's all that matters, I suppose."
Elsa physically restrained her own self from shushing Alice, her eyes darting to the empty hallway. *I hope to hell these walls aren't as thin as I remember.*

"So you're good with that? You're—you're really okay with just being friends, then?"

Elsa asked, more cautious than hopeful.

"Uh, absolutely, yeah." There it was again, that rare uncertainty in Alice's voice, so foreign and untapped it put Elsa even more on guard.

"Fine." Elsa paused, finally uncrossing her arms. "So what was it you wanted to ask me, then?"

"Oh, right," Alice said, almost jumping out of her seat as if a switch inside of her brain had been turned on. "Well, I'm graduating soon."

"...Yeah."

"Well, I've done in so well in all of my classes, and with the amount of extra effort and time I've put in with some of my classes, one of my professors has recommended me for an internship—one that's actually related to my degree."

"Okay," Elsa said in the brief intermission of Alice's speech.

"So I had to come up with a few references, so I put down my professor, my adviser—and you."

"...Me? Wait, you—me? As a reference?"

"Yes, I—"

"A professional reference?"

"That's what I'm here to talk to you about. I just wanted to make sure you're okay with that, because I've never actually had a job before, and I had virtually no one to put down as a reference."

"I haven't had a lot of jobs, either," Elsa shrugged. "But what I do know is that you're not supposed to put down friends as a reference. Jesus, Alice, you're smart enough to know that."

"Well, why not? You know me better than anyone else at this point, better than any other friend I have."

"It's just—it's not something you do."

"I didn't put you down as a friend, I put you down as—well, I don't remember the exacting phrasing, but as someone I've 'collaborated' with in the past. Perhaps it's a bit of a white lie, but I was drawing a blank."

Depleted of responses, Elsa shook her head.

"I just ask that you—if they were to actually call you, just please put in a good word for me. I need this. It could lead to a job with one of the top researchers in the country. I don't ask for much, just this."

Elsa curled her lips in, appearing deep in a processing state despite already having made her decision moments ago. Even if Alice was one of the more delicate friends she's had, the void in her social life expanded incomparably in the past few years, sucking out motivation and happiness like a black hole of social incompetence. The doe-eyed look Alice had perfected mocked her from the
couch, so superfluous it was nearly manipulative, derisive representation on how Elsa's social life had fallen so much, she was considering throwing out integrity and dignity just so she had someone to call a friend, someone who wasn't related by blood, someone who wouldn't only greet to her or in engage in brief small talk with her out of personable pity.

"All right," Elsa said in conclusion, knitting her brow together.

"Oh, wonderful," Alice sighed in relief, swapping her uptight posture for a relaxed one, throwing her head back on the couch. "Really, just—thank you. I'll help you, too, I promise, if you need any—"

"Why couldn't you have just called me about this, though?" Elsa asked. "Or showed up at any time other than bumfuck o'clock? You know, when most humans are sleeping?"

"You were on the way for an appointment I had, but, I guess—I mean, I suppose I just really wanted to see you."

"Oh." Elsa predicted the answer easily, but felt small satisfaction in hearing it.

"Also, I figured it'd be better to ask you in—"

"Hey, oh—hi, Alice."

Fuck.

Elsa flinched like a startled deer, shooting her sights over to the hallway where Anna was now occupying, fully dressed and carrying the effects of the good night's sleep on her beaming face—which Elsa would have cherished at any other moment in her life, but not this one, with Alice in proximity for the first time in nearly a month.

"Uh, hello," Alice said. Elsa saw in her peripherals that Alice was giving her a look, yet was too panic-stricken to decipher the nature of the look.

"I'm—okay, I'll bother you about it later, sorry, I just—okay, uh, sorry. Just come back into your room when you're done, okay?"

Elsa nodded, Anna following up her request by retreating back into the room.

"Don't make assumptions," Elsa breathed, once she heard the sound of the door closing.

"I thought you—"

"Don't make assumptions."

"I didn't make any assumptions," Alice interjected, scowling. "You're the one who's making assumptions here."

"I—okay, fine."

"Did she stay the night?" Alice asked.

"So you are making—"

"I'm not, I'm simply asking."

"Yes."
Alice nodded slowly, pausing. "Did you tell her?"

Elsa could have lied. She could have feigned ignorance, could have salvaged herself and rid of any trace of suspicion, at least attempted to, easing her mind and Alice's from the tension and heartache the truth would have caused. Instead, she stayed silent, either unable to speak or possibly subconsciously wanting to Alice know, she wasn't quite sure which one—but she did know that the stillness in the air and the slight worry on her face told more than anything she could have vocally said.

"I see," Alice said after the silence. "You know—my appointment starts soon, and—"

"Yeah."

Alice headed towards the door where Elsa stood next to, occupied with a cache of thoughts that fought for dominance inside of her, hoping to whatever higher power that Alice wouldn't press the issue any further, as was her nature.

"You know," Alice said in a soft tone, opening the front door. "I think I'm starting to understand why a lot of your friends leave you." Alice closed the door immediately following, making no effort to witness a response from Elsa.

*What the fuck is that supposed to mean?* Elsa stood still, trying her best to prevent the crudeness of Alice's observation hurt her any more than it needed to, but failed.

Her lips quivered, her eyes hurt, and she cursed herself for the weakness she was about to show in her own home.

"I heard the door close, and I didn't want to—"

Elsa tried hiding her face, but wasn't fast enough, evident by the abrupt ending of Anna's sentence.

"What happened?"

Elsa shook her head, shutting her eyes tight. She couldn't see Anna, but she could hear the hurrying footsteps against carpet, and feel the sudden warmth of Anna's arms around her, knocking her back into the wall.

Anna didn't need a reason for Elsa crying. She didn't need a reason to hold her sister as she lost control of herself, sobbing against the shoulders she had grown so used resting her troubled head on. The cathartic release she felt pressed up against the comfort of her sister surged oxytocin through her brain and eased her howling heart. Anna was a drug to her. *Her* drug.

*I don't need friends.*

Elsa muzzled the remaining sobs that scratched her throat.

*I only need her.*
Modern Art

"Do you have any idea how damaging this is to her?"

One after another, unwanted solicitations of propaganda, text messages from Alice gave Elsa's phone rare life.

"Do you ever even think before you make these type of decisions? You're better than this. You're smarter than this."

Elsa glanced at the buzzing phone rattling around her cup holder. It's not the fucking time, Alice. Green light, she breezed through another intersection without disobeying the law, refraining from snatching her phone and reading whatever manipulative drivel Alice had spilled to her.

"I know you'll never respond. I know you. I know you very well, Elsa. I know you're too selfish to ever see how you hurt other people. I know you think you're always doing the right thing, when in reality you're only making everything worse."

Finally, Elsa reached the parking lot. Finding a space was effortless—the patronage level for art galleries on a Tuesday afternoon was anything but substantial. She parked her car and slipped her phone into jean pocket, glancing at the screen in the process and rolling her eyes at Alice's attempts to sway her, as she had been doing consistently for the past week.

She doesn't know anything about Anna and me. These past three weeks have been the best weeks of my life.

She walked towards the entrance, rushing through rigorous winds, pausing at the front door. Le Porc. The whimsical typeface that immortalized the gallery's name and the accompanying cartoon pig, simplistic yet clever, sitting next to the logo rid any second-guesses that this establishment was anything but an art galley for the less genteel bunch. And even if Elsa's pride was too strong to admit it, she preferred it that way.

"Do I need to pay to get in?" Elsa asked the young woman behind the front counter, where a small array of baked goods glistened in artificial light.

The woman said no.

Last time she set foot in the building, it was packed surely beyond whatever capacity the fire marshal had recommended. Instead, now the patrons consisted of one older, round man, staring at each piece of art as if they would spontaneously animate, and a tired looking college-aged girl scribbling something into a worn notebook that had seen several scribbles before. The absence of stirring social eruption and overpowering music was a welcome adjustment to someone as easily anxious as Elsa.

The walls appeared to be made up of wooden pallets fused together, keeping true to its semi-hipster "rustic" décor, occasionally covered by impressive pieces of art conceived by the students of Delle University. The artworks ranged in sizes, from small to colossal, from abstract, to master studies, to original compositions, and despite the wide variance between the pieces, every individual piece displayed talent virtually beyond a comprehensible level, at least to Elsa. And unmoved from its spot that it nestled in last semester was Anna's painting of Madam Purrs, buffered by an assortment of other paintings Elsa deemed too insignificant to pay any mind to, perched under its own incandescent lamp that lit up the piece as if it were its own window to
whatever world Anna had assumed.

Elsa searched for flaws but came up empty. Even the rays of sun hitting the windowsill were rendered vividly, as if Anna had taken a photo and slapped an oil painting filter over it in a photo editing program. Elsa even entertained the idea that perhaps that was the scenario, but knew Anna's camera skills didn't expand much beyond selfies and less stellar cat photos. It amazed Elsa at how someone so scattered and famously inelegant had a brain so brilliantly tuned to art, either as a result of brain plasticity, acquiring the artistic genes in the family, or both. But she was damn proud of her sister and had no doubts in any crevice of her mind that Anna had a talent that would serve her well for years to come.

After marveling at her sister's work for a few prolonged moments, she started moving to her right, as the larger man was making his rounds around the gallery in a clockwise pattern. Reaching a piece ten feet away from Anna's, she calculated she had about five minutes to stare at it before the man decided he had enough studying every individual strand of cat hair Anna had painted and decided it was time to study the next artwork as if it were candied ham.

Barely two minutes had passed. "Hey, creep."

Elsa smiled before even turning around. If it weren't for the obnoxious Le Porc logo printed on the front of her red shirt, Anna would have appeared casual and inconspicuous in any crowd of college students. Anna was smiling, too. A lot—and Elsa knew it wasn't just her presence that grew that indoctrinating grin on her face.

"Hey, fucker. I thought you sold that piece," Elsa said, gesturing her thumb towards Anna's painting.

"No, not that one. Another one. I had about three pieces up for sale and I sold two."

Anna brushed a piece of string off the edges of the canvas in front of the pair. "That one I have up isn't for sale, though. I like it way too much."

"I would love to look at it more, but that guy over there seems to be easily hypnotized by every damn painting in this place. I think he's looking for something."

"What, him?" Anna asked in a whisper. "I've seen him here before. I think he's on drugs, or something."

"Probably looking for drugs in the paintings. I know you art students like to hide cocaine and shit inside your canvases."

The older man glanced over at the girls, his gaze unassuming.

"Fuck, I think he heard me," Elsa whispered as quietly as possible.

"Whatever," Anna scoffed. "Can I help you with anything?" she asked over to the art enthusiast.

"No, I'm all set for now. But thank you, ma'am." His voice was surprisingly jolly for someone who appeared so hard-nosed. I don't think anyone's ever called her ma'am in her life.

"Well, creepy men beside, it's kind of weird to see my younger sister in a job," Elsa shrugged.

"Yeah. It feels weird to have a job. To like, make money. But I make money doing stuff I like. I get to look at art and talk to people at art, and I get to meet other art students, and even just other people, and—" Anna clinched her lip between her teeth. "I'm rambling again."
"I like it when you ramble, ramble more," Elsa teased. *Seriously, please never stop talking.*

"But, yeah. Just—yeah, money, and people. And not being in my dorm all day. Violet has a boyfriend now and—I don't know. I don't wanna spend time in there anymore. I like her a lot, but I feel like—you know, I just feel like I don't belong?" Anna crossed her arms, as she usually did so when her rambles slipped into rants, and seemed to forget she was on the clock, grimacing and bouncing her leg.

"Yeah, I know. I hated living in dorms. I'll never regret moving off-campus."

"Yeah, exactly." After a moment, as if a switch went off in the depths of her brain and reminded her she was still at work, Anna straightened out her posture and uncrossed her arms. "So, I hate—yeah, I hate living in dorms."

Elsa looked at Anna expectantly, and Anna responded with a look a dog would give its owner if it dangled bacon over its head. "You wanna start sleeping over at my place, like..." Elsa lifted her shoulders up to her ears. "Regularly?" Dropping her shoulders, the joy that lit on Anna's face before she even spoke gave Elsa her answer.

"Yeah, like—I mean, if you don't mind. I'd love to." Anna's attempts at being humble, although fruitless, charmed Elsa.

"You're always welcome at my place, honestly."

"Aww, well how sweet of you," Anna said, close to condescending.

"I hope you like rats."

"Rats?"

"Big ones."

"You have rats?"

"Yeah, and gremlins. And the place leaks a lot, and I'm pretty sure it's haunted, too."

"Oh, you're just—"

"It's a friendly ghost, though. He'll even make breakfast sometimes."

"All right, shut up, I get it. There aren't any rats, or gremlins, or pancake chef ghosts."

"No, but it'd be a nice change of pace from the shit that does go down in there. Like Nani snoring, and—and the fridge that constantly breaks." Elsa was now searching for reasons to complain about her apartment, as if it would make her desire for Anna to sleep over any less desperate.

"I can live with that," Anna shrugged, grooming Elsa's shoulders and picking off stray hairs. "It's better than a dorm room and a freaking mini-fridge."

"Anything's better than a dorm room. Sleeping on cardboard outside during a monsoon is better than sleeping in a dorm room. Sleeping inside a tauntaun in fucking Hoth is better than sleeping in a dorm room."

"Well, good. At least I have options, now."

"So, hey," Elsa started, leaning against one of the more barren sections of the wall.
"It seems like you got a pretty sweet deal here."

"I guess."

"Are the artworks for sale?"

"Uhm, some are. If they have a tag on them, they do."

"Wait, a—a tag?" Elsa scoffed. "Who puts price tags on artwork?"

"We do." Anna took a swift scan of the room. "You know, anything else would be way too fancy for us."

"Well," Elsa said, her voice dropping an octave. "Can I take this artwork home with me?" she asked, browsing Anna's body with her eyes.

But Anna wasn't artwork, she realized. Art was more tangible. Art was easier to understand. But art wasn't as beautiful as Anna, and no where near as complex.

"Yes." Anna's response didn't even carry an ounce of the sultry tone Elsa used.

"How much?"

"One chicken sandwich."

Elsa released a brief laugh. "What ever happened to you being a vegetarian two years ago?" Her fingers traced the divides between the wooden planks on the wall behind her.

"I don't know." Anna was visibly uncomfortable, her smile winding down. "I guess I don't have the willpower I used to."

"All right." Elsa's mood began polarizing south at the sight of her sister tiring of her. "I guess I'll head out."

"I'm sorry, I just—I'm scattered right now. I'm actually on my lunch break and I'm supposed to go back in, in like, ten minutes."

"Oh, shit. Sorry. I'll let you get back to work."

After a moment of hesitation on her face, Anna reached her arms out towards Elsa with pleading eyes, sparkling so perfectly in the fluorescent lights that Elsa was sure it was the universe tempting her. "Hug?"

Elsa hugged Anna, thawing out a much lighter mood. "You don't ever have to ask for one, you know," she mumbled in the embrace.

"You're buzzing."

Elsa pulled away from Anna, feeling vibrations in her jeans batter against her legs. "I am, aren't I?"

"Aren't you gonna answer it?"

"It's a text," Elsa concluded from the briefness of the vibration. "Probably from Alice, again."

"What is up with her? Are you two still friends?" The slight laugh in Anna's voice hid what Elsa assumed was residual jealousy.
"Not at all. She's batshit crazy. She's—" Stop talking before you say something you shouldn't. "There's a lot wrong with her."

Anna paused, teeth loosely gripping the flesh of her lips. "So why is she trying to talk to you?"

Why is she so concerned? Elsa shrugged after a short pause. "Who the fuck knows?"

Seriously? You're going to lie to her, again? Why can't you ever just straight out tell her the Goddamned truth? A short spasm in her chest after she spoke was enough punishment for her; lying now physically hurt Elsa.

"Okay, well, just ignore her, I guess. I don't know, I don't want to be the—you know."

"...I do?"

"The jealous type, all right?" Anna spoke as if the words grated her throat like saws, wincing. "I don't like her. I really don't. There, I said it. I don't like her being in your life, I just—yeah."

Elsa should have held a facade of empathy, but even with lips curling so tight together they could have broken steel, the corners of her mouth coiled just enough to identify as a smile.

"What kind of face is that?" Anna asked, agitated.

Really, you're getting pleasure out of her being jealous? "She's not a threat. She's not a threat to either of us." Elsa considered—briefly—the ramifications of showing overt gay affection to her sister in public, but her desire to chase away the discomfort on Anna's face nullified any consequence she could have conceived. "No one's a threat to you. Seriously, like, no one. You literally never have a reason to be jealous with me, because I can't even think about looking at another girl when I have you."

Elsa succeeded quite phenomenally at her goal of cheering up Anna, who even tilted her head close to her shoulder in admiration, in addition to her fresh smile that flashed her ceramic Chiclets of teeth. "That's cute. And...thanks."

"But uh, I seriously do have to go, because I actually have a class in, like, twenty minutes."

"Twenty? How are you even going to make it?"

"I don't care if I'm late. Mathematical psychology can eat a dick."

Anna chortled. "Fine. But thanks for visiting, really. It means a lot. You, uh—you should visit more often, if you want."

"Of course I want to, and I will. Every week, if I can." All right, leave before you start humping her leg in the middle of an art gallery.

Anna nodded slowly with a self-satisfied grin on her face. "Sweet."

"Yeah, sure, dude. I'm gonna go now." Elsa paused, lifting off the wall. "I, uh, I love you?" Is that a question?

"I love you too?"

Christ, way to make everything awkward.

After exchanging goodbyes, Elsa exited, returning to her car and reflecting on her emotions as she
sat stalled behind her steering wheel. Happiness. It was inside of her, instead of teasing her in unobtainable scenarios she was so used to fantasizing about in her lonesome, it was the energy that fueled the smirk on her face that she couldn't erase.

She didn't check the last text Alice sent her, and she didn't need to, for the sake of her own emotions. For once, she deserved to be happy, even for a short while—whatever inevitable misery fate was going to bestow on her soon could wait.

It wasn't as awkward the second time, lying in bed with her sister, waiting for the release of sleep to hush their cluttered minds for at least a few hours. It was—it was cozier, Elsa thought, with her sister snuggled in the bend of her arm, the girl's nose heating wisps of hair around her arm with warm breaths. Her body had assumed a more natural sleeping position than the last time they slept together, not even worried if the sweatiness of her body would bother Anna, who was tightly secured next to her body and filling in Elsa's curves with her own, so naturally perfect together that the idea of a lover being a "missing puzzle piece" suddenly wasn't so asininely corny to Elsa in these calmer moments.

"Are you still awake?" Anna's groggy moan dampened the skin of Elsa's arm.

"Yeah." Elsa took a while to respond, her brain temporarily convinced the voice of her sister in her bed was definitely a hallucination.

"Good," she mumbled, burying her face into Elsa's bare arm.

"Why good?"

"I don't know. I don't like it when you sleep. I miss you."

God, that's one of the sweetest things she's ever said. With the gift of darkness consuming their room, Elsa didn't have the hide the obnoxious smile ablaze on her face. "I'm awake."

"I missed this. I missed cuddling up with you at night and waiting for you to fall asleep."

Like Elsa, it seemed that Anna's speech filter grew weak as her drowsiness cultivated. "Yeah." Those nights, the nights responsible for Elsa's radical feelings for her sister, were still sacred in conversation. Just the thought of those days made Elsa cringe, at how vulnerable and pathetic she felt during those painful months, even if they led to a happier ending—years later.

"It feels nice to fall asleep next to you for once, you know?"

"Yeah, of course," Elsa sighed, stroking tendrils of hair that wandered off Anna's head. Even if Anna's sentiment was more platonic than romantic, it elated Elsa in ways foreign to her. "It feels amazing."

Another silence filled the area, Elsa beginning to drift away to sleep, before Anna spoke up again in the quiet room. "I almost kissed you once." Her voice was much clearer and alert than before, as if she were fully awake now.

"You—you what?" Elsa asked, now completely conscious and awake, becoming so substantially alert so fast that her head twanged with pain. She sat up against the headboard, Anna shifting away from her arm and hoisting herself up next to the elder sister with a sunken head, as if her confession brought more guilt than relief.

"Yeah." Quieter, as though she realized her outburst. "A while ago."
"Okay, you're, uh, you're gonna tell me everything, because holy shit."

"I don't know, God, I don't know why I said that. It's embarrassing, forget it."

"Are you fucking kidding me? You can't say that and expect me to let it go. Tell me what you mean, please. Or it's going to bug me for the rest of my sorry life.

"Like, years ago, before you went off to college. You were crying because—well, because mom and dad—yeah, and I came into your room and, like...just sort of comforted you. And you turned to me, and you were still crying, but you buried your face in my shoulder and wrapped your arms around me. For a long time. Do you remember that?"

"Uh—"

"Probably not, it was a while ago. But I just wanted to never let go of you because you were sad and I hate seeing you sad and I love you. And eventually you calmed down a bit and I was just sort of sitting there on your bed and holding you, and then you pulled away and your face was all red and puffy, because you were crying for a long time. And I wiped your tears away and told you that your face looked like a red marshmallow and you laughed at me. I think it was the first time I heard you laugh in like, a week. God, this story is so stupid. But it was so cute and I had this weird thought, like, 'what if I kissed her right now?' And it bugged the hell out of me. Who in their right mind ever thinks that about their own sister?

"I wasn't really into girls then and I don't know where it came from. It was very intrusive and kind of violating to think but I kind of wanted to, but I think I was in a lot of denial about it, because every time I thought about it, I kind of wanted to throw up.

And I wanted to convince myself that it was because it's gross to kiss your sister, but—I mean, I think it's because I was disgusted with the fact that I wanted to, and almost did. I almost did, I swear to God, I almost did. But I didn't, because you were vulnerable, and I was disgusted with myself. I haven't thought about it in years, but when you told me how you loved me, that moment was the first thing that came to my mind."

Elsa digested Anna's confession for a long time, and the silence on Anna's end assured her it was okay to take a while to respond—because she needed to, because this changed almost every perception Elsa had of their relationship. "Wow."

And suddenly, a lot of insecurities that she clutched so tightly to her heart had fallen away, like old fruit shaken off a tree branch.

"Yeah, so, uh, there's that."

"I remember that. I just remember what you said. But holy fuck, I had no idea."

"It was a while ago, I mean, like I said. But I always wanted to tell you, and I guess it just came out. I don't know, it felt like the right time."

"Seriously? Right before I was about to fall asleep?" Elsa teased.

"It just slipped out then? God, whatever. I feel a lot better telling you, though."

"So you didn't even think—that you liked me like that—"

"No. Honestly, not really. It was just a fleeting thought that violated the heck out of me, but I never forgot it. But I'm glad I got to do it, because it was kind of fun."
"It's a lot of fun."
Elsa felt a kiss on her lips. It was fun—among a variety of other things.

"Sorry if I'm still shit at this, but I'm trying," Anna said at the parting of the kiss.

"You're doing fine." Elsa touched her forehead to her sister's, sliding her hand above her sister's trembling hand. It became still once Elsa fastened her fingers between hers, like Elsa was the morphine Anna needed in her bloodstream. "Just don't freak out."
hey, this is (awkward) sex, and if you're not cool with that you can skip it without missing much plot.

"Show me it!"

"No. You've already seen it."

"Show me it again. I never got a good look at it. Come on. " A pleading voice paired with an amicable smile on Anna's face—pure kryptonite to Elsa, who hid a smirk by turning her head away from her.

"Why do you wanna see it?" Elsa asked.

"I just still can't get over the fact that you have one."

"Well, you could have looked any other time. You've had a shit-ton of opportunities to look at it, why didn't you ever look?"

Anna shrugged. "I didn't want to be creepy."

"...So..." Elsa turned towards Anna, whose line of sight was so conspicuously pointed towards Elsa's lower torso, it occurred to her that perhaps she was purposely trying to be caught passing a lewd gaze towards her sister. "So asking me to show you it isn't creepy?"

"Just fucking show me already," Anna said with a tease in her voice.

Jesus, she's feisty. A type of arousal—sexual or just a curiosity flickering inside of her—stiffened Elsa's already starch pose on the bed. "Why?" Elsa taunted again, after a brief pause.

Anna threw her head back, a parade of her growing annoyance, followed by a groan. "Fuck."

Anna's swearing had about doubled in the past few weeks, in both severity and quantity, unsurprisingly correlating with the increasing amount of time she had spent with her older sister. Of course, as Elsa had noticed, Anna's language remained less vulgar when spent with her other friends and around more formal company—Elsa was admittedly jealous of Anna's ability to control her cursing around other people, if only she had the cognitive endurance to actively censor herself into eventual habitual politeness.

"What?"

"I can't even tell if you're serious anymore. God, what's so wrong about wanting to see your stupid tattoo, anyway? Why the hell would you even get a tattoo if you didn't want anyone to see it?"

"It was a dumb mistake." Elsa considered her words for a moment, watching Anna writhe in such agony over her desire to see her sister's questionably placed tattoo had released a yearning inside of her like a cat in heat. "I don't even know why I got it there. It seemed, like, inconspicuous, you
know? I only expected people I got, I guess, *intimate* with to see it."

Bait set, and Elsa's anticipation for Anna's reaction made her mouth go dry. Anna responded with a puzzled look. *Just say something.*


"Yeah, like you." *Great save, really.*

"I hate you," Anna pouted. *Okay, try to steer this towards your own favor, idiot.* "Do you *really* wanna see?"

"Are you serious? Of—of course I do. Just show me."

"I mean, it's gonna require me sort of pulling my pants down a bit."

"I know."

*Well, shit.* "All right, but I warned you."

Elsa teased a few inches of her flesh, pulling her jeans down enough to expose a small fraction of the ink on her hips.

"Seriously? I can't even see it."

"What? You can see it just fine."

"I can just see its ears. Are they even ears? What even if that? Some kind of—bear?"

"Yeah, it's a bear."

"Great, then let me see the whole thing."

"I probably can't without taking off my pants." *Jesus, try some subtly for once.*

"I don't care. I just wanna see the stupid thing."

"Fuck, fine." Elsa removed her pants completely, hoping the faux confidence in her movements would mask the sudden rush of self-conscious loathing she felt once her pasty skin beamed in the lighting of her bedroom, as if her ghost were trying to escape her through her legs. Even her panties, patterned with reindeer heads, couldn't cover her sudden shame. *Yeah, you just did that. You took your fucking pants off in front of her for pretty much no reason.*

Anna's reaction was definitely *not* sexy, and Elsa began to wonder why she'd ever anticipate otherwise. Her vision had locked on Elsa's tattoo, the bottom of which was hardly covered by the band of her underwear. *Oh God. Oh, God, I'm an idiot.*

"It looks pretty good for being four years old," Anna said after a purposeful look.

"I guess."

"Does it feel like anything?"

"Didn't you ask me that earlier?"
"Yeah, but you didn't really let me touch it. Is it like, scar tissue? Or what?"

Elsa shrugged. "I guess. Sometimes it gets irritated and you can feel it."

Anna reached over to her sister and rubbed the surface of the tattoo with her thumb, applying enough pressure to press into Elsa's pelvic bone. Any arousal that fled with Elsa's confidence returned, tingling her lower body and making her feel slightly less idiotic for her not-so-vague show of desperation.

"Way to fucking touch it without asking."

"Oh, sorry."

She's still going. She's still touching me. Shouldn't she have stopped by now?

Overwhelmed by her sister's odd resilience to rub the artwork she had formerly cursed until this moment, Elsa moaned. She moaned. Either voluntarily or as the result of her primitive instincts abducting her vocal chords, she moaned, and her pleasure scattered away and brought pure guilt and embarrassment.

Holy fuck.

You're literally the biggest idiot on this planet. Have fun explaining that one, dumbass. Elsa's locked muscles made it hard for her to move her head and digest a reaction from Anna, who remained so quiet, Elsa had to listen for any signs of breathing to assure herself Anna hadn't died from second-hand embarrassment.

"That felt—good?" Anna asked after a moment. The innocence in her voice was so ripe, Elsa was sure it was laced with kittens.

"I—uh, well—you kept touching it, and it's—it's a sensitive area, you know—it's my hip, and—you kept touching it."

"Huh."

Huh?

"Look, it's not my fault. I'm only human, and sometimes I just fo—"

"Shut up."

"What?"

"Shut up."

Anna's fingers traveled over Elsa's thigh, brushing skin on her inner legs.

Oh my God.

The whole scenario played out in slow motion to Elsa, who watched with what she could only assume was the most ridiculously hungry expression ever plastered on her face as Anna's hand trailed over to the front of her panties with so much grace and smoothness in her motions, it seemed as if it were almost premeditated—as though she had anticipated it, or even fantasized about it.

Elsa yearned to open her mouth even further and spit out some sort of stuttered request for
clarification of what the hell Anna was doing, but had been conditioned to know better than to speak during any moment that could end in her favor. Her thoughts belonged where they remained, crammed in the bottom of her throat where only her panting breaths saw escape.

Anna's index finger rubbed the front of Elsa's panties, pushing in enough to tease her clit and the area around it. Normally, Elsa gave heated direction to whatever girl was servicing her, but the sensation of Anna touching her in any manner was so overwhelmingly pleasurable to her that even Anna's inconsistent rhythm and fumbling around felt better than anything she's ever experienced prior, even with her most experienced girlfriend.

Her heavy breaths served as positive reinforcements to Anna, whose rhythm gained consistency and traction until she found a tempo that nearly kept up with Elsa's growing arousal.

"Fuck," Elsa breathed.

Anna stopped the moment Elsa had swore. After so many years, Elsa's cursing had finally cursed her.

Several combinations of phrases and words tumbled around Elsa's head to ease the tension of what just happened, but the eventual winner of the battle inside her head was an insipid "no?"

"No?" Seriously?

"Holy shit," Anna said, withdrawing her hand.

"Not—not good?" *Keep trying, pretty soon you'll move onto complete sentences.*

"I touched you." Anna stared at her hand as if it had just committed murder.

"Well, kind of." Elsa shifted around, trying to calm the fire Anna had ignited inside of her.

"Was that weird?"

" Weird?"

"This is kind of weird, isn't it?" Anna seemed panicked.

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"It's not weird. I liked it." Elsa bit her lip for a beat. "I wish you didn't stop."

"I don't know why I did that." Ouch.

"Uh, well, did you—uh, did you like it?" Elsa winced. Some possible answers to that question had the ability to hurt her considerably.

Anna's jaw slacked for a few seconds before she responded. "I think so."

*Christ, maybe this wasn't such a screw-up. "Really?"

"I mean, I—I don't know. Maybe."

"Maybe?"
"I guess."

Knowing Anna wouldn't reveal further than small murmurs and an embarrassed look on her face, Elsa nodded and accepted the death of the conversation.

"I mean, I kind of—I kind of want to know what it feels like," Anna mumbled, obviously avoiding any incidental eye contact with Elsa.

"I can show you." Elsa's voice had evaporated into breaths.

"Okay."

Okay. And suddenly, five years of experience had flushed out of her brain, tuning to white noise and static. As if her poor heart hadn't suffered enough, it rattled against her rib cage in a rabid effort to calm her shock. What the hell do I do now? "Uh."

"Uh?"

Anna looked at Elsa as if she were expecting something, and Elsa wondered what. A verbal contract? A back massage? It was never like this with other girls, and Elsa almost began wishing she were anywhere else but here, staring at her sister as though she had been given a terminal diagnosis. Almost.

Kiss her. Just fucking kiss her, idiot. Elsa kissed Anna, softly and with enough warning for Anna to anticipate it, the younger girl pulling her sister down to the bed with her. The fortitude of Anna's gesture streamed enough courage through Elsa that her hand felt her way down Anna's stomach, landing on the top of her jeans where a conundrum of metal and denim fastened together awaited solution from her fingers.

Anna kissing Elsa back with a surprising amount of ardency, Elsa moved her mouth down to Anna's neck, treating it with sucks and kisses that wouldn't dare harm her delicate skin. Her fingers unfastened the buttons of Anna's jeans and descended the zipper as she did so, her stomach sweeping with anxiety in prospect of what she was about to do to her sister.

Her hand eased under Anna's panties, fingers accepted hungrily between folds where she recognized the little organ she had teased briefly a few weeks ago.

Straining to retain any scraps of sexual adequacy she had gained over the years, she found a cadence in her movement that elicited a gasp out of her sister.

"You're so fucking hot," she hissed into her neck. Anna didn't respond, but Elsa didn't need her to. The disjointed gasps hitting the top of her head and swiping through her hair were enough to motivate her, trying her best to keep rhythm on Anna as consistent as possible.

After a few moments of heaven, Anna reached under Elsa and pushed on her chest lightly, breaking the older sister's concentration. Elsa reacted by rolling off of her sister, catching her breath and removing her hand from Anna. "What's wrong?"

"I—it got a bit, uh..." Anna let out a few heavier breaths. "I don't know, overwhelming."

Elsa didn't have the energy to question her. "I'm sorry."

"No, don't, it's not—nevermind."

Elsa regained a steadier breathing pattern, rubbing her fingers—lathered in Anna's wetness—
together, amplifying what was already a painful level of arousal. "Tell me."

"It's nothing."

"It's something," Elsa said, propping herself up on one hand. "Did you not want me to do that?"

"I did."

"Then why'd you stop me?"

"Maybe you could, uh...God, I don't want to say it."

"Say what?"

Anna covered her face with her hands, groaning through the slivers between her fingers. "I don't want to say it."

Elsa's interest piqued. "I can't do what you want if you don't say it."

"Do...more? Like—fuck, it's weird to say out loud." Anna curled her fingers down to her chin.

"More?"

"Like, yeah—more."

Elsa studied Anna for a moment, the younger girl staring at Elsa like she was anticipating her to say it for her. "Do you want me to go down on you?" Elsa sucked her breath in, the silent moment before Anna's response was like torture to her, and the cursed *throbbing, it's literally fucking throbbing* between her legs.

"...Yeah."

*Oh, Christ.* Time had briefly paused for Elsa, who couldn't digest Anna's response with anything less than exuberance.

"I mean, if you want to."

"Fuck, are you kidding?" Elsa sucked on the fingers that were coated with the physical evidence of Anna's excitement. "I've wanted to do this for a really long Goddamn time."

Anna laughed. Her expression changed to something other than nervousness for the first time in a while. "I know you have."

"Is it weird?" Elsa asked. She reached her hand under Anna's shirt, moving it up to her chest where her bra lazily trapped her breasts, rubbing the two globes of flesh over the garment.

"Not really."

Elsa leaned down and kissed Anna again, with less passion and more compassion than the one prior, her lips loosely joining with Anna's.

"I have no idea what I'm doing," Anna confessed after the kiss broke.

"I do." *No, I don't.* "Just relax."

Elsa's physical composure didn't project the restlessness that shivered through her in waves.
Finding a comfortable spot in front of Anna, she settled herself into the mattress. "Uh, you have to spread your legs. I'm not a fucking magician."

Anna complied.

"Lift your ass," Elsa instructed, grabbing the waist of her pants.

Once Anna did so, Elsa jerked her pants and underwear down, struggling to pull them off her feet where they snagged on her ankles. Once victorious, she almost felt guilty staring at the prize in front of her that she had pined after for so long to smell, to taste, to even look at. It was never about sex with Anna, but human nature and hormones weren't averse to corrupting her thoughts with fantasies that occupied her in the more dull moments.

She pulled her hair behind her, pleading that stray ropes of it wouldn't intrude on her during the act. Her vision easily caught the quick breaths Anna was taking, her stomach rising and falling in quick succession like a balloon nearing its popping threshold. "Just relax, okay?"

"I'm—yeah, okay. I'm just—I don't know, I guess I'm self-conscious."

"Of what?"

"I don't, well, no one's ever seen me there." Anna raised her head from her pillow, looking across to Elsa—eye-contact had never communicated so much trust before, Anna's eyes begging for assurance and confirmation.

Elsa kissed the supple skin on Anna's inner thigh. "Don't be self conscious, you look amazing."

Elsa concluded her declaration by licking up Anna's slit, where her endgame waited patiently between pleats of flesh, a scent, her scent, scratching Elsa's nose like a cooling meal. Her hands idled on Anna's sides, finding a playground in the divots in Anna's pelvic bone under the bottom of her shirt, tracing along the valley created by iliac crests. With impatience drowning out her willpower, Elsa's tongue slipped through, greeting the knob of flesh with sincere fervor.

Flashbacks of previous encounters spiked in Elsa's head like lightning strikes, fleeting yet intense. Even abducted by lustrous desires that fueled lewd, primal licks and strokes, she would never neglect technique, especially not on her sister. "I'm gonna try some stuff out, and you just tell me what looks good, okay?"

Elsa couldn't hear a response. Anna, being Anna, probably just nodded her head, even out of vision.

Elsa tested out a cornucopia of methods on Anna's sensitive swelling, from licking it delicately to sucking it like a source of water, hoping Anna heard her and that she wasn't just mindlessly playing with Anna's clit like a lollipop. She didn't mind the hair that breached her mouth, savoring instead the nearly honeyed taste that taunted her taste buds.

"That," Anna breathed, jerking her body in parasympathetic approval of Elsa's latter attempt.

Relieved that something worked for Anna, she kept her suckles steady, pressing the base of her tongue against Anna and relishing every second of the experience—it was beyond her fantasies, the taste sweeter than candy and the sensation so great, she was almost sure was feeling more pleasure than Anna was.

Anna didn't moan, and that was okay. Elsa listened intently for the pattern of her breaths, which accelerated and gained volume as Elsa continued to her servitude, even with her neck starting to
cramp. Her hands gripped into Anna's abdomen, securing herself to Anna in case any unexpected
thrusts would otherwise buck her off completely—as had happened to her before.

Without verbal caution, Anna's lower body fed into a brief convulse, sharp inhales peppering the
air as vague confirmation that Elsa had succeeded in her longstanding mission to finally bring her
sister to an orgasm. The feeling of satisfaction rushing through Elsa's veins nearly lured her out of
her tempo, but she kept it for a handful of moments until Anna's breathing fell back into
conformance with its normal sequence.

"Hey," Elsa smirked, her mind barren of anything else to follow up with. She crawled up next to
her sister, who crossed her legs once Elsa left their vicinity.

"Uh, you okay?" Elsa asked.

"Yeah. I'm—I'm good." Anna offered a smile.

"So, yeah, that's, uh, that's what girls do to each other. Or, that's how us lesbians do it."

"I fucking knew it. You are a lesbian," Anna teased.

"Fuck, you got me. Fine, I'm gay. For you."

"No, you're gay. You're full-on gay, aren't you?" Anna sat up, her face lit with a grin Elsa was
excited to witness.

"I am. Surprise, I guess. What can I say, I love pussy." Okay, down, girl.

Anna paused, looking down at her legs. "That was nice."

"Nice? It wasn't a business lunch. Would you like my business card?"

"Shut up," Anna said, pushing Elsa on the arm. "It was good."

Post-sex awkwardness, the one hurdle Elsa still tripped over without fail. Her skills in other areas
could not account for her social shortcomings, tying her tongue, despite its crafted performance
moments ago. "It is fun, isn't it?"

"Sure."

Seriously? "Sure?"

"I don't know, it's good. It's fun. I guess I'm in disbelief it happened."

"Why?" Stupid question.

"I'm—yeah. It's fine. It's not bad."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah." Anna rubbed Elsa's arm, and predictably, Elsa felt better. "I said I wanted to do it, so don't
worry."

Wait, did she like it or not? What the fuck? "Okay."

"Do I have to return the favor?"
"Have to? No."

"Oh."

The awkward silence that followed was physically painful to Elsa. Normally, she either fell asleep, or moved onto to whatever activity the other girl decided on.

"How many girls have you done that with?" Anna asked.

"Uh, including you? ...Five?"

"Wow."

"Is that bad?"

"No. I mean, it shows."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Elsa said.

"I want to return the favor," Anna said, boldly as if she needed to conjure up confidence before she said it.

"Really?"

"Yeah. But—I don't know how. I don't know what I'm doing."

Elsa had never seen such a lack of confidence in Anna. In the fables that were their family lives, Anna was normally the one who basked in morale, while Elsa stumbled through her life clinging onto a string of feigned belief that she knew what she was doing. It was endearing to see this shadowed side of Anna, even if it came out in stranger circumstances. "It's okay, you don't have to."

"I want to. Let me try, at least."

"Okay, well, go ahead."

"Just—do it?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. I'm, uh, okay."

Anna, with very little poise in her movements, slid her hand under the waistline of Elsa's underwear. Even clumsily, her fingers felt surreal against Elsa, who scooted closer to her sister and welcomed her entry with a soft moan.

"Is this it?" Anna asked, her index finger badgering Elsa's receptive nub, which ached for any sort of contact at this stage in her desire for relief.

"Yes," Elsa breathed, closing her eyes.

Anna wrestled around with Elsa's clit, applying more pressure than Elsa was used to, but despite the excess pressure and the unpredictable modulation of her rubs, Elsa soon realized it wasn't going to take much for her to reach release. She was pathetically weak under the touch of Anna, even if she was completely inexperienced and void of direction. As she unknowingly hired acute pleasure into Elsa, Anna reached her other hand across her, grabbing Elsa's hand who instantly accepted
Anna's and gripped it tight.

"Shit, I'm close," Elsa gasped, merely seconds after the first contact.

"What, already?"

"Yeah, just—yeah," Elsa squeezed out a few words, never feeling such heightened sexual bliss. She nearly wishes she could have pended her inevitable climax, which warned of its arrival with embered tingles around her pelvis, but the want for relief was painful at this point.

The orgasm arrived with ununforseen agony—Elsa was certain she passed out for a few seconds, her vision blurring and her hand tightening around Anna's so hard, Anna squeaked with pain. A few seconds had stretched to an eternity to her, discharging years of repressed desire in the most archaic display of pleasure she's ever performed.

"Oh, you—you came." Anna's voice registered as rather condescending to Elsa, as if praising a pet.

"Yeah," she gasped through clenched teeth, in the twilight of her recovery. Her muscles reclaimed normalcy, relaxing so much she fell backwards onto the mess of pillows offered on her bed. "Fuck. Fuck."

"What?"

"Jesus, I've never—that was the best one I've ever had."

"Really?" Even if Elsa's eyes were shut tight to prevent any further over-stimulation, she heard pride in her sister's voice.

"Yeah. God, yes."

"I'm not surprised. You lasted, like, not even two minutes."

Elsa grunted in response, jerking her hand towards her which still had Anna attached to it. Anna took her place next to Elsa, and once Elsa was able to open her eyes and the fog of her mind cleared, she saw that Anna was lying on her side, facing Elsa with a look on her face she couldn't decode. "What?"

"I don't know. Hi."

"Hi."

"I don't really know what to say," Anna said, her hair falling into her face like a serendipitous shield deployed to hide her shyness.

"You don't have to say anything. Come here." Elsa gestured Anna closer to her, Anna obliging and wiggling towards her sister.

Elsa snuggled her head under Anna's chin, pressing her ear up against her younger sister's chest. "Your heart is racing."

"I know."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Elsa asked. Now that she finally achieved relief from harrowing desperation, the awkward nature of the situation settled into her brain, free from the reigns of clouded lust.
“Yeah. Just—just hold me, okay?”

“Okay.” Elsa slipped her arm around her sister, pulling her in. As exhilarating as sex was, nothing had the tranquilizing effect on Elsa's mind like embracing her younger sister.

Elsa expected a barrage of comments about how Anna couldn't believe she did such a thing with her own sister, yet for minutes Anna remained so quiet, for all Elsa could have known her vocal chords had been destroyed. Instead, the sisters cuddled in silence, and even if there was a flavor of tension that made it hard for Elsa to look Anna in the eyes, it was the very definition of perfection to Elsa, listening to the breaths and heartbeat of her sister as it gradually calmed down. She never wanted to move—it would be a crime against nature to escape such a perfect moment.

"Did you know that your hands get really warm when you—well, you know..."

"...Really?"

"Yeah. I mean, you haven't been cold lately, but—really warm. Like, normal warm."

Hearing Anna say "normal" as if it were a rarity hurt a little. She tried diligently to forget that, above all else, she was still an outlier. "I didn't know that."

"It's pretty cool. I mean, not cool, but—you know—"

"Yeah," Elsa smiled. "I know."

"Oh, and—I like your tattoo. I forgot to tell you that."

Elsa laughed, easing out the tension in the room. "Thanks. I never thought it'd get me laid, though." She pulled her head away from Anna, finally making eye contact.

"I think we missed our movie."

"Shit, we did," Elsa sighed, rolling onto her back. "I really wanted to see it."

"What a fucking waste of time," Anna said, clearly joking—at least, Elsa hoped she was. "We could have been watching previews this entire time."

"If we leave now, we'd only be, like, twenty minutes late."

"Nah," Anna said, snuggling her face into Elsa's arm. "I'd rather just stay here."

Elsa kissed Anna's head, settling her nose into her hair, which had a distinctive, lovely scent of strawberries. Happiness had dug its way into her miserable little life and occupied her heart, and it was five feet tall and nestled in her arms. It was never like this with other girls. "Me too."
Reflections

_Seriously? Did she drool on my arm again?_

"Asshole, wake up."

Anna remained comatose in her sleep. If she had passed during the night, Elsa wouldn't have known any better.

_She's adorable even when she's passed out and slobbering on your arm like a Goddamn infant._ Realizing Anna hadn't registered Elsa's command, Elsa remained still and awake, glancing over at the sleeping girl next to her. Even if they had slept in the same bed for the past month, passed-out Anna, dormant in her own saliva, was still a scene worthy of Elsa's treasuring.

_Christ, you're smitten._

"I'm gonna make breakfast."

Anna stayed quiet and still, prey playing dead, or simply that disengaged from consciousness.

"You sleep way too fucking much." Elsa grumbled and stumbled out of bed, checking her phone on the nightstand.

_A text from that dude in my Cellular Neuro class. ...No, I don't remember what the readings were. Why the hell do I even bother to give people my number anymore?_

"Do you want any breakfast?" Elsa asked, stretching her arms above her head.

Anna grunted.

"Oh, hey, you're awake."

"Nn—nooo." Anna tossed, burying her face in her pillow.

"Do you want cereal? Poptarts? Eggs?"

Anna grunted into her pillow again. As Elsa had successfully predicted when she was fourteen—during a heated argument about who was going to clean the Easter dinner dishes—Anna was devolving into an ape.

"No, we're out of that."

"Fuck off," Anna groaned, tossing around.

"Good morning to you too, dick."

"Let me sleep."

"Fine. I'm going to the kitchen, then."

"Come here," Anna mumbled.

"Why?"

"Come here."
Unwilling to debate her in such a young hour, Elsa went over to Anna's side of her bed. As soon as she arrived, Anna grabbed Elsa's arm and pulled her down, wrapping her arms around her older sister with as much strength as her sleepy body could find.

"I just wanted to hug you," Anna said, holding onto her sister.

Even with her spine clamoring for a change of position, Elsa hugged back. *Tight.*

"You're an idiot." Elsa kissed Anna as an afterword. "But a cute one at that."

Leaving her sister to sleep a while more, Elsa went into the kitchen and began preparing breakfast. Placing her phone on the counter, she reached for the box of cereal that had been calling for her since around 1 AM the night before. After finding the box, she paused to examine the glimmer of saliva that bathed a patch of her forearm. A sanitation-crazed part of her itched to wash it off, but another, more vocal part of her wanted to continue staring at the plot of residual Anna that baptized her skin.

*Yes, it's drool. You're longing over drool. Good job, you're in way too deep.*

Her phone rang. It took Elsa a moment to realize that the low-quality version of *Little Motel* was coming from her phone, a default ringtone that hadn't seen much use.

*What the hell? What number is this?*

"Uh, hey, uh—hello?"

"Hello, Elsa?" a female voice asked. The pep in her voice virtually infuriated Elsa, anyone who had this much enthusiasm this early in the morning was anything but a functioning human.

Elsa sat on the kitchen counter, tugging her nightshirt down to her bare thighs. "Uh, yeah."

"Hello, how are you?"

"Good, how are—"

"I'm with the Delle University Substance Abuse Research Facility. You have been listed as a reference by Alice—"

"Oh, yeah. Oh, wow." Elsa's confusion had sparked into joy. "Yeah, Alice." *Wait, wasn't that a month ago? Is she still using my name?*

"Yes, Alice. She listed you as a personal reference, and we're fairly strict about the students we take in as interns here, so we always make sure to contact the references they provide us with. If I could just ask a few questions..."

"Shit, yeah, go for it. Oh, excuse my language. I'm just—you know, I'm just so excited to see her putting herself out there, you know? Are you guys like, serious about hiring her?"

"I—I can't really divulge information like that. I will say that she's a promising candidate, and—"

"You know," Elsa started. "She is a perfect candidate. I mean, I honestly don't know anyone who's more knowledgeable about drugs than her."

"Oh, really? Well, she's currently in the top—"

"Like, she's tried all of them."
The women paused. "Excuse me?"

"She's pretty much done every drug I can think of. I don't know who her dealer is, but man, that girl has connections."

"So—are—"

"I can assure you, you lovely people will never run out of, uh, substances to research, or whatever you guys do. Or do you mostly do research on people? Either way, she knows a lot."

"Ma'am, I implore you to please take this seriously. It's a very—"

"Of course I'm taking it seriously. Why would I lie? I love this girl. I'm not trying to make her sound like a drug addict, or anything. She's not. She's very strong in that sense. I'd say she's more of a, uh, a sampler. You know?"

"...A sampler?"

"Samples more than anything. And, I guess she seems to prefer psychedelics over anything else. Although—yeah, she had a pretty brief stint with coke. I'd say she's still in a bit of remission. But oh, don't let that affect your decision. I think her work ethic is still pretty strong."

A dial tone.

Elsa slapped the phone down onto the counter, hopping off. Self-satisfaction had settled into her in a wave of warmth. Sabotaging Alice's chance at happiness and success won a silver at relieving stress. "Bitches get what they deserve."

"Bitches?" Anna asked.

"Oh, hey."

Anna sauntered into the kitchen, carrying the weight of an unsuccessful sleep in her walk. "What bitches?" she asked, yawning and leaning against the counter opposite Elsa.

"Uhm, nothing. Just a—spam call. Why aren't you asleep?"

"Oh." Anna shrugged, staring down at the floor. "I couldn't fall back asleep."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I heard you talking?"

"Oh." Elsa expected a more romantic response, about how Anna couldn't sleep without Elsa within an arm's reach, to hold and bury her face into, to feel actual bliss for once. Of course, just because it was true for her, didn't mean it was true for Anna—and these sad truths were beginning to shine vividly in the preceding weeks.

"You eat a lot of cereal."

"I do." Elsa tucked the box back into the pantry, as if hiding the box could hide the guilt her diet brought her. "Hey, get me some milk. Mine's the red carton."

Anna took out the nearly-empty carton of milk in the fridge. "How old is this milk?"

"Not old," Elsa assured, taking the milk from Anna. "Trust me, I won't even drink milk within a
"Yeah, I know. I remember."

"You should go back to sleep. It's fucking Saturday, and you barely slept last night."

Elsa poured the remainder of the carton into her bowl. "And, shit, now I need more milk."

"Well, then, why don't you go back to sleep? You slept just as much as I did."

"I probably will soon, but I need food first." Elsa tossed out the empty carton, leaning back on the counter once she was finished with her preparation. Her gaze raked over her tired sister, biting her lip in contemplation.

"What?" Anna asked, keen on Elsa's body language.

Jesus, just say it. You guys do it somewhat regularly at this point, so why not start talking about it?

"I'm sorry I kept you up, I guess."

"Oh." Anna blushed, and it wasn't the type of blush that set Elsa into a fit of zealous smiling, it was a blush that settled an anchor of regret in a deep pit in her stomach.

"Uh, don't be. It wasn't you. It was me, or—or both of us, I guess."

"We don't have to do—"

"It's fine." The frustration in Anna's voice made Elsa's nausea worse. "Don't worry about it. I liked it." Her guilty face countered her statement.

She fucking initiates it, but hates talking about it. "Sure."

The pain of the awkward silence rivaled kidney stones. If Elsa's appendix were to suddenly inflame and threaten eruption, she would gladly take the trip to the emergency room over standing in that kitchen, having to face the realities that her relationship wasn't entirely mutual.

Anna's acts of affection, although powerful, grew scarce, like leftover bits of love scavenged from weeks before. Her composure became erratic, often switching between excitement and apathy in seconds, and no matter how satisfying and passionate a session was, she held no desire to discuss sex or any sort of intimacy, as though she was consistently ashamed of herself, despite often being the initiator—which was a shock in itself to Elsa, who hadn't expected much life from Anna in terms of bedroom activities, considering the stale nature of the first few encounters.

It hurt. And it hurt Elsa even more knowing that she was too weak to confront Anna about the snags that were unwinding their relationship, in fears that Anna would easily scatter away with any vocal hint that Elsa was becoming unhappy. Even through the pain and anxiety, losing Anna would hurt more than any sort of insecurities torturing her.

"What are we doing today?" Anna asked, unfazed by the worry on her sister's face.

"Uh, I don't know."

"...Oh."

Think of something, for God's sake. "If you get hungry tonight, I guess we could go to that weird pizza place next to the bank." Anything that would at least make you talk to me.
"That place smells like pee," Anna said, grabbing a few slices of cheese out of the fridge.

"Well, at least we know they have bathrooms."

"All right. I'm always up for trying for new shit, I guess." Anna began nibbling on the slice of cheese.

"Did you seriously just take slices of fucking cheese out of the fridge to eat?"

"I'm hungry, and you didn't pour me any cereal."

"You're literally a mouse trapped in a human body."

Anna laughed, almost spitting cheese out of her mouth. After a silence—much more pleasant than the last—Anna shoved the rest of the slice into her mouth. "I'm going back to sleep."

"Sure."

"Yeah, it looks as bad as it smells," Anna said, scanning the inside of the restaurant.

She's right.Crudely signed celebrity headshots couldn't cover the shame that greased the unappetizing green walls. Even the lights were so dim, Elsa was sure it was the owner's efforts to not bring any attention to the atrocious interior of what was the pizza equivalent of a dive bar.

"I think it's a drug laundering joint." Elsa played with the cap on her Sprite. "I think we've intruded on some serious shit."

"That dude behind the counter looks like he's served time."

" Probably did. We're probably the only ones in here that didn't."

"I bet it pays well, though," Anna said, leaning back into her booth. "Maybe I could do it if this whole art thing doesn't work out."

"Yeah, you c—"

"Order fifty eight," the supposed convict behind the counter called.

"Oh, that's us. I'll get it, don't move." Anna went to get the order, leaving her sister alone at their booth.

Just bring it up. Confront her. You told her you loved her, you can tell her how you feel again.

"Here," Anna said, sliding the tray onto the table. Disgusting establishment or not, the pizza looked rather appetizing to Elsa.

"I don't understand why you don't like toppings on your pizza," Elsa said.

"I just don't. Cheese pizza is fucking awesome."

"All right, then eat a slice."

"I can't, it's too hot."
"Yeah, ovens tend to do that to food."

"Fine, I'll try one." Anna took one of the massive slices and took a bite. "Oh my God."

Anna's orgasm face wasn't as exaggerated as the face she made.

"Is it good?"

"Shit, it's heavenly."

"I'm not surprised you like it, what with being like, half-mouse and all."

"What, is that a thing now?"

"I don't know, is it?" Elsa asked with a grin.

Anna shrugged, too busy eating. "It almost makes me overlook the numerous health code violations I'm sure they have."

"Food poisoning isn't ever worth it." Elsa finished off her Sprite. She wasn't even that thirsty but sugar and carbonation distracted her just enough to calm the anxiety twisting her stomach. Just. Say. Something.

"Aren't you going to eat?"

"In a minute."

"Are you okay?" Anna asked, immediately after Elsa responded.

_How the fuck can she tell? Is it that obvious? "Yeah, I mean—I think so. Why?" Or just lie, that's fine._

Anna paused her eating for a moment, staring at Elsa. "Just wondering."

Elsa tapped her fingers on the counter, wincing at a sticky spot her ring finger touched. "Are you?"

"I guess so."

Elsa said nothing. In part because she had nothing worthwhile to say, and in part because she hoped a lag in the conversation would encourage Anna to continue, to tell her why she had grown distant, and why their relationship was decaying back into the awkward mess it was a few years ago.

But it didn't work, like every passive-aggressive tactic Elsa had in her arsenal. "How are your brain stuff classes going?" Anna asked, undisturbed by the exchange.

"Uh, okay. Hard. But—but yeah, I'm not worried." _It's seriously the last thing on my mind right now._

"Neurology looks so hard. I flipped through some of your textbooks once and I didn't understand much. I mean, besides what we covered in AP Psych, I guess."

"It's kind of easy once you get the hang of it."

"Yeah, I guess," Anna reached for another slice. Elsa couldn't stomach the thought of eating; even the sight of food in front of her disturbed her. "So like..."
Elsa raised her eyebrows at Anna. "Yeah?"

"Do you..."

"What? I can't hear you over this fucking music." There was a time and a place for 80's rock, but it wasn't now, barely blanketing the creaks of the old ceiling fans.

"Never mind. It's stupid."

"Tell me," Elsa urged, growing steadily more anxious.

"No, I don't know, it's nothing."

"Fucking tell me. You know I'm not going to drop it."

Anna leaned in closer to Elsa, clearly unsure about what she was about to say. "I—um, I mean—"

"...Yeah?"

"Did you ever learn about, well, you know..."

"About what?" Elsa asked, holding her chin with her hand.

"Just—ugh, I hate saying it."

"Just say it."

"You know—like, incest?"

Anna whispered it, but Elsa still snapped her head to check the restaurant to make sure no one heard. "Uh—"

"Sorry, it's weird. But, I always kind of wondered about it, I don't know."

"Not—not really?"

"Oh." Anna fell back into her booth. "Okay."

"Well, I guess it's more of a sociology and psychology thing than neurological. But—but I do remember touching upon it in freshman year."

"Yeah, and?"

All right, choose your words carefully. "I don't know. It happens a lot, I guess. Usually in siblings who meet as adults. Technically, this—I mean, us, wouldn't happen, due to something called the uh, fuck, what was it? The West—West something effect."

"Oh." Anna took another bite. "Why?"

"I don't know, like I said, we don't talk about it much. I read somewhere about sense of smell and how you can smell your family members, or something, and it deters incest. But for all I know it could just be neo-psychology bullshit."

Anna shrugged, again. "I don't know. You don't smell bad to me."

"I wear deodorant, that's probably why. Maybe no one in that study did."
"Yeah, you're the first person to ever wear it."

"Also," Elsa continued, as if continuing to talk about it would revive dead affection, "it wasn't really that taboo in some parts of the world, hundreds of years ago. Or, as taboo. It only feels wrong because society tells us it is, you know?" And I know all this shit because I researched it years ago to make myself feel like less of a freak.

"Yeah, I guess."

Elsa exhausted her mind trying to think of something to steer the conversation towards their issues, without direct confrontation. "I mean, if two consenting adults are in love, what's the problem?"

Anna nodded, finishing off her second slice. She didn't reach for a third, instead, her brow knit in thought. "How do you know when you're in love?"

Elsa considered making up symptoms, concocting habits and rituals they had together into anything manipulative enough to persuade Anna into thinking that what she felt for Elsa was something beyond sibling love. But Anna was smart, and Elsa was sick of lying. "When you are, I don't think you have to ask that question."

"Oh."

Oh. And it was a monosyllabic response that broke Elsa's heart, bringing her to the most dismal realization she's had in ages. She just doesn't love you like that. Elsa tried to mask the pain she was feeling behind an unassuming expression, even if her face flashed red. She's only doing this to make you happy, but you're just too damn selfish to realize that.

"Are you going to eat anything?" Anna asked.

"No, I'm just—I'll take some home."

Anna nodded and looked down at the counter, as if she herself hit a depressive wall.

Elsa's appetite was completely gone. Her heartbeat was a metronome beating against her ear drums, and her fingers stung with a bitterly familiar sensation—ice.
Elsa drove home automatically from her lecture, every turn and stoplight registering in a deeper crevice in her mind. It wasn't until she reached the turn before her apartment that she realized how disengaged her conscious mind was from her actual driving, instead lost on dissecting emotions and analyzing earlier conversations. She remembered learning about the word for that—*automaticity*—in Psych 101. In fact, she remembered almost every concept, term, and study she had learned in the past five years of her academic career, but had zero recollection of anything the professor discussed in the lecture she just attended. Her brain had shut off any sort of processing that extended beyond helping her situation with Anna, whose aloof attitude towards her sister and polarized states of affection stressed out Elsa beyond hope.

She was home, but she didn't want to be. It was Wednesday—Anna was already back from class, and since she somehow still chose Elsa's apartment over the meager shelter of her dorm, Anna was now a permanent residence of Elsa's apartment, as well as her thoughts. Seeing Anna would require confronting the reality she had tried to erase in her head, that everything was *fine*, that Anna was happy with her, that their relationship wasn't failing and hanging on a string of whatever surreptitious reason Anna had to perpetuate a relationship with her sister that she clearly was minimally invested in, as if she had some sort of monetary gain or masochistic reward she achieved from their facade of a courtship.

*Maybe things changed while you were gone. Maybe she suddenly realized that she is happy with you, and you'll go back to being as blissfully gay as you were months ago.* Yet hesitance still shook her hands as she unlocked the front door.

Nope. Anna was on the couch, distracted by whatever flickered on the screen on her laptop. Briefly, she looked up at Elsa—and Elsa swore she saw a smile flash on Anna's face. If life had a remote, Elsa would have paused on that smile for hours.

"Hey."

"Uh, hey." Elsa hung her bag on one of the hooks next to the front door.

"It's cold out."

"Yeah." Elsa held back sarcasm, although painfully.

"And you still look like you just time-traveled from a Nirvana concert."

"God, do you even know what 'grunge' looks like? I'm literally wearing a plaid shirt and jeans that—okay, might be a little dirty and torn. That's not 'grunge', or anywhere near that shit. You wouldn't know, though, you were born in like, '96." Elsa grabbed a soda from the fridge, trying her best to ignore the stench of Nani's food that was past its expiration date. *I swear, if I get sick, I'm kicking her back to Hawaii.*

"...Yeah, you're—you're four years older than me."

"Pfft, so?"

"Oh, sorry, I guess I forgot how involved you were with being hip and trendy when you were two years old, my mistake." Anna smirked to herself, her eyes still focused on the screen in front of her.

"Yeah, well—I just look like I always do."
"I never said anything about 'grunge.' I'm just saying, I don't really get how you're not worried about people looking at you and realizing, 'hey, it's like, ten degrees out, and this chick is wearing nothing more than a long-sleeved shirt.' Oh my God, we're having an actual conversation.

"I don't get cold," Elsa said, dropping into the chair in the living room perpendicular to her sister.

"Yeah, but it's suspicious."

"Is it?" Elsa asked, chugging her drink. "I mean, like, I don't think anyone's going to jump to the conclusion of, 'oh wow, holy shit, she must have magical ice powers.'

Just that this chick likes flannel. And is probably gay."

"Wow, stereotype much?" Anna mocked.

"Lesbians don't get cold."

"Apparently not."

"In fact, we're pretty hot."

Anna scoffed, smiling.

A minute passed without speech. Elsa wasn't sure if she preferred it that way, or not.

Anna slammed her hand down on the coffee table after the silent recess, startling Elsa. "Oh. Oh, sorry. But oh. Oh."

"…Oh?"

"Alice."

"Yeah?"

"She was here." Anna turned towards Elsa, pointing at her.

"Me?"

"Yeah, she was looking for you."

"Wait—what?"

"Alice came here. Like, she dropped by. She knocked on the door, and I answered, and she was looking for you. And she seemed—kind of pissed. She was being pretty rude. And then—then she talked to me."

Fuck. As if Elsa's emotions hadn't already tumbled to rock bottom already, anxiety clutched her abdomen, running cold through her veins. "What?"

"I told her you were in class, and that you were going to be gone all day, since I figured you don't want to talk to her. She, uh, she asked if she could speak with me."

"...And?"

"Oh, and—she did."

"Oh." Elsa could hardly hear Anna over her heartbeat. Jesus. Christ. Can't she just stay out of my
"Did you—did you tell her about us?"

Elsa's chest hurt. "No."

"Okay."

"Well, kind of." Holy shit, this is it. She's going to kill you.

Anna closed her laptop and put it on the table. "What did you say?"

Anna didn't look mad, or even sound mad. But her calmness was surreal, as if it were the calm before the storm. "I just, I—ugh. I guess I told her I loved you."

"Oh."

"Are you mad?"

"I don't think so. But does she know about—us?"

Is there even an "us" anymore? "No. But—I think she inferred it."

"Oh, God, Elsa." Anna held her face in her hands in sudden despair.

"What? I didn't tell her! She just figured it out herself, and—"

"She knows? Someone knows?"

"Yeah, so?"

"I mean—she's mad, Elsa. She's fucking mad. As in, she's angry, and crazy. Who's to say what she's going to do?"

"Well, what can she do? Do you think people will believe her? And who's she going to tell? What evidence does she have?"

"Why is she mad, Elsa?" Anna asked, unexpectedly serene.

Anna's sudden calm placated Elsa. Jesus. The phone call? "I don't know. She's mad because I won't date her."

"Are you sure it's just that? Why would she just—suddenly get mad about that?"

"I—okay, fine. I said some things. Some bad things. And I probably shouldn't have—but I did, and she got mad. But was the one who was mean first, and—"

"God, who cares? Who cares who was mean first? You're twenty-two, for God's sake. Are you seriously that petty?"

"It was immature, and stupid." Face it, you only regret it because you got caught.

"But she's harmless. She can't hurt us."

"You better hope so, I swear, Elsa. If—"

"What did she talk to you about?"
"Why does it matter? That's not important right now. What's important is—if anyone finds out about us, we're both screwed. Our lives are screwed. Our—everything, it's screwed."

"Is that what this is all about, then?" Elsa felt immediate relief, yet her anxiety boosted, placing her hand on her chest as if it would physically calm herself.

"What?" Anna asked after a beat, looking at her sister with perplexity.

"Why don't—why don't you just say it?"

"Say what?"

That you hate this. That you don't want this. That I'm being selfish for keeping you in this. That you'd be happier without me. That this whole Goddamn thing was a mistake. "Nothing."

"What?"

"Forget it."

"No, Elsa, what?"

"Don't worry about her, okay? I'll take care of it. I'll—I'll talk to her," Elsa said, desperate for a switch in the conversation. Although I have no idea how I'm going to dig myself out of this hole.

"Yeah, okay, fine Please, just—I don't want to have to deal with any of her crap.

From how you talk about her, she seems—uh, off."

"Yeah, she is."

"All right. Well—okay. I just don't want anything to happen to either of us."

"It won't, trust me." Elsa sighed. "I'd never let anyone hurt you." Except myself, apparently.

"Okay." There it was, that brief frame of a smile again. Elsa resented it as much as she adored it.

Sleep wasn't an option, Elsa noticed, after twenty minutes of tossing and turning to find a good position. Even the most comfortable positions that normally lulled her into sleep did absolutely nothing but grow numbingly uncomfortable and force her to, with frustration, reposition herself every few minutes.

Her head was a mess. Even her room was a mess, now. Old Elsa would have tidied it up out of sheer annoyance over its disheveled aesthetics, but new Elsa was—well, the same as old Elsa, but defeated and with a worn-out motivation.

Who the hell are you kidding, you're the same you've always been. Only now you got what you wanted.

Elsa shifted positions again, burying her face into her lumped pillow.

And it sucks.

She wanted to fall asleep before Anna got back from going out with her friends, as she had done at
least twice a week. The sisters didn't even eat dinner together, although that wasn't uncommon anymore.

But Elsa never minded eating alone until now.

She heard the front door open, interrupting her thoughts about how she could ever casually bring up with Anna that she had been hurting. She still hadn't come up with anything satisfactory. The bathroom door opened, and Elsa tried to will herself to sleep while Anna was in the bathroom. But the bedroom door eventually followed, releasing the light of the hallway into her room, Elsa cringed and turned away from the door.

"Oh, you're still awake?" Anna asked.

"Yeah," Elsa mumbled.

"I hope I didn't wake you." Anna closed the door, turning on the closet light.

"No."

After a few moments, Anna turned off the closet light, entering the bed from her side.

"Hey."

Elsa inhaled through her nose, turning towards Anna. The faint light sliding through the slivers of the bedroom door outlined her sister's figure. "Hey."

"I'm, uh, I'm sorry. About—yeah."

"About what?"

"I didn't mean for it to sound like—I don't know. I don't know what I'm apologizing about. I overreacted, I think."

"I don't think you should apologize for anything." Elsa sat up, turning the light on her nightstand into its dimmest setting. "It's just..."

"Yeah?"

"It's not you. I wish I never met her in the first place."

Anna hung her head, nodding. "Yeah."

"Jesus, I mean, she's pretty harmless, but she's batshit. No, apeshit. She's a whole different level of animalshit crazy."

"Why did you keep her in your life?"

"She was innocently nice for a while. Someone to talk to, I guess. Yeah, she knew about you, but, she kept me grounded, to an extent, I think."

"Did she—was she the one who convinced you to tell me?"

"No." Elsa pulled the covers closer to her body. "She urged me against it." Elsa would have kept most of these facts confidential, but with their relationship in as much turmoil as it was, she virtually lost any shred of concern she'd have over how Anna would react.
Anna populated a short silence with a thoughtful breath. "I can see why."

"Yeah, so, she kept me at least semi-sane." Elsa paused. "And she was a good lay."

Anna chuckled. "A—am I?" Anna asked timidly.

"Are you…?"

"Am I good? Am I—I'm better than her, right?"

"Uh, you're—yeah." Even if Anna lacked technical ability, it was better with her than any other girl Elsa's been with. Love was a catalyst unmatched.

"Nani's gone—right?"

"Yeah, she's home for the week."

Anna responded with an awkward kiss. She never got the hang of smooth initiation, but as weak as Elsa was, clay in the hands of her sister, she kissed back.

Insecurities and doubt scattered, but hints of them still clung onto to the smallest holds of her brain.

Elsa urged her body towards Anna at the sensation of uncoordinated, shaking fingers teasing the skin of her stomach.

She knew what she was in for—wonderful sex, followed by awkward silence, sleep, and then a day of barely any interaction. She couldn't figure out why. If Anna was so disinterested in her, why was she initiating sex almost daily? Why did she seem to hate herself during it, yet pull herself close to Elsa's body during climax? And why did she always ensure Elsa's pleasure as much as her own? These questions distracted Elsa to the point of her almost unable to enjoy the last rare act of love Anna displayed, practically playing out her actions automatically.

Anna was a Goddamn puzzle to her. She didn't even notice how far down Anna's hand had ventured until her index finger brushed her clit.

"Ugh," Elsa groaned. Analyzing these frustrating questions that infected her had thrown her back into dejection.

Anna nuzzled Elsa's cheek, following her head as she threw it back to the headboard—so hard, her vision flashed white.

"Stop," Elsa whimpered, nearly in tears.

"What?"

"Just, stop. What are you even doing?"

"I'm—I'm uh, you know."

"You can't even say it. Hell, you won't even talk to me anymore. So why—why do you keep doing this? Why are you so—why do you keep wanting to fuck if you can barely even look at me anymore?"

Anna scrambled back to her side of the bed, shielding her face behind her arms.

"God."
Elsa's automatic reflex at the sight of her sister in distress was to apologize, but this time, she fought it down. "I don't fucking understand you."

"God, Elsa, I'm sorry."

"Why? What—why can't you just tell me what's going on? Because obviously—I'm fucking missing something here."

"It's nothing. I don't know, okay?" Anna's voice was seasoned with heavy breaths, she herself was holding down tears. "My head's been elsewhere, I'm distracted."

"By what?"

"Nothing! School, life—the fact that I'm in a relationship with my own fucking sister?"

"That never bothered you before, did it?" Elsa knew she was treading on ice thinner than the ice that—oh, crap - stung her fingers. What was it mom and dad taught?

Conceal...don't...reveal?

"I'll get over it. I'm sorry. I—"

"You don't—"

"What?"

Just tell her she doesn't have to. Just end it. Just end it, because you're both fucking miserable and this is going nowhere. "Never mind."

"Let's just sleep, okay? I'm sorry I ever tried anything." The animosity in Anna's voice could intimidate a prison guard.

"Fine."

Elsa angrily turned away from Anna, shuffling under the covers. Even if it stung her sinuses to do so, she challenged the urge to cry, and won.

Anna sniffed. Elsa knew that sniff. It was the noise that made her realize that, yet again, she had hurt her sister to the point of crying. To a point way beyond she had ever hoped to bring her sister to—she was supposed to make her happy, not miserable. And, conforming to the normal standard of her life, she had failed.

Be the stronger one here. Just end it.

Elsa allowed herself to cry, finally. She didn't care if Anna heard. She didn't care if her neighbors heard.

It's over.
Elsa checked the time on her phone. 8:47. *Anna has class at ten.* With her back turned to Anna, she couldn't see if she was awake, but her stillness and stifled snores that she grew to love indicated otherwise. After the emotion-fueled fiasco the night before, there was no foreseeable way Elsa could turn around and confront her sister without a cocktail of embarrassment, shame, and guilt wrenching her organs and shushing any apologies she had to say. The past few hours, empty of sleep, had brought the revelation that maybe Anna *couldn't* quench the desperation that gnawed at Elsa's conscious, and chase away her anxieties. At least, not in the relationship they had eventually settled in. And it was all her own *damn* fault, acting upon feelings which were anything but natural and acceptable, expecting her sister to react positively and welcome her advances. Anna's only reciprocation was conceived out of fear of losing her sister, who ostracized her due to her own stubborn bias to blame others for her own unhappiness. Elsa became a predator, and Anna was her prey, yet Elsa still anguished with hunger. In her own misery, she had brought down her own sister, the happiest person she's ever known.

Despite her epiphanies, swapping sleep for introspection brought no decisions.

Breaking off her relationship with her sister would only augment her heartache, yet continuing it did very little to improve her mental health. Whatever decision she chose, she saw nothing but emotional suffering in her immediate future.

Anna stirred.

Fuck.

Elsa held her breath for a beat, listening for any signs that Anna woke up. Her snores had stopped, and after a moment, she moved again.

*Yeah, she's awake.*

Anna didn't say anything.

Elsa became aware of her body and the starch position she was curled in. *Do I look asleep? Do I sound asleep? How do sleeping people even breathe?*

With the sunlight streaming through her blinds and hitting her eyes, she had no choice but to shift her body, unless she wanted to spend the next few minutes with the sun taunting her with its own karmic *fuck you.*

In her peripheral, she saw her sister, sitting up against the headboard with her head turned down towards her knees. She looked miserable, and knowing she was responsible for her own sister's unhappiness made Elsa wish she could disappear.

After a few minutes of psyching herself up, Elsa sat up. Anna didn't even move an inch, occupied in another world, eerily still and somber as if her body was a vessel of a soul that had left earth.

*What the hell do I even say? Do I ever say anything? "Uh..."

Anna lifted her head, her stare hollow. Whatever thoughts occupied her mind had dominion over her focus.

"I'm sorry."
Nothing from Anna.

"I'm sorry for getting mad, and I'm—I'm sorry for being a jerk last night." Her apologies weren't empty, yet carried very little sympathy in her voice. "I'm sorry for accusing you—and for—for just, for yelling at you."

Anna nodded. "I think you were right."

Elsa's stomach twisted. "Right?"

Anna took a breath and shook her head, subtly. "Yeah. I—God." She bit her lip down, still avoiding eye contact with her sister. "I don't think I can do this."

"Uh, do—what?"

Anna shrugged. "This. Honestly—like, I know, I sound like a dick when I say this, but I don't even know why I thought it would work."

Elsa expected this, in fact, she anticipated it, but her mouth still went dry, her head turning cold. "You're talking about, about us—right?"

Anna nodded. "I'm sorry. I'm such an idiot. I don't know why I ever thought—I shouldn't have done this to you."

"Can I just ask—why, then? Why did you, did you do this with me when you—I mean, were you lying to me this whole time?" Elsa's sadness turned her hostile. She wanted to repress the anger, approach the situation rationally, but her emotions busted any filter she had built up. If the truth was painful, she wasn't going to be the only one getting hurt.

"I wasn't—no, I don't know. I guess I thought it could work."

"You guess?"

"I don't know?" Anna finally looked over at Elsa, her face tweaked with disbelief. "I don't know what I was thinking. Maybe I wasn't thinking. But you were so unhappy, and I was why you were unhappy. And—"

"And so you thought lying to me would make me happy?"

Anna shook her head. "I was lying to myself."

 Fucking. Ow. "Jesus."

"But—"

"God, I'm fucking retarded. I don't know how I could ever think you'd feel the same way."

"Well—"

"What are the fucking chances, anyway? I'm fucked up enough to—to fall for you, my own sister, and—I expected it—I actually expected you to love me back?"

"I mean, it's not what you—"

"You shouldn't have—"
"Can you just let me finish? " Anna snapped.

Anna's outburst nipped Elsa's ramble short, catching her words in her throat. "I—"

"Yeah, I mean, fine. I didn't. But what the fuck was I supposed to do? If I said no, you'd be even more depressed."

"I'd get over—"

"Would you? You don't seem to get over anything. But, I don't know. You actually seemed happy once I—I guess, pretended to be into it. And I loved seeing you happy. But—honestly, no, I wasn't in love with you."

"I know."

"Wasn't," Anna stressed, her eyes trained on Elsa's like a pack leader asserting power.

A chill strung down Elsa's spine. "Wasn't?"

"You were happy again, briefly. You weren't mean. You were like—the old Elsa. For a few weeks. And maybe your happiness was based on a lie, but whatever. I loved it. I loved you." Anna curled her lower lip under her teeth. "And that's when it got weird."

"Weird?" Elsa parroted, her body starting to shake.

"God, Elsa." Anna held her head in her hand. "I—yeah, in the end, I did fall in love with you."

"Wait—you what?" Elsa spoke faster than Anna's words processed in her head.

Relief washed out her frustration, but brought confusion. Anna loved her?

"I don't fucking know. I don't even really look at girls that way. But, like, after you got all happy and all affectionate on me—and then—the—well, the sex, and—the touching—and it got to my head. And it scared me. Well, uh, it—it scares me."

Elsa remained quiet. She couldn't willingly interrupt Anna's venting, her vocal chords had sewn shut in her anxious listening.

"Because I hate it. I fucking hate. I love you, and I hate that. And then what did you do? You went back to being miserable and quiet, treating me as if I were your—like I'm a stranger."

"What? You were the one who—"

"Yeah, Elsa, I got scared. I did. And maybe that made me kind of sad. But instead of—instead of doing what normal couples do and asking me about it, asking me if I was okay, you shut me out. Again. Like always."

Elsa tucked her head into her knees.

"It doesn't even matter. I can't do this. I can't be with my own sister. Even if it hurts, I have to—God, I know it's going to hurt both of us, but it has to stop. It's not healthy."

"Why, though?" Elsa asked, rising her head. " Why? "

"What's our life going to be like? Secrecy? Changing our names and moving to the middle of nowhere?"
Elsa paused. "Why didn't this bother you before?"

"I don't know if I should tell you."

"Was it Alice?" Elsa asked with barely a beat to spare, hoping she was wrong.

The silence was her answer, the sullen silence that cradled her head in her hands.

"What the hell did she even talk to you about?" Elsa asked, striving to keep her voice steady.

"She—well, when I told her you weren't here, I don't know, I guess she took that as an invitation to attack me. So she—asked me if I was bothering you. And I said no.

But then she asked why I was always over at your place, and I asked her what business she had being nosy. Because, like, why wouldn't a sister hang out with her own sister all the time? I guess I got kinda mad, because she was being pretty rude about it. But then she told me that you were in love with me."

"Are you fucking—she—"

"Yeah, and I told her I knew. And that I was okay with it. And she told me I shouldn't be okay with it, because you're my sister, and it was weird. And I felt defensive, because, well I felt that way about you—and I told her there was nothing wrong with it. But she insisted that you were sick, and wrong, and needed help, and that there was nothing natural about what you felt for me, and that I should stay away from you, because you're trouble, or something."

"You can't take anything she says seriously. She's—she's upset, because I didn't love her back," Elsa said.

Her words mended nothing. "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"What she said kinda stuck. What the hell are we doing, anything? What's a relationship between us gonna do? I don't want to live the rest of my life pretending that I'm single, and pretending that the person I love isn't my girlfriend or whatever."

"Does it matter what other people think? I mean, fuck them. If we can be happy together—"

"Elsa, I could never get used to being in love with my own sister. I don't want to be. I don't want this life. It's not going to make me happy. It's going to make me miserable and stressed out. I don't want to live every day of my life feeling sorry for myself, because I can't stop thinking about my sister, and how badly I want to—to kiss her, and hug her—and do—well—you know. It's weird. It's fucking weird and I hate it. I need to—I need to get out of this, before it gets worse. Before I reach the point where getting over you is going to kill me. And trust me, Elsa, I already know getting over you is going to hurt a fucking lot."

"Yeah. Welcome to literally the past two years of my life. You really think you're the only one going through this? How the fuck do you think I felt? Every day of my life for the past two Goddamn years? Look, maybe if you gave it time, it'll get easier, and—"

"No."

Elsa shifted, sitting up straighter. "No?"
"Elsa, I got—I'm not staying here."

"Staying here?"

Anna cringed. Whatever she was about to say had to fight to come out. "I got accepted."

"Wait, what? You got accepted?"

"Yeah, I—I put in an application to transfer to Aren Arts, like, a month ago. And I didn't expect anything, but—I heard back, like, a week ago."

"Wait—why did—why did you even apply?"

"For kicks? I don't know." Anna scooted over to the end of the bed, her feet dangling above the floor. "But I got accepted. And I'm going. I already—I already started doing the paperwork, and shit. I called Gerda and she's actually pretty excited about it. I'm going next semester."

In an instant, Elsa's world crumbled. As if she hadn't been through enough pain, the minor problems she held earlier seemed like petty nuances compared to the reality of Anna now geographically leaving, as if placed on witness protection to save herself from being victimized further. She had nothing to say. All sentences that formed in her head were tapestries of begging and pathetic bargaining, disguised as selfless care for her sister's well being, when she knew very well the only reason she'd want Anna to stay was to salvage any chance of rebuilding a relationship in the future—but now her future seemed as bleak as her past.

In a nervous fidget, she combed her hands through her hair, releasing strands from her braids. "You're moving?"

"Yeah. I mean, it's not that far away, I guess. In the city, but—long enough that—yeah. It's not going to work, no matter what we do."

"And are you—are you leaving me because you're transferring, or are you transferring because you're leaving me?" Elsa was too pained to speak any louder than a whimper.

Anna looked down at the floor, kicking her legs for a moment before responding. "I don't think any answer is going to make you feel better."

Elsa accepted Anna's answer like a criminal accepting execution, hopeless and without resistance. She had become the martyr of her own stubborn nature, excommunicated from the one constant in her life that became the basis of her emotions.

Her thoughts fogged with failed survival mechanisms, her brain desperately trying to convince her she'd pull through, but with so many thoughts battling for priority her mind turned static. Her environment melted into an opaque mess of dull colors that framed the one saturated human figure beside her, pink and blurs of orange swaying as it started to smudge together in her shattering conception of life.

"Okay." Elsa didn't know what she was "okay"ing. She briefly phased between reality and picking apart the emotions that clawed at her heart.

*Jesus Christ. You're being dramatic. You've lived without her before. You saw this coming.*

"Please don't blame yourself for this," Anna breathed, twirling her body to face her sister.

Elsa shook her head. "I—I don't blame anyone, I guess." With her mouth as dry was it was, her
voice hardly carried a tone.

"It's gonna suck for both of us, but it's what's best, okay?"

Elsa committed to a vague shrug.

"Elsa."

Elsa focused her eyes on Anna, who returned a stern gaze. ""Elsa, I really—I need to ask you for—can you do me a favor?"

Elsa shrugged again, now aware that her fingers pulled out a considerable amount of stray hair once they resumed their anxious fret through her braid.

"I know, I know you hate me now. I would hate me too. But, God, Elsa—I need you, okay?"

Anna's composure broke, dissolving into tears. "I fucking need you, as a sister. I'm gonna be scared and alone and I'm going to miss you, I know I'm going to miss you to death and I need you to talk to me and be my sister, please. You don't have to be my best friend, I just want to know you'll be there—there for me, okay?"

Elsa didn't answer. She didn't have an answer.

"Elsa," Anna choked, gently grabbing her sister's arm. Anna's grasp felt cold on Elsa's skin. "Elsa, please. I can't lose you. I can't, I can't, God, I just fucking can't."

Please, please don't let this ruin us. I love you, I love you so much—and you're literally—literally the only person in my life right now that I can trust enough to—to rely on. So, just, promise me you'll still be my sister, okay? That you'll be there so I can call you—because I know I'll have to—because I'm going to be scared, and—just, please?" The sun sparkled in a tear that trailed down her cheek.

"I think you're right," Elsa said, softly.

"I'm right?"

"I think I do hate you."

"Oh." If heartbreak were an expression, it would be the crestfallen features that tugged the hope off of Anna's face. "I honestly don't—I have no idea why I thought you would ever—"

"Just leave. Please," Elsa begged, already regretting what she said. "I can't even fucking look at you right now."

Anna hopped off the bed and grabbed some day clothes, Elsa covering her face.

"Change your sheets," she heard Anna say. "You're going to freeze them. Again."

Elsa didn't even notice the frozen folds of fabric spilling below her, yet for now, it was the least of her worries. She kept her face shielded by her hand until she heard the door close—half-surprised Anna didn't slam the door as loud as she could as she exited Elsa's bedroom for what she assumed was the final time.

She didn't hate Anna. She could never hate Anna. But how could she forgive Anna after hurting her for so long? She justified her harsh words as best as she could as with weak excuses that—as always—shifted blame away from herself.
Driving to Alice's house was automatic. Every muscle movement for the past two hours was automatic, driven by instinct, every conscious part of her brain focused on sedating her emotions into a mood passive enough to keep her from short-circuiting.

As far as she knew, her cerebellum was the only part of her brain functioning normally. She was certain some sort of hormone had released in her brain to make her calm, experiencing a rare yet subtle high. Anna was gone. Their relationship came out even more damaged than it was before, and it was all Alice's fault, not hers.

She knocked on Alice's door, all of the ambient noises around her combining into an annoying ringing sound.

Alice opened the door, her face dropping into disappointment. "Oh."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Elsa asked.

"Well, 'hi' to you, too."

"Can you just—can you let me in?"

Alice sighed, dramatically. "Yeah, I don't think I want to."

Elsa stared at Alice.

"But, I'll let you in, because I'm a decent person, and I can't let you stand out here in the cold—without a jacket."

"Alice, you have no—you have literally no business talking to Anna," Elsa said, entering Alice's apartment. She hadn't been inside the apartment for so long, even the distinct, artificial scent of it made her feel off. "I mean, seriously, what the hell even possessed you to do that?"

"I'm sorry, I must have been high," Alice mocked, closing the front door.

"Oh." Elsa suddenly regretted the confrontation.

"Yeah, you know. From all of those drugs I do?"

Elsa stayed quiet, only now beginning to realize that maybe she wasn't so much the bad guy. "Um, I—you found out?"

"I did. It's really surprising how things you do have consequences, huh?"

"That doesn't mean you had a right to talk to An—"

"Elsa, I really, truly, honestly don't care what you think. You were manipulating this poor girl to be something she wasn't. How in the world was I supposed to sit back and let this happen?"

"She was fine. She was fine until you came along." Elsa shoved her hands into her pockets. As much as she detested Alice, she had no intention on freezing her apartment. "But this morning, she left me. She left me, because of what you said to her."

"Oh, really?" Alice asked, pouring herself a cup of tea, so nonchalant, the casualness of her actions bordering on psychopathic. Elsa couldn't even conceive eating or drinking anything in the emotional state she was in.
"I don't understand—like, maybe what I did was wrong, fine—but that doesn't mean you have to break us up, just because you're jealous?"

"Jealous? Really?" Alice asked, her voice more amused than angry. She sipped her tea, shaking her head. "Why would I be jealous?"

"Because, you're like—you're in love with me."

"No." Alice put her tea cup down onto the mantle of her filled-in fireplace, clasp her hands in front of her body. "No, I wasn't."

"Yes, you—"

"I was never in love with you, Elsa. Honestly, I could never love someone like you. I suppose—I thought I was, but no. You were a project to me, nothing more."

Alice's confession stung Elsa—somehow making her feel even worse. "You weren't—I was a project?"

"Yes. You're so—God, you're so awfully screwed up that I was intrigued by you. It's not so often you meet someone who's—who's in love with their own sibling, on top of being such a selfish piece of work. I meet so many dull people every day and you were exciting. But in the end, you were always the same person at the end of the day. A selfish, self-centered—bitch who only complained about herself and never cared for anyone else's life. Sleeping with you was a mistake. Sleeping with you regularly was an outright lapse of judgment. I tried so hard to listen to your whining almost every day for a few months, only to be rewarded by losing one of my dream jobs because I couldn't accept that you had manipulated your poor sister into something she clearly had no desire to be in."

"When I finally got to talk to poor Anna, she had no reflection of that bubbly person I got a glimpse of a few times during our friendship. I have never seen such a huge difference between someone within a few months time, it was like meeting a different person. Yes, she defended you—but I could not, in any good conscious, allow that girl to be with someone like you, because, unlike you, she has potential to lead a fulfilling life."

"She loved me," Elsa breathed, tensing her muscles. "She did fall in love with me."

"Really?" Alice asked, sipping her tea again.

"Yeah, she told me that—this morning. She does love me. She is in love with me."

"Well," Alice said, shrugging. "I mean, if you choose to believe that—that is entirely up to you."

"Wow, fuck you."

"Heavens, you really haven't changed at all, have you?"

"And who the fuck even talks like that?"

"Some of us don't feel the need to swear every other word."

"Yeah, well, you know, we were happy."

"Were you?"

"What does it matter to you?" Elsa asked, balling her hands into a fist in her jean pockets and
nearly tearing the denim.

"It doesn't."

"Well, good, then. Because I'm—"

"Honestly, Elsa, I don't care about what you choose to do with your life anymore.

One day you'll grow up and realize I'm right. And you probably will never pay any mind to any advice I give you, but for the sake of your own sister, if you really do love her, you'll refrain from ever trying to win that poor girl back. Because as smart as she is, I have the feeling she loves you enough to do anything you wanted her to do."

Elsa shook her head, relaxing her hands. Even the hatred in her heart wasn't strong enough to retaliate with more anger. "I won't. You're right." You are an awful, awful person. "I don't deserve her, anyway. I never did. I'm a—I'm a fucking wreck of a human being."

"And are you actually going to do something about that?"

Elsa paused before nodding. "I think so. I don't know what, but—God, I guess I'll try."

"Well, then good. Maybe you'll realize this whole thing was for the better. Instead of using this as an opportunity to bitch and moan like every other thing that goes wrong in your life, you'll use this to your advantage you actually better yourself."

"If you hate me so much, why do you care about that stuff? Do you actually think I have potential to be a decent person?"

"No," Alice said, candid. "But your sister does. And I can't stand the thought of you letting her down again."

Elsa sighed, accepting that Alice knew what was best. Even with her thoughts too clouded to even contemplate fixing her life right now, hitting rock bottom cleared up a perspective on life she had only entertained briefly before. If she was the problem, the least she could do was make herself the solution.

"Thank you. For making me realize that I am even more horrible than I thought I was."

"I don't know what you're thanking me for, but at the risk of sounding like a terrible host, I have to ask you to leave my apartment."

"Yeah," Elsa said, leaving Alice's apartment without even time for any follow-up comments.

She leaned against the wall of the hallway, calming herself down before going behind the wheel again. By now, Anna had returned from class and, most likely, packed her things and left. Elsa didn't want to go home. It wasn't home anymore without her sister, it was a building which contained a bed which would never sleep Anna again, and food which Elsa could never conceivably find the appetite to eat.

The entire world was empty without her sister.

And it was her fault.

She pulled her phone out of her pocket—even the phone Anna had bought her was painful to look at—and deleted Anna out of her contacts. In an instant, a bridge of communication vanished,
perishing into flames that manifested into pixels confirming her deletion. It wasn't a complete severance, but it was enough to ease the temptation of ever contacting Anna again.

Once she calmed herself down enough—which wasn't complete without a few minute bawling session outside of Alice's apartment, certain that Alice could hear her cries of hopelessness—she drove back to her empty apartment.

The drive home had never been so quiet.
Dear God, I swear her voice is giving me fucking PTSD.

"Yeah. I'm sure," Elsa sighed into the receiver. "I think it's just best if I don't go home for the summer."

"Well, that's entirely up to you. But you know, it's going to be hard for us to continue to support you, financially."

"I mean, I think—I can probably find a job. Hopefully. I graduate in—Jesus Christ, only two months. It's not like I'll have class weighing me down anymore."

"Elsa, you know once you graduate, you're on your own. I am doing as your mother asked and offering you a place to live until you can support yourself fully." Yeah, no, that's fine. Keep reminding me that the only reason you treat me like a human being is because my fucking mother told you to. "It'd be a wise choice for you to return home, at least for the break."

Elsa fell back onto her bed, rubbing her temples with her free hand. "No, it's fine, really."

"I'm sure Anna would app—"

"It's fine. Please," Elsa assured. Just hearing her sister's name made Elsa's breakfast threaten escape from her stomach. "I can do this. I don't need your help anymore."

Elsa heard Gerda exhale. "Well, it's entirely your choice. I suppose if you do change your mind, you're welcome to call us and we'll see what we can do."

I know, I know, I'm a burden. "Okay. Uh, thanks, though."

"I still don't understand, though. We are offering you a home and everything you need to live, and yet you refuse?" God, here we go. "Is there something wrong with the way we've kept you in our custody for the past four years, raising you as if you were our own child?" Gerda's voice retained that awful monotonic cadence, punctuated so subtly with a hint of disappointment, that somehow almost never failed to manipulate Elsa into a spiral of guilt.

Guilt, however, was a cousin of anger. Raise me? I was fucking eighteen when you took me in. I was already raised. Get that thick skull out of your gigantic—" No, I just want to focus on finding jobs here, I guess. Get a job, pay my own rent, maybe get something that actually leads to a career?" Pure bullshit, but realistic and promising enough to kick Gerda off of her tail.

"Fine, if that's what you want. I'm sure Anna will be very disappointed to hear this."

Yeah, I don't think that's going to be a problem. Gerda sighed. And Elsa had lived with Gerda enough to know that sigh was a signal of further shaming to come, the racking of a gun. "And do you have any idea what is wrong with your sister?"

"What?"

"Your sister, I spoke to her the other day, and she sounds—well, she sounds miserable."

"Oh? Miserable?"

"She won't even tell me what's wrong. I don't recall her ever being this reserved before. Have you
spoken to her recently?"

_Great, so on top of screwing her up, you've made her miserable._ "No."

"Could you? You're her sister, I know she'll talk to you. She talks about you a lot, in any case."

Elsa harnessed a breath, whatever words it would accompany would have to be chosen carefully. "I, uh—yeah. I'll try to talk to her." _Nope, try again._

"She's your younger sister. I wish you'd be more involved in her life, she always seemed so sad you were so distant from her." Gerda's voice scraped through Elsa's ears like sandpaper. Elsa started to fantasize about the call dropping right there, if only technology could fail serendipitously. "She's going through a lot, she could use her older sister for once."

Elsa strained to find any way to gracefully steer the conversation away from her now-estranged sibling, yet in her silence, Gerda continued.

"It's not my business what goes on between you two, but she seems to feel abandoned by you. At least, that's the message I always got from her for the past few years"

_What goes on between us two? Wait—does she—_

"Either way, I'd appreciate it if you could talk to her for me."

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Yeah, I said okay." Elsa pushed away all of the resentment that threatened to taint her voice. As long as she was unemployed, she couldn't risk being financially starved by Gerda and Kai—as much as she fantasized about telling them off. "She hasn't really been talking to me either, though. Maybe she just has to figure stuff out on her own, I guess."

"That's not an excuse to ignore your sister."

_Jesus fucking—"I know, I'm not—yeah, sure."

"Okay, well, tell her to give me a call if she's feeling any better."

"Yeah, I will. I gotta go—"

"And keep me updated with your job search, assuming it leads anywhere."

Elsa sat up. _Assuming? Don't press it._ "All right, fine."

"Good."

"I, uh—bye."

"Bye."

Elsa ended the call before her sanity suffered any more trauma. Moroseness settled into her head like an old friend, breaking the delicate threads in her mind that held up any shred of happiness she scraped together in the past weeks. Hearing that Anna was suffering as she was only made her feel worse.
So maybe take Alice's advice and fucking do something for once. Elsa leaned forward, resting her arm on her legs. Even if she is a colossal shithead, she probably knows you more than you'd care to admit.

Elsa did something she hadn't done in years: willingly seek out human contact. Her contact list on her phone was shy of people she could call a friend, but the rustling in a nearby room drew out a target. Suppressing the throes of anxiety that had trapped her for so long, she stood up, shuffling over to Nani's room.

Nani's door was open, the woman sprawled out on her bed reading a book, oblivious to the girl standing in her doorway whose disarrayed hair and unkempt clothes could have mistaken her for a distressed home intruder, had she hadn't interrupted Nani with one her trademark "uh..."s.

Nani looked up at Elsa, expectantly, as if waiting for Elsa to announce her intentions.

"Hi," Elsa squeaked out after an uncomfortable moment.

"Uh, hey. You uh—you're—alive. Good."

"Yeah, I—I don't know, I haven't left my room...much..." Elsa rested a hand on Nani's door frame. "Um..."

"You need something?" Nani turned her book over, sitting up.

"Uh, well this is, uh, kind of weird—"

"Elsa, honestly, at this point, there's really nothing you can do that would seem weird to me. Trust me, I've seen—I've seen some...uh, what did you need?"

"I've been going through some, uh, tough shit these past few weeks. And—I don't want to sound pathetic..." I think that ship has already sailed. "...But I kind of just—I don't know, I want to get out. And...do something."

"...Yeah? Are you asking me to hang out with you?"

Elsa shrugged. "I guess."

"Wow. Hold on, wow. I'm pretty sure you're sick."

Elsa shook her head and began turning towards the hallway. "All right, fine, forg—"

"Woah, no, no, no, nuh-uh, you're not turning around." Nani's voice lassoed Elsa towards her. "What did you have in mind, anyway?"

"I—I don't know, just, something that involves some sort of human interaction with someone who isn't my professor, I guess? A bar? Food? ...Laser tag?"

"Laser tag? How long have you been in your room? It's two thousand—"

"Yeah, I know the year. And date. And time, and what I do know is that it's been like, three weeks since I've—"

"Okay, okay. Well, let me just finishing reading this chapter and we'll go, uh, laser tagging. And then we could stop by the theater and check out that new Pulp Fiction movie and play some SNES games."
"Fuck off, it was just a suggestion." Elsa smiled. *Shit, when was the last time you smiled?* "I'm up for anything, and I'm driving. And paying." Elsa tapped the pocket of her jeans where she normally kept her wallet. If there was any benefit of all of her recent lack of human contact and venturing out of her own room, it was the small boost of her financial state.

"Well, you're a generous date. Almost raises the question of why someone like you is single, huh?"

_Goddamn, if only you knew._

"Hey, hey, take this upcoming right," Nani said, tapping on the dashboard.

"What?"

Nani turned the music down, repeating herself. _Aw, but I liked that song._

"Why? The res—"

"Just do it."

"Holy shit, are you going to kidnap me? Could you at least wait until after finals?"

"Elsa, we're roommates. How the—hurry up, it's coming up."

Elsa took the turn, off of the main road into a less maintained road, the asphalt cracked and crumbling along the edges of the narrow road. Even the slight moonlight that bathed the earth was swallowed up by the thick vegetation looming over the road, worrying Elsa as her headlights weren't strong enough to illuminate more than a few yards in front of her car. *Okay, cool, you're going to die. That's fine, at least you remembered the turn the oven off this time.*

"Take the...second? No, third left. Third."

"Oh my God, you better know where the hell you're going." Even with her hostile tone, Nani's presence eased Elsa at least somewhat.

"I do. It's this one coming up."

After a few more directions from Nani, and Elsa reluctantly obeying under a paranoid parasite in her brain that warned her that if she didn't comply, she'd end up dead by the end of the night, the two girls arrived at a clearing on a hill.

"Where are we?"

Nani stayed silent and exited the car, walking up to the highest point of the hill as if it called for her.

Elsa followed her. Despite incremental littering that occasionally jarred from the grass, the clearing was mostly untouched by the dirtied hands of humans, offering a view of the town from above where all of the establishments and homes twinkled like candles, infrequently extinguishing in the night breeze. A barely visible tint of purple stretched along the atmosphere, the last gesture from the sun before it tucked itself into the crust of the horizon and left civilization to sleep. Even the wildlife appeared to enjoy the view, a curiously nocturnal squirrel shuffling across a tree branch and stopping to gaze off into the distance.
There was something profound about it, exponentially so as Elsa hadn't seen much beyond the view her window offer for the past few weeks, or the glimpse of scenery she got form her drives to class, and yet Elsa had trouble comprehending whatever beauty or epiphany Nani was trying to share with her. Her mind was a steel trap refusing to release Anna from her thoughts.

"I took you up here to murder you."

"Huh?"

"You're an idiot."

"Wait, what? I'm sorry, I was too busy, uh—"

"It's beautiful, right? I mean, if it weren't for school crushing the soul out of me, I'd probably have enough energy to have an existential crisis up here." Nani sat down on the grass, Elsa following her actions.

This is actually comfy as fuck. "Yeah. I see our apartment."

"No, you don't. We live back there," Nani said, gesturing her thumb behind them.

"Well, I see Delle." And Anna's there, somewhere.

"Every time my little sister visits, I bring her up here," Nani said, relaxing her post.

"We just sit here, and talk for hours."

Elsa nodded. Even if she couldn't tell Nani, even the mention of younger sisters settled her deeper into her depression, and never failed to make her feel like a creep. See, other people don't try to corrupt their younger sisters, they just fucking talk to them.

The few bugs that showed up this early in the spring conversed with each other, cluttering the air with their territorial and mating calls. Somehow, it placated Elsa's somber mood.

"The walls are thin," Nani said, breaking the peace.

Elsa's chest tightened. Fuck.

"What?" Elsa asked, direly hoping she misheard her.

"I've told you that. They're thin, back at the apartment."

Elsa phased through stages of grief fast in an instant. If Nani was going to talk about what Elsa hoped she'd never have to talk about again, she promptly accepted the death of their relationship. "Yeah?"

"Yeah, it's—I try not to listen in, but it's hard to ignore sometimes."

Elsa stayed quiet, a pathetic tactic in a bid to save face.

"I don't know what went on between you and your sister. And it's not my business."

Elsa still remained silent.

"But if what's bugging you is what I think it is—I mean, you haven't seemed to talk to anyone in the past few weeks, from what I've seen. And if her absence is any indication, you—I don't want
you to think I'm going to judge you."

Elsa teared up, turning her head away in hopes Nani wouldn't see. "You don't know what's going on between us."

"The last thing I want to do, honestly, is make any sort of accusation about you two. But, I've heard...stuff."

"Stuff?"

Nani exhaled, straightening her spine. "I'm not going to judge you. It's not my place to judge you."

_Fuck it._ "Why the fuck not, then?" Elsa groaned, facing Nani. "You have a younger sister yourself, how do you not think I'm sick and messed up?"

"Because, from what I heard, she loves you, too. I don't understand it, I don't understand why the hell you'd ever pursue her like that but—you lost your sister, didn't you?"

Elsa hid her face behind her hands, sulking. "Yeah," she breathed through the slivers between her hands.

"No matter what kind of relationship you had with her, I can't ever imagine how painful that must be."

"It's all my fucking fault, too."

"What did you do?"

"I made her think she loved me. She didn't, I was just a stupid creep who couldn't keep my mouth shut." _Literally._ Elsa cringed at the memory of Anna's introduction to Elsa's intimate feeling towards her.

"She loves you, Elsa."

Elsa shook her head.

"Maybe she doesn't love you like that, but she _loves_ you."

"If she's lucky, she'll never have to see my face for the rest of her life."

"I bet she misses you, honestly."

"I don't think she does. If she knows what's good for her, she doesn't," Elsa said, calming down. She brushed the dirt off of her elbows, scowling. "How could I ever forgive myself for what I did to her? How can I ever recover? It's hard enough getting over someone you love, but what do you do when it's your own _sister_? What do you do when people keep reminding you almost every Goddamn day about her, about how they ran into her earlier, asking about her—what the hell am I supposed to say? We had a falling out?"

"I don't know."

"I'm never going to find someone like her, who loves me like she did. Literally, never, because how often do you get unconditional love from your own partner? I thought I had security with her. I never thought a relationship would her could be so delicately frayed. I can't even talk to her. I traumatized her for life."
"I can't tell you any magic words that'll make you feel better, but don't ever think you're not worthy of love, because you are."

"It fucking hurts," Elsa squealed between tears. "It fucking hurts, and I miss her."

Nani put an arm around Elsa, who immediately accepted it and buried her face into her shoulder, muffling sobs. Even with her hands growing cold, Nani didn't seem to mind holding them.

With the night and Nani's arms swallowing her away from her realities, Elsa drifted into a daze. Soothing words fell from Nani's lips, but they didn't register beyond her eardrums. For now, it stopped hurting, even if only a little.
Anna Begins

*Well, that didn't suck so bad.* The fresh air sliding between the front doors of the classroom hall whistled a faint tune of freedom in Elsa's ears. The relief of finishing her exams lingered in a satisfied smile—it was rare for anything to lift her out of the constant sorrow recently plaguing her. Walking to the parking lot, anything she tuned out in her normal post-class trance was now sentimentally dismissed, the chirping of birds, the desire path she followed to the lot, even the gas line markings in chalk on the worn-out footpath. She was done. School was over. Hell was over, and now she had a few blissful weeks of relaxing to look forward to before finding a promising internship in which to waste away.

Students equally as excited passed her, ignoring her as usual, still faceless silhouettes to Elsa who never paid any mind to her surroundings. A familiar figure, however—bulky, ambling—glinted in her peripheral.

*Kristoff? The fuck? And—Sven?* With Anna out of her life, the bite of jealousy was gone. In fact, the fact she ever held any jealousy towards him almost brought her out of her fledgling happiness. Kristoff acknowledged her with eye contact and an uncommitted head nod. Sven squinted at her, as if to wonder if he knew her from somewhere.

"Uh, hey," Elsa said, her voice raspy from lack of use.

"Oh—uh, hey, Elsa, uhm—yeah, hey." Kristoff stopped. It wasn't until Sven tried pulling Sven away, unaware that he had stopped, that Elsa realized they were holding hands. *Well, holy shit.*

Elsa cleared her throat. "Oh, you guys are—"

"Yeah, we—"

"You guys are fags, huh?" Elsa hoped her smile would erase any evidence of hostility in her voice.

"Well, he is," Kristoff said, nudging his companion. "I'm a half-fag. And hey, wait, aren't you a fag too?"

"I am, I am. Very—very much so." *Don't think about her, for God's sake.* Even if Anna was a constant in her conscious, bringing her to the front of her mind always shattered her mood. It was distractions, not rationalizing that would help her get over Anna.

Sven mumbled something.

"What?" Kristoff asked.

"I said, I'm not gay."

"You could have fooled me."

"Well, hey, glad you found someone to put up with you and your, uh, gas."

"Yeah, sorry it couldn't be your sister, but that was my fault."

"Are you serious? I'm right here," Sven grunted.
"What? Her sister's hot." Kristoff shook his head and shrugged. "Men, huh?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Well, hey, where even is Anna, anyway?"

"Hell if I know, honestly."

"Aren't you supposed to be her sister?"

"I'm not supposed to be, I am. Kind of a title I can't really shake." Elsa curled her lower lip below her teeth.

"If you see her, tell her to text me, or whatever. I kind of feel like an ass for the way things left off." Sven looked at Kristoff in offended injustice.

"Look, I'll be honest. I don't talk to her anymore, and she doesn't talk to me. Just—family shit, you know? And as far as I know, she's transferring next semester, anyway." Elsa prepared herself for a barrage of follow-up questions capable of causing her to break down.

"Oh. That sucks." Elsa was relieved at his lack of questions, yet strangely disappointed.

"No, it's fine. I'm sorry for—it's fine. Nothing against her, she's a good kid. It's my fault."

"Well, uh—hey, if you ever want to hang out, have a few beers, uh, watch Sven get wasted and do his animal impressions, you're more than welcome to."

Elsa had made small steps in establishing a closer friendship with Nani, which brought tremendous improvement on her mental health. A night out with Kristoff would be healthier than another night spent in her room, even a night with another human scorned by the love of the same girl.

"Yeah. I'd like that. I'm staying here for the summer, anyway."

"Hell, Hans is holding another party. An end of the year one."

Elsa flashed a smile. "Sounds good."

*Getting drunk surrounded by people I possibly don't hate. Can't really beat that.*

"I have no fucking clue how you were able to impersonate a reindeer. But, Goddamn, that's a reindeer if I ever heard one," Kristoff raved, rubbing his drunk boyfriend's back.

"I don't know, I thought yours was pretty good," Elsa added, elbowing Kristoff.

"I didn't even do one."

"I know."

"Yeah, yeah, all right. I'm getting another round. Who wants another beer?"

"I do." Elsa tugged at Kristoff's shirt as he stood from the couch.

Students celebrated freedom with intoxication and ignorance towards the future, as though all of their hardships had been conquered for the rest of their lives, dotting Elsa's shaky vision and sliding
through her ears with conversations whose subject matters, predictably, consisted of food, sex, and bragging rights over whatever internship they had landed, thanks to their dad's connections.

Elsa threw back her head and closed her eyes once Kristoff left for the kitchen. The smell of beer and the commotion of inebriated human interaction reminisced of the last party she attended, arguably the scene of her first kiss with Anna. With every ounce of alcohol she consumed, it abated the pain of Anna's absence and soothed her troubled mind. Sharp pain subdued to dull aches —she hoped the time spent in agony over Anna would not sum to wasted time in her life. Fleeting ignorance turned temporary bliss was the only salvation left for her in the foreseeable future. It was only in these moments, soaked in something close to oblivion that she found any peace of mind.

A finger tapped on her shoulder. "Beer," Kristoff stated, shoving the bottle to her.

"Oh, t-thanks." Elsa's hands stumbled over the bottle until establishing a full grip.

"Who has the bottle opener?"

"It's a twist-off, retard." Kristoff grabbed her beer and twisted the cap off.

"Shut up," Elsa mumbled, taking that wonderful first sip.

"Hey," Kristoff whispered, still audible despite the several conversations that hung in the semi-busy room. "Dude, your sister..."

"Yeah, like I said, it's cool." Elsa hid her face behind the bottle.

"What happened, though? I don't know, you two seemed so tight. And she's totally fucking into you, y'know?"

"In—into me?"

"Wrong word, I don't know. She adores you, you know? Fuck, I can't words. I'm drunk. No I'm not. Am I?" Kristoff looked concerned over the unsure state of his inebriation.

Elsa shrugged. "I fucked up."

"I can't believe two sisters would just stop talking like that. That's messed up."

"I really don't want to talk about it."

"Okay, okay. I'll drop it, drink your fucking beer." Kristoff pushed Elsa's hand, spilling a few drops of beer on her jeans.

"The hell? "

"Sorry."

Before Elsa could scold him, looking past Kristoff, she saw a familiar girl standing in the corner of the room, engaged in conversation with another woman. Shit, I forgot she was Hans' neighbor.

"Fuck, " she breathed.

"What?"

"Ugh, nothing." Elsa fantasized standing from her spot, reaching her hands out and freezing that bitch's heart in the middle of the party. Her act of cold-heartedness would don her as a hero,
receiving a hail of praise from all of the other party goers, as if each individual in the room was wronged by Alice as well.

"What are you looking at?" Kristoff turned his head around to find whatever Elsa sneered at. "One of those girls?"

Elsa sighed, tracing the top of the bottle with her finger. "The blonde."

"What about her?"

Elsa shrugged, staring at the bottle rim.

"Did you date her or something? Kinda hard to—"

"Kinda. In a way."

Kristoff gave Elsa that half-lidded, determined gaze drunk people try to pull off.

"What'd she do to ya, Elsa?"

"She's—I don't know, kind of one of the reasons Anna and I don't talk."

"And who's—who's that girl she's talking to?"

"I don't know. This is sort of an uncom—"

"You hate her?"

Elsa paused, tugging her hair down. "Yeah."

"She wronged you?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Okay, okay." Kristoff sat up, stumbling a bit before regaining equilibrium. "Wait here."

"The hell are you doing?" Kristoff ambled towards Alice and the other woman. Alice's gaze immediately targeted Kristoff, making Elsa wonder if she had been spying on their side of the room the entire time, expecting initiation of any sort from Elsa. "Holy shit, Kristoff, sit down." Her words drowned in the music and boisterous wailing of a drunk party-goer. "God."

She watched as Kristoff interrupted Alice's conversation, talking for a few moments before the other woman walked away with what Elsa deciphered as a look of disgust. Alice looked at Elsa, glaring, and left Kristoff to storm off into another room.

"Jesus Christ, what did you say to her?" Elsa asked Kristoff once he returned, anxious yet unexpectedly amused.

"I told her, uhh, 'if you decide to keep the baby, I completely support your decision and will always love you.' Some shit like that. The other girl looked pissed."

"Oh my God. That's going to come back to bite me in the ass." In spite of the threat, Elsa couldn't help but find the entire situation hilarious. "Why the heck did you even do that? I can fight my own fights."

"I don't know, you're—you're uh, sad? I thought you could use some cheering up, or—or
"It was pretty funny," Elsa smiled, placing the half-empty bottle on a clearing in the table in front of her. "You saved that poor girl."

"A female cockblock."

"Clitorference."

"Okay, that's disgusting."

"And cockblock isn—" Elsa's phone buzzed. "Oh God, I have a feeling that's her."

She checked her phone.

"You're an asshole," the text read.

"Is it her?"

Elsa showed her screen, hands trembling, to Kristoff, nearly whacking him in his above-average nose. "Yeah."

"W—wow, she's pretty uh, mad. How did she even know I knew you?"

"Because she's smart. She's an ass, but she's smart."

"I'm sorry, I didn—"

"Don't apologize," Elsa interrupted, putting her phone back. "She deserves this shit."

"And you deserve better than her. She seems like a bitch, anyway."

Elsa hid her mouth behind cupped hands. "I do, right?"

"Of—of fuckin' course you do."

Elsa's eyes watered, as any sentiment directed towards her was enough to overwhelm her, especially with her consciousness tainted by the suggestiveness of alcohol. "Thank you."

---

Elsa's ceiling was a charted map of nights she spent up, awake, staring at all of the cracks and imperfections in the paint when her mind was occupied with her sister.

She discovered the smudge on the far right of her ceiling a few weeks ago when her thoughts processed old conversations and deconstructed every word and facial tic Anna used, as they had the night before that day.

Now, her ceiling was lonely of her gaze. In fact, the last few nights she had fallen asleep almost the moment her head hit that pillow. The only reason her eyes raked its surface on this particular night was because Elsa stayed up into the night worrying about the internship she had just applied for, ten miles out of Dellie at a prestigious research institute. A paid internship. She thought about how a bulk of her troubles and a world of opportunity was seemingly less unobtainable than she previously perceived it to be. She could make something of herself, for once. She could move out, start her job, and even find love with someone else and leave the life she had decayed in for the
past 22 years behind her.

She smiled to herself. It was unheard of for her own thoughts to surrender a smile on her face.

Her phone went off, startling her. For a moment, she was scared it was Alice calling to tell her off for what Kristoff did last week, but the default tone meant it was a number not registered in her phone. Her hands fumbled on her night stand, grabbing the phone and pulling it up to her face.

*Oh fuck, I know that number.* Elsa's thoughts crumbled to her throat and the air around became thick, her breath pushing through an atmosphere as thick as molasses. The moment between her finger pressing the green button and her hands bringing the phone up to her ear lasted an eternity.

"H—hey."

"Oh, Elsa. I didn't think you'd pick up."

"Why wouldn't I?" Elsa choked up, fighting her composure steady.

"I don't know."

There was a silence. "Why'd you call me, Anna?"

"I don't know."

Well, fuck, then couldn't you just leave me alone? I was doing so well. That voice, even compressed to a scratchy signal transmitted through her phone, undid months of efforts to get over her. *I can't believe I'm this fucking weak.* "I don't know if I can talk to you."

"Why not? Are you b—"

"You fucking know why," Elsa said, voice trembling.

"I'm sorry. That's why I called, I guess. I don't want to do this anymore. I hate it. I really, really hate this."

"What?"

"I hate having to pretend I don't have a sister. A sister who I love. I hate this. And I know it's late—but I can't sleep anymore. I haven't gotten a good night sleep in weeks."

Elsa stayed silent, hoping Anna would keep talking.

"I miss you," Anna said. Elsa could hear she was starting to cry herself.

"Okay." Elsa couldn't bring herself to return any tenderness.

"The house is so empty without you. I hate walking by and seeing your room, knowing you're not in there."

"Yeah."

Anna paused. "Maybe calling was a bad idea."

"I'm trying to get *over* you. This is—this is counter-productive as shit, and—"

"I know, I know, you're right. I shouldn't ha—"
"But you can call me whenever you want," Elsa started, her voice barely comprehensible through her crying. "Because I'm your big sister, and I'm going to keep my promise of always being here for you."

Anna sniffed. "Really?"

"Of course."

"Thank you." Anna paused again. "I love you."

Yeah, but in what way? "You're welcome."

"Uh, I guess—I guess I'll call again later—if that's okay?"

"I guess."

"Okay. Uh, thanks. Bye."

Elsa broke down. She curled into herself, corrupting her loud sobs with the fabric of her shirt, the room closing in, and she was certain the world was judging her for her decision to hold her sister's mental health above hers. She didn't have any intentions of winning Anna back. But now, the only thing more painful than her own suffering, was the thought of her little sister suffering.

She charted new territory on her ceiling that night.
"I know how to get there."

"N—no, you sure? I mean, you've never really been all that big on cities, and you have the worst sense of direction, and—"

"I'm looking at it right now, you dolt." Elsa stepped out of the way of the pedestrians strolling past, staring up at the concrete prison that Anna now inhabited. "Historical" refurbishment or not, even the clean uptake of the building couldn't mask the depressing realities of college dorms.

Anna said something into the phone, but a car honking, followed by a man yelling behind her, obstructed her voice.

"What?"

"I'm...stay...soon."

"Literally what? It's too loud. I can't he—oh."

Ah, Christ, she's still gorgeous. Elsa ended the call, awkward fumbling around her pockets ensuing once she caught sight of her sister, smiling in front of her and holding the door open as if Elsa was royalty. But she wasn't, she was her sister, almost qualifying as estranged as it had been months since they've met eyes.

Elsa remembered the promise she made to herself. Anna was a friend—not food.

"Well, good to see art school hasn't beaten the manners out of you."

"Why would it?"

Elsa shrugged and entered the dorm, and a chill of jealousy took over. For a college dorm, the interior was, well, pleasing to the eye, clean, well-decorated with art created only by the most talented pool of students this school had to offer. Even the few students lounging around the lobby looked happy, rather than bearing the defeated, "I'm actually dead inside" look Elsa was so used to sharing with her peers.

"I'm—I'm uh, just expecting you to turn into one of those 'I'm better than you' hipsters. You know, the type that really only gives a shit about themselves?"

"No. Well, not yet at least." Anna greeted a boy seated on one of the couches that could easily be
mistaken for an art installation. *Holy fuck that looks really comfy.* "I figure I'll hit that stage once I hit my junior year and start smoking filtered cigarettes."

"Jesus, nevermind. You don't even know what a hipster is."

Small talk exchanged on the way to Anna's dorm room held almost no quality to Elsa, except for hearing Anna's voice in person after so many weeks of phone and Skype calls. Granted, she hung onto Anna's every word as always, but her mind occupied itself with obsessive renderings of situations that could play out once they were alone, for once, and Elsa could formally apologize for her prior behavior, for the months of near-manipulation and the no doubt trauma she inflicted upon her dear younger sister.

She was a changed person, she had told herself—daily—repeatedly. Anna was not a temptation anymore, she was a family member who deserved peace of mind and clarification that Elsa's behavior was never a reflection on her character, but Elsa's disturbed conscious. And, at the very least, she needed to be told this in person, rather than over the crackling of a phone call.

"So, yeah, the rooms are a lot bigger here—actually, we get our own *bathroom* in our dorm room."

Elsa was in such a trance she hadn't even noticed she was already in Anna's dorm.

It was bigger, and comparably nicer than her old dorm room, almost nicer than her apartment bedroom. But details hit her mind and reflected off as soon as her glance left the interior and focused on her sister, talking on about how much she enjoyed her new life in art school and the city.

"Well, uh, I'm glad you found your place here."

"Oh, thanks, and yeah, I really did—I mean, *I really* did, it's fantastic, and the people are fantastic. My roommate is really cool, and she's kind of like me in some ways, and her boyfriend is around a lot, and he's cool. And uh—she's a really good painter, too—everyone's really good here, obviously, but—" Anna took a deep breath and held her hands together. "It's fun."

Elsa looked at Anna, as if a pensive stare would make an apology easier. But apologies were easier on paper. They were easier recited in a bedroom, where pauses didn't last an eternity and the only eye contact she made was with her own eyes, occasionally glancing in the mirror to assure herself she hadn't lost the proud composure she pictured herself with as she presented an apology to save face and free her minds of hauntings.

"I'm sorry." She wasn't sure *what* she was sorry for anymore. In fact, she was terrible with apologies—she was terrible with expressing her emotions with words in general.

Growing up, despite her parents' openness and tolerance towards her odd self, Elsa learned to season dinner conversations with false positivity, feigning joy to ease suspicions when depressing thoughts flared up in her life. Of course, her parents would comfort her in the times it got too hard to hide, especially when her powers had gotten the best of her mentality, but Elsa's real feelings mostly remained unspoken. And after her parent's passing, when her mental state *was* too difficult to hide, a sulking caliber was enough to keep her aunt and uncle at bay. Years of emotional debt, however, surrendered her silent after her short apology.

"It's okay."

That wasn't the answer she expected from Anna. Elsa half-hoped Anna would insist she did nothing wrong, yet her acceptance of her apology only tipped Elsa off on how selfish her intentions
were to begin with. She was really sorry, to some degree—but part of her wanted to hear validation from Anna that she wasn't the fuck up.

"You know what I'm apologizing for?" Elsa eased onto Anna's bed.

"Well—I—I don't really want to make assumptions, but—"

"I guess—" Elsa cut her sister off, sensing a discomfort in her voice and fidgeting position. "I'm sorry for—everything? Cutting you out, telling you I hated you, which isn't true—at all—and...forcing you into shit you never really wanted in the first place." Elsa retracted her stiff pose, feeling as physically vulnerable as she did emotionally. Of course she would never expect any sort of physical backlash from her sister, but her insecurities bloomed any time she showed any sort of emotional weakness.

"Yeah." Anna paused. "It's okay, like I said. I—thanks. For uh, saying you're sorry. Really, I'm not mad anymore. If I were, I wouldn't have talked to you again."

"I'm over it. You. I swear I am. Not that—you're easy to get over, but—I promise, I don't have any sort of weird intentions or whatever."

"Look, seriously, it's fine. I trust you."

Fuck, no one's ever said that to me.

"All right. I'm s—yeah, I, uh, okay." Oh, God, why do you have to make everything awkward?

Elsa's phone vibrated. "Oh, shit," she said, startled.

"What?"

"Who? Alice?"

"Hey, fuckface, when you're done getting mugged in the city, I got the new MGS game if you wanna come over and watch Sven stare at Snake's ass while you play."

"Oh. You don't talk to her anymore?"

"Not in months," Elsa said, putting her phone back. "I don't know what happened to her. Last I heard, her dissertation was well-received by her professors and she got an internship somewhere fancy."

"Just like you did, huh?"

Elsa shrugged, face flushing pink. "Yeah. I guess—I guess Delle Institute is a pretty fancy."

"Wait, then who texted you?"

"Kristoff."

"Right, right, I forgot you have friends now. It's weird seeing you go out and have a social life, for the first time since, like, high school."

"Are you sure you're cool with me hanging out with Kristoff? After the shit he pulled on you?"
"It's fine," Anna shrugged.

"I brought it up once and told him he was an asshole. He said he was an idiot and that he's sorry he did it. I still punch him every chance I get, though, to remind him how much of a douche he is."

"That's—that's more than I could ask for, honestly."

"Oh, and—I'm sorry I didn't come home for the summer," Elsa added.

"It's fine. Though, honestly, I wish you did. Kai and Gerda hate me now."

"Wait, what? What the fuck? Why? She's the perfect niece to them, what the hell could she do?"

"They were, like, bitching about how you didn't come home, and I snapped at them. All right, I guess they don't hate me, b—"

"They were bitching about me?"

"Yeah, how ungrateful you were. I finally lost it and told them it's probably their fault for treating you like shit all the time, and they got mad at me. I've never seen them that pissed off at anyone that wasn't—well, you, no offense."

"Oh, shit." Elsa tried to hide her joy towards this new development. "I'm sorry."

"Whatever, they'll get over it. I can't blame you, though. They're assholes towards you."

"That's not exactly why I didn't come ho—"

"I know." Anna assured. "But—it's fine. You needed to start your job, anyway."

Elsa nodded. "Yup."

Anna sat next to Elsa, close enough to her sister that her hand brushed hers. "Yeah, it's fine," she restated.

"Still wearing your hair down?" Elsa said, effortlessly tugging on a stray strand of Anna's hair.

"Oh, yeah."

"I like it, even if you look like a Powerpuff Girl. Uh, whichever the redhead was."

"Blossom?"

"Yeah, her."

Anna sighed. "So, hey, Elsa..."

Her stern tone shook Elsa. She had hoped the serious talking had subsided, almost relieved that their relationship had been cleared and reset, even into standard platonic sibling status. "What?"

"I really need to know that we're okay, all right? I'm anxious all the time that I'm just going to wind up hurting you, like I always do, without even trying. I just need to know that I'm finally getting the big sister I always wanted, and—"

"I promise you, I'm not in love with you anymore." Saying it out loud was liberating.
"She wasn't. She didn't get that feeling in her stomach anymore when she made eye contact with Anna, nor the questionable urges that mutinied with every touch, accidental or intentional. It was boring— but freeing.

"Good." Anna's voice held no enthusiasm. She grabbed Elsa's hand, massaging her fingers and placating Elsa's adrenaline.

"What are you doing?"

"How have your powers been? You don't feel cold."

"I haven't even tried them in months. For all I know, they're gone." They weren't. They had flared up until a few weeks ago, when her feelings for Anna finally started to wane— again.

"Oh."

Anna didn't stop, her massaging slowly degrading into soft, cyclical rubs around her fingers, reviving old sensations in Elsa she had almost successfully repressed.

Fuck.

"I'm probably not in love with you anymore," Elsa whimpered, regretting it instantly.

You idiot. Elsa cringed and shut her eyes, no desire to see whatever reaction Anna had to her unsettling outburst.

Anna brought her face closer to Elsa, breath traversing across her nose. The warmth brushing across her face fluctuated affections Elsa had pushed down for months now, faltering between wanting to kiss her sister, and a new-woven desire to push her off in a sort of self-defense, almost disgusted at how much Anna was invading her personal space.

"Really?" Anna whispered, millimeters from Elsa's face.

"God, what the fuck?" Elsa slid away from Anna. "Didn't you just say you wanted me to be a sister to you?"

Anna started laughing. She was fucking laughing at Elsa's frustration and humiliation, cupping her hands over her face.

"Seriously? This shit's funny to you?"

"No," Anna said, calming herself down. "It's not funny at all."

"Then why are you fucking laughing?"

"Because I'm just as fucked up as you, Elsa," Anna said, small chuckles escaping in bursts.

"No, no you're not?"

"Yes, I am. God, I want you to be a big sister to me—but part of me misses it. I don't know what it was, feeling wanted—or feeling wanted by you— but, crap, I miss it."

"That makes you laugh?" I'm so fucking confused.
"I don't know, it's—it's kind of funny, it's like self-deprecatingly funny." Anna paused and collected herself more. "I'm sorry, I'm not laughing at you. It's not funny."

"It is. It's a hilarious situation," Elsa said, stoic.

"I'm sorry." Anna paused again. "You're not the only one who was fucked up by our parents' death."

"Well, one of us could have become Batman." Elsa rarely joked about her parents' death, drawing out a shocked look on Anna's face. "Naw, but we ended up like this. You know, I'm sure lots of kids turned to incest once orphaned." Somehow, joking about it didn't make the situation any lighter.

"God, what is wrong with us?"

Elsa shook her head, leaning forward. "So you miss it?"

"I don't know what I miss."

"Either way—I don't think it could work."

"Probably not."

"I'm a piece of shit, and you're not."

"That's not true," Anna said, sliding closer to Elsa.

"Which part?"

Anna thought for a moment. "Both, I guess."

"Oh."

"And—just a note, the whole self-loathing thing doesn't help."

"Yeah, I know." Elsa tilted her head down.

"You're not as bad of a person as you think you are. We're still young, we still have a lot of growing up to do—I mean, I'm nineteen now, and you're almost twenty-three. Maybe there's a lot of maturity we haven't found yet, and maybe we'll never grow up.

But, I think, instead of focusing on the stuff that's wrong with us and admitting it as though it'll excuse from our faults, we should just, I don't know, try to actually be better." Anna bit her lip. "But, uh, screw that, it's just easier to pretend as though we'll just get better on our without doing anything about it."

Elsa nodded, preparing herself for a self-induced guilt trip. But it's for the best, right?

"I probably should start by telling you that you never deserved anything I put you through, and I probably should have never told you how I felt in the first place."

"I don't know, I'm glad you told me. I just wish you didn't—like, making out with your sister's neck is probably up there with some of the weirdest crap you could ever do expecting some sort of
"Yeah. It was retarded."

Anna leaned her head on Elsa's shoulder. Elsa concentrated on hard on keeping her heart beat at a manageable level, afraid Anna could sense its rapid rhythm, but she had yet to master her sympathetic nervous system.

"I think I know what I missed the most, though."

"What?"

Anna kissed Elsa's neck, softly, short, yet with enough pressure to reveal her intention.

Maybe it couldn't work. Maybe the physical distance would be too much, maybe emotional distress had taken a toll on both of them, possibly breaking them, and maybe Elsa would never be what Anna deserved.

But the absolutes reigned over the maybes. Elsa absolutely loved Anna, and Anna absolutely loved Elsa.

And for now, that was enough.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!