Love Shack

by mallstars

Summary

She knows things will be different in a big city. She will no longer be the only one that doesn’t fit into the cookie cutter standards most people in her home town seem to have no issues squeezing themselves into. She will meet people like her, and she will meet people nothing like her, or her family, or anyone she knows. She's ready to meet people so different, unique, and colourful that her own character pales in comparison. She’s ready to step it up and make sure she doesn’t pale in comparison for too long.

Notes

hello friends, i literally haven't written fanfiction ever except for that one twilight fanfic I wrote eleven years ago when I was 14 and thought kristen stewart was a revelation (i still think that).

i'm gonna update regularly, once a week probbaly!

english isn't my first language, but i like to think i'm doing okay. if you think this is a rocky read, please let me know and i'll find a beta.

i hope you enjoy! <3
“Sorry, I’m sorry!” Trixie apologizes for what feels like the hundredth time today, struggling to
manhandle her suitcase off the man’s foot it’s currently crushing. The man is wearing ugly mud-
coloured saddle shoes, has his legs sprawled out over the floor space that Trixie with her two big
suitcases obviously needs, and Trixie isn’t truly sorry at all. The man pulls his legs closer to his
body with a pained expression on his face and Trixie hopes he has learned his lesson.

Trixie is exhausted. Exhausted from waking up in the middle of the night to get to Mitchell Airport
in Milwaukee to catch a too-early flight to Boston. Exhausted from dragging around her suitcases,
both of them battered and impractical, one of them with a broken wheel. Exhausted from days of
packing and repacking her belongings, fretting over every piece of clothing she decided to leave
behind. She knows she doesn’t need her costume she wore for their High School production of
Rocky Horror years ago, but that doesn’t mean she has an easy time leaving it behind. She knows
she doesn’t need the pastel green wig she wore to three different Halloween parties, but maybe
there are more Halloween parties to come and she’ll regret her decision to leave it behind in
favour of fitting her winter coat.

As excited as she is to start her new life in Boston – and she is beyond excited – dragging herself
through a crowded noisy airport in the early morning, tired and stressed, she has a hard time not
feeling anxious about her current situation. She is nervous and restless throughout the next two
ours of queuing and overpriced smoothies, and then she’s finally on the plane – the right plane
nonetheless – and watches Wisconsin fade smaller and smaller in the distance. Before she has the
time to bid a melancholic farewell to the tiny farms, trees, and roads, Wisconsin gets swallowed by
puffy late summer clouds and is gone.

Trixie lets herself drop back in her seat, letting out a long breath that she feels she has been holding
for hours. She pulls a thin blanket out of her back and around her shoulders, lets her eyes drift over
the manuals of safety instructions clipped to the seat in front of her, and settles into a long flight.

She finally did it. She finally left. She’s finally starting college. At the age of 23.

Five years ago, when she just finished High School, Trixie didn’t know what she wanted to do with
her life. It wasn’t that nothing excited her – she had always had a hard time relating to her many
class mates who could just never get excited over anything, who seemed unimpressed with
whatever life had to offer them. Trixie was prone to having the opposite problem: too many things
excited her. She wanted to be a singer. She wanted to be a conductor. She wanted to work with
children and teach them how to read and write and make music, she wanted to be a hair dresser, a
fashion designer, a makeup artist, an interior designer, any kind of designer, a journalist, a doctor, a
chef, and even, briefly, a botanist. She felt overwhelmed. She spent countless hours mulling over
the possibilities while working her job as a receptionist at a hotel near her school, a job she had
gotten as a junior in High School. The weeks had turned into months and she had found herself still
working her receptionist’s job, thinking less and less about her future and getting more and more
used to the idea of staying here. Helping customers, preparing the breakfast room, taking phone
calls, reading magazines at her desk.

It wasn’t that life in Wisconsin was bad. Well, it had been, for a while when she was a child, but
her mom had separated from her stepfather years ago and things had slowly, gradually gotten
better. Towards the end of High School, things had been exciting, actually. She had been in love
for the first time, and if she was honest with herself maybe that had a little to do with her hesitance
to move away for college. But things hadn’t worked out between her and Shea, of course not, how
could they have when Trixie had struggled so much with herself and her sexuality, wanted to keep things between them covert long enough for Shea to run out of patience and eventually disappear out of Trixie’s life and out of Wisconsin.

Now, however, things are different. Trixie is no longer a scared and confused 17 – year – old; she loves girls and she loves that she loves girls, and everybody in Boston would just have to deal. She knows things will be different in a big city anyway, she will no longer be the only one that doesn’t fit into the cookie cutter standards most people in her home town seem to have no issues squeezing themselves into. She will meet people like her, and she will meet people nothing like her, or her family, or anyone she knows. She’s ready to meet people so different, unique, and colourful that her own character pales in comparison. She’s ready to step it up and make sure she doesn’t pale in comparison for too long.

There are so many things Trixie wants to do differently in her new life in Boston. This scares her, a little. For years the thought of moving away and flipping her whole life upside down had been a calming and reassuring – if at times unrealistic – thought. It didn’t matter that what Trixie was doing with her life wasn’t fulfilling when she knew she would get her true life started soon enough. Dreaming about the future has always been a way to tolerate and justify the present. Now that she’s actually making the next step, she’s scared things are going to be just more of the same and her fantasies of a better future are going to be exposed as a lie, forcing her to get comfortable with a present she can’t accept as anything more than temporary.

Trixie takes another deep breath and forces that thought out of her mind. No use in stressing out about this before she even lands. To calm herself, she puts on her pink headphones and listens to some of her favourite country artists glorifying life in the country, a country that she’s currently flying away from at a speed of 600 mph. She takes out her notebook and tries to come up with song lyrics; writing her own music often calms her down, but she can’t think of anything and instead just scribbles flowers into the corner of a page. Writing music. Yet another thing Trixie wants to do with her life but almost never does.

Out of the many things Trixie wants to go to college for, she finally settled on Early Childhood Education a couple of months ago. If she had her way, she’d be off to the West Coast by now, for a life of lying on the beach and eating Frozen Yoghurt – while also going to her classes, probably, sometimes – but the college she got into is Boston University, and she decided she loves Boston the second she got the letter, loves Boston even though she has never been there. She found a room in student housing, made all the decisions she had put off the for the past five years, and is about to start classes in only two days. More things had moved in her life in the past three months than in the five years before that. The feeling of accomplishment she gets from this almost makes up for the awful morning she’s had. She scribbles a little sun on the middle of the mostly empty page in front of her and spends the rest of the flight in a state of nervous excitement. She is ready. Bring it.

♥♥♥

After what feels like an eternity, Trixie is finally standing in front of her apartment that she’ll be sharing with another girl. This is probably going to be awful, Trixie thinks, but there was no way she could afford a place on her own. She nervously pulls her little mirror out of her bag to check her reflection one last time before meeting her new roommate. It’s an important moment, after all, and Trixie is nothing if not a little vain. Her pink lipstick has long since faded, is now stuck to empty smoothie cups and airport napkins, and she didn’t really have the time to put on more than some mascara this morning. Her hair is flat and looks exactly like she spent her day on an airplane, and her yellow dress is looking more like i-picked-this-because-I-wanted-to-be-as-comfy-as-possible-on-the-plane than pretty. Oh well. It is either this or changing and fixing her makeup in the dimly – lit hallway, and she is not that desperate. For all she knows her roommate spent all day
in bed eating chips and wearing pyjamas. It’s a Saturday afternoon after all, and that’s how Trixie likes to spend her Saturdays.

She cautiously knocks on the door and only seconds later, a tall girl with pastel purple hair opens. She is dressed for whatever the opposite of a lazy day in bed is.

“You look exhausted. I made soup if you want some? I’m Kim. Hi,” she says, sounding nervous, and with a small lisp.

She’s a sight to be seen. She’s wearing more makeup than Trixie has ever seen on anyone, looking like she just came from a job as a living art installation in front of a makeup store. Trixie likes makeup, loves it even, but never wears a lot of it because she’s seen the way people at her home and at her old job look at her whenever she wears a little more, knows people think she’s being too much, that she’s only doing it to hide something, and she can’t really handle that, as much as she’d like to.

Kim, however, doesn’t seem to have any of these concerns. She’s wearing bright purple lipstick that matches her hair, a big white line under her eyes, at least three colours of sparkly eye shadow and a lot of fake eye lashes. Trixie stares at her for a second. She definitely is not in Wisconsin anymore.

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Half an hour later, Trixie and Kim sit in their room, eating Kim’s soup. It’s warm and tastes great, and the bowl is covered in pink polka dots. A roommate who can cook. That can only be helpful.

This is what Trixie has learned in the last half hour: 1) Kim is great; friendly, sarcastic, creative, non-threatening. 2) Trixie likes their room - which looks a lot like Kim, with pastel green walls, a lot of photos of high fashion makeup dos (and also cats. A lot of photos of cats. Maybe a little too many if Trixie is being honest), and very neat and organized. 3) To Trixie’s disbelief and horror, Kim studies business administration, but doesn’t seem to want to talk about this fact.

“So what do you study? I never asked you, sorry,” Kim says when Trixie is finishing her soup. Kim is sitting on her bed, facing Trixie, and applying silver nail polish to her toe nails. Trixie could swear she has never seen nail polish this shiny before.

“I’m doing Early Childhood Education,” Trixie answers, smiling, and is glad she can trace a sense of pride in her voice. She likes the sound of that. She’s finally going to do something she’s passionate about, how about that?

“Oh, cool, I have a friend who does that. Shangela?” Kim adds as a question, as if she is expecting Trixie to know this person. “She has a pretty cool job at a day care, she might be able to hook you up. Uh, if you need a job?”

Trixie smiles brightly. “Oh wow, that would be great! I’m definitely going to need a job. I thought about waitressing or something, but that would be so much cooler.” Trixie thinks about the times she’s helped out at the hotel’s restaurant, about impatient customers, a lot of running back and forth, and a lot of flirting with men to get enough tips to treat herself at the mall on the weekends. Yeah, she’d definitely appreciate not having to do that again, ever.

Kim stretches to reach her nightstand to get out a little box, then pulls out some sticker nail art and starts applying sparkly silver stars on top of her silver nail polish. It’s a lot. Trixie loves it.

“We’re hanging out tonight. Shangela and I. I’m at her place a lot, it’s the best.” Kim sounds genuinely excited and as much as Trixie already likes Kim, she’s a little relieved she’s going to
have the place for herself for tonight, to breathe and settle in.

“How so?”

“So she lives in this house that’s big and crazy, and she lives with a bunch of people and they’re all pretty great. Mostly art students. Well no, only two art students. Hang on.” She narrows her eyes and thinks for a second. “Three art students. There’s Katya and Sasha, and no, that’s only two. They are pretty loud, well, Katya is, so they seem like more than two people, I guess. Then there’s Adore, they are a singer. I think they are hypothetically taking classes here? But god knows what, I’ve never even seen them on campus.” Kim frowns, and then continues, going a hundred miles per hour: “Then there’s Jinkx, they just graduated and are looking for the next thing to do, they are trying to get to Broadway, going to auditions all the time. Juju, she’s doing Philosophy but she mostly just –“

“Okay, wow, lots of people!” Trixie interrupts her, pulling her knees to her chest where she sits on her new bed. Her head is hurting a little. She’ll have to put sheets on her bed and she doesn’t want to. Would it be too bad to sleep here without sheets for her first night? It’s been a long day after all, she can cut herself some slack.

“What’s with the names, do people in Boston just…not have normal names?”

Kim raises an eyebrow at her. “What’s a normal name?” she asks with a huff and a half smile.

“Uhh…Brenda, I guess? That’s a normal name. Wisconsin is full of Brendas.” This is not actually true, Trixie knows exactly one Brenda, and she’s her brother’s Canadian wife, but it’s a point she’s made so she’s going to stand by it.

“Alright, Trixie.” Kim snorts. “You’re literally called like my aunt’s dog, but sure, go off.” Kim is smiling and Trixie knows she lucked out with her roommate. “Most of them picked a name they liked a while ago and made it stick,” she offers as an explanation. She tries to bend forward enough to blow her toe nails dry, but doesn’t quite succeed. She’s not the most flexible and some of her movements look a little awkward. “So if you’re fed up with your name, now is the time you want to change it. New beginnings and all.”

Trixie laughs. “I actually like my name. I mean, not Beatrice, but Trixie. I like that a lot,” she admits and Kim raises an incredulous eyebrow at her. “What?” Trixie asks, faking a pout. “It sounds like a doll’s name. I’m into that.”

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Trixie doesn’t understand how, but somehow Kim talks her into joining her when she goes over to Shangela’s. She is tired and in dire need of a shower, but also exhilarated and giddy, and genuinely curious about Kim’s friends. They sound intriguing. They sound like the kind of people Trixie has always wanted to know but who didn’t enter her life much when she was living with her mom in a small town, working the desk at a hotel mostly frequented by people above the age of fifty.

Kim changes into a new dress and waits for Trixie propped up in her desk chair, scrolling through her – pastel blue – phone. Trixie goes through her suitcases, pulling out a simple black dress she has always liked and that she wore at her job a lot. Before she puts it on, however, she makes up her mind after considering what Kim has put on: a purple dress with frilly skirt that matches her hair and makeup perfectly. Trixie wants to keep up. She empties out both of her suitcases in order to find her favourite pink dress. She barely ever wears this dress because it’s just a little too much – at least that’s what her mom’s face told her the few times Trixie put it on – but she loves the bright colour and how she can twirl and make the skirt fly through the air and Kim gives the dress a
thumbs up. Kim knows what’s good.

Trixie makes Kim wait for her while she puts on some make up – heavier than usual, because why not – and when she considers the end result in the mirror, she feels prettier than she has in a long time. She hasn’t made an effort to look her best in a while, because she didn’t have a reason to. Tonight, however, is special. Tonight is the first night of her new life, and this night begins with her in her favourite dress.

“I have the perfect shoes for this dress,” Kim offers, and cocks her head in question.

Trixie thinks about it for a second, then grins. “Nope. I got just what I need.”

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Shangela’s house is a fifteen-minute walk from their apartment and the campus. Kim chatters away the whole time, lisp and all, tells Trixie about her Instagram account (“People love me on Instagram! It’s crazy!”), and gives her more information on Shangela and her friends, information Trixie can barely take in. She spends most of the walk feeling happy to have met Kim, and some of the walk anxious about meeting new people. Maybe she should have stopped at Kim today. Maybe that would have been enough. But she’s here, in her dress and her soft pink cowboy boots (that Kim made fun of for a solid two minutes earlier), and they’re walking up to the house, and Trixie can tell immediately why Kim likes spending so much time here. The house is big and old, and looks like the kind of beautiful and unassuming house white families with 2.5 kids move into at the beginning of a horror movie. There’s a garden with a wooden table covered in candles, clutter, and a fat white cat, and a big tree that holds fairy lights and two swings.

Before they’re even through the garden, the door swings open and a girl with big dark hair grins at them. She comes to hug Kim, seemingly unaware of the wet grass under her fuzzy, previously white socks.

“Hi, you must be the new roomie? I’m Shangela,” she says, and Trixie still thinks that’s the funniest name she’s ever heard. Shangela is tiny, barely reaches Trixie’s shoulders and looks about half the size of Kim. She is wearing gym shorts and no makeup. Before Trixie can answer her, Shangela points to her boots and laughs. “Oh my god, did Kim tell you to wear those? Kim, you bitch.”

“Actually, they were her idea. You can’t blame that on me.”

Usually, Trixie would regret her choice by now, but something about Kim’s frilly dress gives her the confidence to quip, deadpan:

“I’m country. Deal with it.”

Shangela’s grin wavers and Trixie quickly adds: “Oh, uhm, I’m Trixie, by the way. I hope it’s okay I tagged along? I don’t really know anybody here yet besides Kim and she said I could come?”

“Sure! Don’t worry about it, there’s always loads of people here at the Love Shack. After all, this is the best house in Boston!”

And it is, probably. The house is big but so full of stuff that Trixie barely notices. Shangela leads them through a hallway littered with shoes and jackets into a kitchen with a checkers floor and three big sofas – but no table – and pours them tea that she has already prepared.

“So, uh, the Love Shack?” Trixie asks, realizing Kim and Shangela are comfortable enough with each other to share a moment of silence, but she, Trixie, is definitely not there yet.
“Yes!” Shangela grins, gesturing to the house around her.

“Nobody calls it that,” Kim informs her helpfully. “I mean, Shangela does, but she’s tried to make it catch on for like two years now and no.”

At this, Shangela starts to sing pretty loudly: “The Love Shack is a pretty old place where we can get together – her – her!”

“This isn’t even the lyrics,” Kim says and rolls her eyes.

Shangela’s singing is pretty awful so Trixie interrupts her, earning herself a grateful grin from Kim.

“So how many people live here?” she asks, letting her eyes drift over the three sofas and the considerable amount of mugs in the sink.

“Uh.” Shangela frowns, and looks at Kim for help, who just shrugs and lets herself drop onto one of the sofas. “Seven?” Shangela finally settles on, then seems to change her mind: “Nine?”

“Hey Shangie,” Kim interrupts, “Trixie does Early Childhood education as well, didn’t you say you need someone at the day care?”

They do. Apparently, Shangela’s co-worker Ginger (again with the names!) just moved away and they haven’t found a replacement yet, leaving Shangela with too many shifts to juggle. Things seem to work out perfectly pretty much ever since Trixie landed in Boston a couple of hours ago, she notes, and part of her keeps waiting for the ball to drop and something bad to happen. Maybe their apartment is infested with roaches. Maybe Kim likes to listen exclusively to Speed Metal. Maybe Shangela and everyone else in their house is part of one of the weird societies Trixie only knows from movies. There is a weird drawing of something that could be the devil and has a big belly covered in eyes glued to the fridge; maybe that’s a bad sign?

But Shangela is telling her about what she does with the kids – which involves a lot of dancing – and Kim has gotten up and started making pancakes as if she lives here, and her tea is warm, and the sofa is soft, and Trixie feels at peace.

Trixie’s peace lasts another eleven minutes. Then, somebody comes in the front door with a lot of noise, enters the kitchen in a rush and throws herself on the yellow sofa opposite of where Trixie and Shangela are sitting.

“Oh, company!” she flashes Trixie a grin upon noticing her. “I love company.”

She extends her hand to Trixie without changing her position from the couch, and Trixie has to reach over as far as she can to shake it. The girl’s hand is cold, and her nails painted black.

“Hi, I’m Katya,” she introduces herself. “I like your dress.”
In Which Bob's Hardwood Floors Are Always Scratched

In the non-existent who-is-the-most-extraordinary-person-Trixie-has-met-today contest, Katya gives Kim a run for her money. She is wearing a bright red lace bodysuit that covers every inch of her body except for her head, hands, and feet, and a chunky necklace with a black, glistening eye on it. Her long, blonde, slightly curly hair is pulled back with a scrunchie, her lipstick is just as bright as her bodysuit and her heavy black eye makeup looks like she applied it in the dark.

“Did you wear that outside?” Trixie blurts out before she can stop herself. Katya looks at her with her mouth open comically wide. Oh god. Trixie can already feel a blush creeping down her cheeks. Why couldn’t she just have said thanks for the compliment about her dress and left it at that. Always with the talking.

Shangela laughs out loud. “New girl’s not a fan of you bullshit, Katya, how about that.” Shangela giggles, and reaches over to pat Trixie’s arm. “Get her, Jade. She needs that.”

Trixie doesn’t know how to respond. The thing is, she is a fan of ‘Katya’s bullshit’. Very much so. Trixie wishes she had the guts to wear shit like that. Well, maybe not that colour. And maybe not the necklace. And also not the earrings with the tiny hands on it that she just noticed. What the fuck. But still.

“Katya’s an interpretive dancer,” Shangela says, as if that explains it all.

“Butoh,” Katya corrects her.

Apparently, it’s obvious that Trixie doesn’t know what that means.

“Butoh!” Katya says again, only louder, and when Trixie shakes her head lightly to prompt an explanation, Katya gets up from the couch - and for a moment Trixie thinks she is going to demonstrate her dancing, can feel her heart speed up at the prospect - but then Katya just lies down on the floor and stretches, rolls her toes and lets her knuckles crack. Trixie watches her, transfixed. Katya doesn't remind her of anyone she's ever met.

"Butoh isn't allowed in the kitchen anymore," Kim comments semi-helpfully. She walks over to them, settles a plate with pancakes on top of Katya’s stomach, and hands Shangela and Trixie full plates as well.

“Anyone else home?” Kim asks Shangela.

“Uh, Jinkx is home, and Adore too I think, but they just ate, and you know they’re probably sleeping anyway.”

“More pancakes for me,” comments Katya, who apparently decided she could eat without getting up, ripping off huge bits and letting them fall into her mouth from her extended arm. The bright red of the body suit looks great against the checkers tile of the kitchen floor, and two of the three sofas in the kitchen remain empty.

They eat in silence for a minute, Trixie’s heart still beating a little faster from her thoughtless comment about Katya’s appearance before. Katya, thankfully, doesn’t seem offended by her comment. Maybe she gets shit like this a lot. Trixie scrunches up her nose at that thought. She doesn't want to say things to Katya that Katya has heard before; if Katya doesn't remind Trixie of anyone she's ever met, Trixie in turn doesn't want to remind Katya of anyone Katya has ever met.
When Katya has finished her first pancake she turns to lie on her side, facing the others. “So,” she says with a grin - and if Trixie had teeth like that, she’d grin all day long, holy shit, they are perfect.

“Who are you, besides uneducated in the art of dance?”

When Trixie doesn’t answer because she doesn’t know how, Kim comes to her aid:

“That’s my new roommate. Trixie. She likes that name. And those boots, she likes those too.”

Katya considers Trixie’s boots for a long while, chewing her second pancake thoughtfully.

“I like them too,” she finally decides and – did she just wink at Trixie? Trixie must have imagined that.

“A woman not afraid to look stupid! A woman after my own heart.”

Trixie’s heart beats faster at that, and she almost forgets to feel offended about being called uneducated. Almost.

The rest of the night is pretty great. They are chatting about anything and everything, with Shangela doing most of the talking and Trixie being happy to listen. Katya isn’t saying much either, she stays on the floor for most of the night but gets into weird stretch positions every once in a while – that girl can move her body. Katya seems to find their conversation endlessly amusing, breaking out into breathless giggling fits every couple of minutes, flailing her arms in the air above her. Most of the times, Trixie doesn’t even know what’s so funny, but Katya’s laugh never fails to sweep her up, make her laugh along.

Trixie feels drowsy; she’s been up and about for close to thirty hours now, and she settles deep into the couch and lets the conversation wash over her. Inadvertently, her eyes keep focusing on the girl on the floor in the tight red lace and matching lipstick. Trixie catches herself waiting for Shangela and Kim to say the next funny thing, so she can watch Katya laugh again, wishing she herself was a little less sleepy and a little more present so she could do the job herself.

When Katya, in the middle of Shangela telling Trixie more about the day care, gets up to fetch a bottle of red nail polish out of her bag, painting over the black and hollowing out her cheeks to softly blow her nails dry, Trixie feels a light fluttering in her stomach – a fluttering that returns when Katya messes with Shangela’s hair, when she goes to get black-rimmed glasses out of her bag and puts them on, and when she, in passing, adds another eye to the drawing of the devil-creature on the fridge.

But Trixie is tired and a little overwhelmed with everything and her stomach is probably all messed up from the plane ride and this means nothing, she decides. She is not going to crush on a person she met her first night here. Especially not on one that wears an eye around her neck.

They go home after Trixie has fallen asleep on the sofa for the fourth time, and back in her dorm room she goes straight to bed, without bothering to try and find her nightgowns in her suitcase, or put on sheets. The last thing she thinks of before falling asleep is Katya’s laugh.

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The next morning, Trixie wakes up to pastel green walls, the faint smell of fruity perfume, and the thought of surprise that she was able to sleep that well in a new place. She must have slept a little too well, actually, because the sun peeking though the half open blinders is bright and when she glances at her phone she sees it’s past ten already. Kim is nowhere to be seen but even from her
place in bed Trixie can see a post it note on the door:

*I’m at Shangela’s. Come over if you want to. Feel free to take my cereal if you don’t want to go buy something. – K.*

On the bottom of the page is a phone number that probably belongs to Kim.

Trixie stretches and remains in bed for a little while, feeling more at peace than she has in a long time. Her new roommate is better than she could have imagined, she has a job in sight, and she is still genuinely excited about starting classes on Monday. She looks around the room for a long while, deciding which of Kim’s cat pictures have to go to make room for her own stuff. She had packed a bunch of things to decorate her room, things that she loves and that are very personal, and she hadn’t been sure she would ever actually get to take them out. After all, she knew she was going to be sharing that room with somebody. But with Kim she knows she can fully be herself. And for now, being herself means getting out of bed to hang up pictures of her and her grandfather who had passed years ago, of her with her musical theatre group she had been in for most of High School, some pretty flowers, and some song lyrics she liked so much she had taken the time to write them down in her best attempt at calligraphy. She quietly sings to herself while putting on her favourite bedding (yellow with little daisies on it), arranges the few books she has taken with her on the empty shelf in her part of the room, and decides to go shopping for plants later. Currently the only plant in the room is an orchid on Kim’s night stand and it looks to be dead. Kim had painted the orchid’s brown leaves golden, using what looks suspiciously like nail polish. A fashionable but ultimately tragic plant.

It takes Trixie another hour to empty both of her suitcases. They have a big closet, but she shares it with Kim and while Kim has made her some space, it’s not quite enough (and not nearly half the closet). But Trixie doesn’t mind. Most of her clothing she doesn’t like anyway, it’s boring and plain and she got it because she always had to look “nice” for her receptionist’s job. It’s all very uninspired, a lot of white, a lot of black. Then there’s a couple of things she really loves but never wears enough, some frilly dresses and skin-tight skirts, and she feels like she’ll actually get to wear these things around here. She spends a lot of time admiring Kim’s clothes and wonders if she’d mind sharing. Kim is taller than her and not exactly slim, but Trixie has some weight as well, big thighs and hips mostly, so Kim’s things might just fit her.

When her suitcase is empty, her side of the room looks like her and she’s satisfied. It’s only then that she considers Kim’s offer to spend the day at Shangela’s. She wonders if Katya would be there.

Katya.

By the light of day, she is sure the fluttering in her stomach last night really didn’t have anything to do with her. Sure, Katya is beautiful and is obviously crazy in a great way, but Trixie doesn’t know her and it’s not like Katya would be interested in Trixie.

As far as Trixie knows, she has met an underwhelming amount of three gay women and one bisexual woman in her life. One of the girls in her musical theatre group was gay, out, proud, and beautiful, but also never that interesting to Trixie. All she ever talked about was Jurassic Park. Then there was Shea, who Trixie very much didn’t want to think about. The third one was a woman who frequented the hotel Trixie worked at, and who always complained about the AC being too loud and generally got on Trixie’s nerves quite a bit. The bisexual woman was a girl named Courtney who Trixie met at a night club two years ago. They hooked up regularly over the course of nearly a year but ultimately didn’t care enough about one another to make things work once Trixie got too frustrated with the no-strings-attached kind of relationship they had. Trixie isn’t
a no-strings-attached kind of girl and promised herself she would never try to appear like one again.

Either way, chances of Katya being the fifth in this unimpressive line of women are slim.

Then she remembers the way Katya winked at her last night. It takes a second for her to catch her breath after that.

♥♥♥

After a long shower, a lot of Kim’s bath products, and some of Kim’s cereal, she decides she’s going to take Kim up on her offer and head to Shangela’s place. She thinks she can remember how to get there and puts Kim’s number into her phone just in case.

Trixie finds her way to the house eventually, getting a little lost a few times on the way, but appreciating the chance to get to know the neighbourhood. Being a dreamer, Trixie is used to getting lost and has long since stopped to get annoyed with herself about this fact. On the way from her place to Shangela’s, there are a couple bars (including a 50s themed milk shake bar that Trixie immediately snaps a picture of and will definitely be spending some time in), a burrito shop, a nail studio, and even a little cinema that looks like it can’t have more than one room. Trixie can’t believe there are this many places in walking distance. Just two days ago, the only things in walking distances where the neighbours’ farm, a forest, and her favourite as well as her least favourite cows.

The late summer sun is sending all the warmth it can muster through the cloudy sky, so Trixie is wearing a soft yellow dress with no jacket, and her cowboy boots again – Katya said she liked them, didn’t she? And it’s not like Trixie needs a lot of encouragement to pull these boots out.

When she reaches the house, there’s a group of people sitting at the table in the garden and Trixie makes out Kim by her purple hair immediately. Katya’s also there. She’s on one of the swings, swinging so high it looks like she might fall off any second. She waves at Trixie without letting go of the swing’s string.

“Hi, Trixie,” Kim says from where she sits at the table and then, “That’s my roommate I told you about. Trixie, this is, uh, a lot of people. This is Adore, Jinkx, Juju, Sasha, Chi Chi, and Bob. And you know Shangela and Katya.”

Kim points at each person individually and Trixie does her best to remember who everyone is.

The group at the table looks extraordinary for sure. Very much not like the friends Trixie had in High School and who slowly dropped out of her life one after one in the years after school. There’s at least three people at the table whose gender Trixie can’t make out. There’s Adore, with hair such a bright blue that they stand out even next to Kim. Adore is slouching in their chair, smoking something, wearing only an oversized shirt and hugging their hairy legs to their body. There’s Jinkx, short red hair and about zero features that indicate their gender. They smile at Trixie with a chipped front tooth. There’s Sasha, in men’s clothing and bald, but with an impressive amount of makeup on, and even more impressive eyebrows. Juju is a small Asian girl who’s currently busy building a house out of playing cards; Chi Chi, who has a Nintendo in his hands, seems too involved in his game to look up, and Bob, tall and bald, a little older than the others, is the only one who stands up and shakes her hand.

“Hi everyone,” Trixie says, and awkwardly sits down in the empty spot next to Juju who looks up from her cards to tell her:
“You’re joining us at exactly the right time. Bob is giving us an important lecture on how to treat his precious hardwood floors.” She rolls her eyes non-discreetly.

Trixie must have looked a little lost because Sasha chimes in:

“It’s Bob’s house. He lets us stay here for next to no rent and certain people” – Sasha pointedly looks at Juju – “could be a little more grateful.” Juju doesn’t dignify this with an answer and instead adds a sixth floor to her card house, which promptly falls apart.

“So, uh, it’s your house?” Trixie asks Bob, because she doesn’t know what else to say. From the corner of her eye she can see Katya has stopped swinging and is sitting still, watching her. Watching them. Not her, of course.

“Yup,” Bob replies with a grin. Trixie likes him immediately. His septum reminds her of her unrealistic plans of getting one as well. “Used to be my dad’s house, is my house now, and I rent it out to these guys.”

“We’re his charity,” chimes in Chi Chi in a heavy southern drawl without looking up from his Nintendo. There’s no bitterness in his voice, Trixie notes.

“I’m not anyone’s charity,” Juju quips, sticking her tongue out at Chi Chi, “Maybe your ass, but not mine.”

“Bob is a social worker and does a lot for LGBT youth,” Sasha says, apparently being the most helpful person at the table. “This house is basically open for those of us who need it.”

“Oh. So, you’re all…” Trixie doesn’t finish that sentence, and regrets having started it. Why can’t she just be quiet?

“Fucking queer,” says Adore from next to Juju, raising her arms into the air, and a little bit of ash drops into their bright blue hair. They grin at Trixie, almost proud, and Trixie feels a little lighter immediately.

“Fucking queer,” echoes Katya, who has suddenly come up behind Jinkx, and picks the ash out of Adore’s hair with a smile, before squeezing herself into the space between Trixie and Juju. She’s wearing a skin tight black dress covered in pictures of abstract faces, combat boots, and the little hands are dangling from her ears again. Her thighs press against Trixie’s and she smells like cigarettes and flowers. Maybe daisies, Trixie catches herself thinking, before frowning at herself. It’s not like she even knows what daisies smell like.

Katya is very close. And Katya is fucking queer, whatever that means. This close up and in the light of the sun, her dark makeup looks even messier. Her mascara is clumping a bunch of her lashes together in the corner of her right eye and her foundation doesn’t match her neck. Trixie wants to reach out and pick a stray lash off Katya’s cheek. The thought makes her blush. To her relief, nobody seems to pay her too much attention and after a while Trixie manages to get her mind off the girl next to her and focus on the rest of the group. Bob has resumed his lecture on how to treat the floor – apparently, they were scratching it rearranging furniture all the time, hosting parties Bob isn’t sure are always necessary. Sasha and Jinkx listen earnestly, while the rest of them don’t seem too bothered. After a minute, Katya snatches away Chi Chi’s Nintendo mid-game and starts playing his Pokémon game while he quietly curses at her but makes no effort to get up and get it back. They spend another half hour half bickering with Bob, half doing their own thing (Juju is now busy gluing little crystals onto a mirror for god knows what purpose and Shangela is knitting what looks like a tent in the ugliest green Trixie has ever seen) when Kim turns the conversation to Trixie:
“So Trixie, have you settled in already? Anything you need?”

Trixie remembers the plants she wants to get. “Uh, yeah, everything’s pretty great. But I want to get some plants. Can you tell me where to get them?”

“Plants! I love plants,” Katya chimes in from next to her. “I’ll take you.”

Trixie’s heart flutters at that. Again with the fluttering. Can she still get away with blaming that on the airplane? Probably. If her mom can complain about stuffed ears 72 hours after a plane ride, she can put the butterflies in her stomach on the plane ride for at least another day. The thought of going plants shopping with Katya seems nerve wracking to her. She hopes somebody else will come too, maybe Kim; Kim could probably anchor her.

“Anyone else wanna come? No? Good.” Katya says without really waiting for an answer, gets up, and pretends to give Chi Chi back the Nintendo but then puts it on the ground out of his reach last second.

♥♥♥

The first thing Katya does when they’ve left the garden is take a cigarette and a lighter out of her bra. The second thing is ask Trixie this question:

“So, who are you, and, more importantly, who do you want to be?”

Trixie looks at her in disbelief for a second. What the fuck kind of question was that? It sounds like a title of one of the self-help audiobooks Trixie's mom started playing around the house a couple of years ago, and that Trixie always has to stop herself from making too much fun of. They help her mom, she thinks, and she appreciates that. They are, however, also hilarious: “If the great internet connects us all ... then why are so many of us becoming increasingly isolated?” Hilarious.

Katya seems to expect an answer, so Trixie wracks her brain for a second and comes up with:

“I’m the gal who’s not here for a long time, but is here for a good time. Trixie!”

She tops this off by raising one hand into the air and propping her other hand on her hip. Katya almost drops her cigarette out of her mouth at that and laughs, wheezes, for way too long. Trixie mentally pats her own back - good on her for establishing herself as funny and quick-witted - before immediately thinking of the next thing to say to avoid possible lulls in the conversation. She can’t deal with those, not until she’s truly comfortable with a person.

“So, Kim says you study art?” Trixie she asks, remembering Kim’s ramblings last night.

“Yes! Visual arts,” Katya says in a voice that leaves no doubt she lives for that. “With Sasha. The bald one? Sasha’s my favourite person!” Katya skips a little in her step, grinning at Trixie. She seems just as overflowing with happy energy as last night and Trixie wonders if she’s always like that. Trixie isn’t, that’s for sure. She is right now though. Something about Katya makes her heart feel light.

“So how do you like it here so far?” is Katya’s next question. With it, she spreads her arms and spins around in a circle twice, indicating the area around her. “I’ve never lived anywhere else, but I think it’s pretty cool, yeah? I’m in New York a lot, but I prefer it here, honestly,” she adds.

“Yes, wow, I mean it’s definitely better than Wisconsin. It just has to be.” She feels a little guilty immediately; she doesn’t hate Wisconsin after all, far from it. She hopes Katya will understand her comment as her readiness to explore something new, not as her giving the middle finger to where
she comes from. She wants to make sure Katya knows this and proceeds to tell her about her home
town, about growing up in the middle of nowhere, about how much she had liked Wisconsin at
times, and how much she had resented it at different times. She tells her about her neighbours’
farm and about how she was scared of cows until she was eight, and then her brother spent an
entire day talking her into touching one, and Trixie, much to her surprise, survived, and has liked
cows ever since.

Katya seems to listen intensely, looking way more at Trixie than at the street in front of her, and
lighting another cigarette as soon as she’s finished the first one. Trixie likes being looked at, but
feels weirdly self – conscious under Katya’s eyes.

It’s a Saturday, and the streets are buzzing, even though they are nowhere near Downtown. Trixie
rarely sees this many strangers in one day, can’t help but check out their faces and fashion, taking
notes, comparing, cataloguing, admiring, scrunch up her nose in distaste. There’s street food and
bakeries, nail salons and boutiques, and Trixie knows she doesn’t need LA. She will be happy here.

They reach a little flower shop after a twenty-minute walk. It’s painted in a faded yellow and Trixie
likes that it matches her dress. It makes her feel beautiful, and like she wants to decorate her hair
with flowers. Maybe daisies, she thinks, daisies are lovely.

♥♥♥

The shop is small and narrow, and a silver bell chimes and announces them to the elderly lady
watering plants towards the back of the store. It’s the end of summer and an array of different
flowers are blossoming, colourful, beautiful, and making Trixie work hard to stick to her plan of
getting mostly simple plants like ivory; plants that won’t make her sad when they inevitable lose
their blossoms soon.

Katya gets a carton box out of a corner of the store, carries it in front of her stomach and gestures to
Trixie to put everything she wants inside it. Trixie does, considering her choices carefully, trying to
remember hers and Kim’s room and deciding which plants would look best against their pastel
green walls.

Katya hums quietly, out of tune, and in a melody she seems to be making up as she goes. She nods
and grins at every plant Trixie holds up for inspection.

“You should get carnivorous plants,” she decides after a while, then frowns upon realizing this
little pretty flower shop doesn’t sell them. “But this is beautiful too.”

With each plant Trixie carefully drops into Katya’s box, she feels a little guiltier about Katya
carrying all that weight. She’s buying a pot for every plant she gets, and the pottery and ceramics
are anything but light. Katya, however, doesn’t seem to mind.

“I’m strong as shit,” she informs Trixie, and Trixie rolls her eyes. Katya is skinny, wiry.

“Look!” Katya waves her over a couple of minutes later when Trixie inspects some potted roses
she knows wouldn’t last more than a few months in her care. Maybe she should get fake roses
instead? Something about fake plants always makes her a little sad, but between her constantly
forgetting to water her plants and her inability to follow instructions such as “avoid direct sunlight”,
maybe she should get over that.

Katya is holding up a chunky – and ugly – metal sculpture of a crow, a decoration for flower pots.
No plant deserves this, Trixie thinks. Trixie’s box is standing next to Katya’s feet.
“I’m not putting this horrid thing into my pretty plants,” Trixie informs her, and grins.

Katya looks at her in mock-shock and makes to cover the crow’s ears with her hands. “She’s not for you,” she shushes, “She’s for me. She will make a beautiful necklace. I'm in love with her.”

“It’s way too heavy to be a necklace.”

“Pretty hurts.”

“I hate to tell you, but this is, like, the opposite of pretty.”

Katya gives her a beautiful smile, her teeth white, welcoming, and impressive, and puts the crow into Trixie’s box where it all but crushes one of her succulents. “I’m going to be wearing this every time we see each other from now on,” she swears, “until you can’t help but fall in love.”

♥♥♥

On their way back to the Love Shack, Trixie insists on carrying her box herself. Her arms hurt after about five minutes, the sun has lost its fight against the clouds and it is now a little too chilly for her to be wearing just her summer dress, and she’s pretty hungry, but Trixie feels happy. Katya is great, she decides on their way back to Shangela’s – Bob’s? – as if she didn’t already decide that last night.

Katya didn’t say much last night or in the garden today, but now that they are alone, she is talking pretty much constantly, skipping from one topic to another and back in a way that makes it hard for Trixie to follow but that’s also entertaining. Katya talks about her efforts to learn Russian and how she’s making sure her pronunciation is perfect, even if she doesn’t know that many words yet (“ворона, ворона” she yells out, fiddling with her metal crow, as if Trixie knows what that means). She talks about the cat Trixie saw in the garden earlier and how she calls him Milk but everybody in the house has a different name for him, which doesn’t matter because it’s not like he listens anyway (“he’s not technically ours, and not technically allowed in the house, but I swear he spends most of his time in Juju’s and Shangela’s room, Juju lets him sleep in their bed). She talks about her dancing class and about a girl named Laganja that talked her into trying it out (“You have to meet her, she’s my favourite person!”) By the time they reach the house, Trixie is sure she wants to stay here and listen to Katya talk all day.

The garden is empty except for Kim, who’s petting Milk the cat, Shangela, who’s still knitting her tent-thing, and Jinkx, who seems to have fallen asleep in their chair. Trixie heaves the box with her plants onto the table and slumps down next to Kim. Katya, apparently filled with too much energy to sit down, stands behind Shangela and messes up her hair.

“Stop that, Kat,” Shangela complains and then adds: “Go and call Violet. She sent Sasha like ten texts today saying you should stop ignoring her. Please don’t make her stop by again unannounced, that was a little intense last time.”

Katya sighs deeply and messes with Shangela’s hair even more rigorously, trying to knot it into a pretzel on top of her head.

“Seriously, Kat. What’s going on with you two?” Shangela asks, her voice suddenly soft. Katya opens her mouth as if to answer, but then doesn’t, and shrugs. Her giddy energy seems to slowly leave her body, making her look smaller, and a little forlorn.

“Ugh,” is the only thing Katya says before she turns and towards the house, her shoulders slightly slumped, presumably to call Violet.
“Who’s Violet?” asks Trixie, curious about the sudden shift in Katya’s mood.

“Oh, Violet. She lives here, technically, but she’s currently travelling around with a bunch of people making shows. She’s mostly doing aerial,” Kim explains. “You should see her, she’s amazing. She’s Katya’s girlfriend.”
hey everyone, i promised regular updates and for now i'm coming through! thanks so much to everyone who commented so far, i live off your encouragement so please keep it coming!

if you come talk to me on tumblr (mallstars) i'll love you forever and i'll send you 27 imaginary dollars. (please, i'm too lonely over there)

i have never stepped foot into the US and don't know how their colleges work, and i'm also pretty sure that a job like trixie's isn't a thing over there. indulge me, please, and have fun with this!

Katya’s girlfriend.

Kim’s words are stuck in Trixie’s head even an hour later when she’s back in her room, distracting herself with Netflix and a vegetarian Burrito she got on her way over here. Katya’s girlfriend. Of course Katya has a girlfriend. Katya is amazing. Trixie sniffs a little and hides her face in one of her pillows. When she comes up for air she catches sight of herself in Kim’s big mirror and suddenly has to giggle in slight exasperation with herself. The drama! So unnecessary. It’s not like she knows Katya, not really. Katya could be a serial killer for all she knows. With that jewellery of hers, she probably is. And at least Trixie found out about her girlfriend now, before she had time to indulge and encourage whatever feeling she gets when she looks at Katya for too long. It isn’t a crush yet anyway, not really. Everything is still pretty amazing, she decides, things are going just fine. And if she spends the rest of the day thinking about Katya’s laugh and the way her combat boots are just a little too chunky on her skinny legs, well, that’s okay. She’ll be distracted soon enough. She has things to do, people to meet, a life to live. Her life is going to be exciting.

As if to undermine that point, she spends the rest of the day in her room watching Netflix and mentally preparing for starting classes tomorrow. There’s not much to do. She already did most of her preparation reading weeks ago when she still counted the days until she would leave. So now her preparation consists mainly of pulling half of the clothes she just put into the closet this morning out of it to put them on and decide if they are the right clothes to wear on her first day.

Trixie likes when her clothes mirror who she is. Or, maybe, who she wants to be. Either way, she wants people to have an idea of who she is before she even starts talking. But today none of her clothes say what she wants them to say about her – that she’s a delight; funny, creative, tasteful, interesting - so she leaves everything lying around, deciding she’ll just have to wing it tomorrow morning. In order to do at least one productive thing today she brushes up on her resumé to give to Shangela when she next sees her.

In the early evening, Kim comes home from Shangela’s. She raises an eyebrow at Trixie’s clothes on the floor – and shit, Trixie realizes, Kim is so neat and she fucked up the room on only her second day here – but doesn’t comment. Instead, she throws herself on her bed and puts on Project Runway on her laptop while eating pickles straight out of a jar. Classy. Trixie, having gone back to her what-will-i-wear-tomorrow dilemma, is hardly paying attention to the show, but Kim keeps commenting on it, trying to involve her: “Can you believe Heidi talks trash about his look when
she wears this? This?! She has some nerve.” Kim even turns her laptop so that Trixie can see
Heidi’s outfit. At that, Trixie decides to give in and join Kim on her bed, and they watch the show
together. It’s dumb and funny and gets Kim agitated in a way Trixie hasn’t seen her before, and this
is nice, Trixie thinks, this is really nice.

♥♥♥
The next morning Trixie wakes up buzzing with excitement about starting her classes. She puts on
an amount of makeup she never would have worn back in Wisconsin, slips into the yellow dress
that served her so well yesterday and that she settled on in the middle of the night, staring at the
ceiling, not able to sleep, and carefully curls her long blonde hair. Trixie’s hair is her whole pride,
and she spends an embarrassing amount of time making sure it looks perfect at all times. And it
does – as long as she doesn’t have to spend a day in an air plane. Kim blasts Korean pop music
Trixie has never heard before while changing outfits at least seven times and eating cereal at the
same time. She lets Trixie leech off her cereal once more - Trixie is going to buy her own shit
tonight, for sure - and then leaves for her classes in the opposite direction of where Trixie is going.

Like a true first semester student, Trixie is early to class. Twenty-eight minutes early to be exact.
She wanted to make absolutely sure she’d have enough time to find her building and then found it
much faster than expected, mostly due to a little plan Kim drew up for her. On her way here, the
campus was mostly deserted, and in the small brick building she is right now she can’t see a single
person. She double checks if she is at the right place. She triple checks. She goes into the
bathroom to inspect her reflection in the mirror. She walks up and down the corridor reading the
signs on every door. She goes into the bathroom again and washes her hands. Still twenty minutes.
She wants to take a walk over campus because she hasn’t actually looked at anything yet, but is
suddenly anxious she won’t find her classroom again, so she stays put. God, she’s nervous. What if
in twenty minutes her professor will say something that tells Trixie that she shouldn’t be here, not
in this room, maybe not even at this college or any other college, that maybe she can’t do this, and
she should have stayed at the hotel.

This is stupid, Trixie decides, she needs to distract herself. In the last few minutes one other student
has arrived, but he is lost in his phone and seems to be not at all interested in a conversation, and if
she’s honest, he doesn’t look like an intriguing conversation partner, not with his dress shoes and
light blue sweater swung around his shoulders.

Trixie pulls out her phone as well. She hardly had time to look through her notifications this
morning but now she sees she has a followers request on Instagram from Kim and Shangela. She
accepts and scrolls through Kim’s profile for a little while. That girl really is an artist, Trixie will
definitely have to learn from her. It takes only a little scrolling before she finds Katya in one of
Kim’s pictures and with it a link to Katya’s profile. She wonders for a moment if checking Katya’s
profile is a good idea, but it seems a better option than freaking out about her studies before they
even begin, so she clicks her name.

For whatever reason Katya’s profile is called ‘momsgoldteeth’. Her profile picture is of her with
photoshopped demonic eyes in front of a background of fire. Her bio only says: Can you even fuck
a pokeman? What the fuck. Katya’s profile is private, and Trixie hesitates before sending her a
friend request, goes to check her own profile for potentially embarrassing pictures before she does.
Trixie’s profile picture is her favourite picture of her that a classmate took on a field trip a couple
of years ago. She’s standing on a meadow, wearing a flower crown she had just made, her arms
raised in the air and the sun behind her making her hair glow. Her bio says: Love your hair, hope
you win with a bunch of heart emojis added in and oh well, why not. She sends the friend request
and while she’s at it, also sends one to everybody else she met yesterday. Making friends! It’s
important.
She barely has time to look at their profiles before her professor arrives and opens their room. It’s still fifteen minutes early but apparently this professor is used to first semester students being anxious and early and she gives Trixie a smile that immediately makes her feel a little lighter.

Trixie’s first lecture is probably boring – filled with: this is what we are going to do this semester, this is how to register for your classes, this is how everything works, and you need to pay attention, your exams aren’t going to be easy – but Trixie listens intensely and feeling much more relaxed than just half an hour before. She’s finally here and damn if she’s not going enjoy her time here. The two guys sitting next to her start playing hangman ten minutes in and a girl in front of her is eating dry cornflakes straight out of the box, but Trixie carefully writes down everything her professor says. She’s going to do well in this class. If these two idiots next to her – one just failed at guessing the word ‘compass’ – can go to college, then so can she.

♥♥♥

When Trixie comes home after her second and last lecture of the day, she’s still feeling good, but she’s also exhausted. Who knew sitting around for four hours could be so tiring? At least at the hotel she had calls to make, keys to hand out to, customers to bat her eyelashes at. The hasn’t done this much active listening in years. Kim seems to feel the same way because she’s lying in her bed, full face of makeup but changed into pyjamas, and plays on her phone.

“Hey, how was it?” Kim asks with a smile. When she lifts her head a little, Trixie can see the shadow of her foundation on her purple pillow.

“Pretty cool!” Trixie answers. “I mean, we didn’t actually do much today, but the classes sound nice and apparently we’re allowed to eat during lectures so what more could you want?” She decides to do as Kim and changes into one of her night gowns before lying down in her bed and pulling out her phone. Katya and Adore have already accepted her request and she clicks on Katya’s profile. Her stomach is fluttering in excitement.

Katya’s profile is a lot. She barely has any pictures up, instead, there are a bunch of short videos. Trixie clicks on the latest one. In it, Katya is wearing the same red bodysuit she wore when they met and is doing cart wheels in a dance studio. A second video shows her zooming in and out of Bob while he is reading a paper, singing “You’re my favourite person” to him off key while he does his best to ignore her. Another video shows her smearing her red lipstick off with her hands before laughing hysterically and dropping out of the frame.

“Katya?” Kim asks, without looking up from her phone.

“Yeah. I’m uh, I’m just looking at her Instagram.”

“It’s a mess. Wanna see a good Instagram? Go to mine. Or Sasha’s, that’s amazing. But Katya? Hot mess.”

“Yeah,” Trixie agrees distractedly. Here’s a picture of Sasha kissing Katya’s cheek while she grins into the camera widely. “So, umm, Kim? Katya and Violet. They are…” she trails off, suddenly not knowing where she wants that sentence to go.

Kim frowns at her for a couple of seconds before saying: “They’re a couple. They are gay. A gay couple. Well, Katya’s bisexual and I’m actually not sure what Violet identifies as currently, but they’re a couple. You don’t have a problem with that, do you?” Kim sounds a little concerned at that.

Okay, okay. They’re a couple. Trixie knows this already and it’s tragic enough without Kim
repeating it a billion times over. Kim still looks at her with a scrutinizing look on her face and it takes Trixie a second to understand her behaviour. Oh. Kim thinks she’s a homophobe. That’s hilariously awkward.


“Yeah, umm,” Trixie thinks for a second. Should she bring this conversation back to Katya? She really wants to. “So Violet is travelling a lot?”

Here’s what Trixie finds out: Katya had been interested in Violet since Violet first moved into Bob’s house a little over two years ago, but they had only started dating a year ago. Apparently, there had been quite a lot of pining on Katya’s part before that, and only when Juju had played matchmaker had they finally started dating – damn Juju, Trixie thinks. A couple months later, Violet had left to travel with her group. They are still together, talking on the phone all the time, and apparently arguing a lot lately. Kim says she doesn’t know what these arguments are about, but it’s obvious she’s keeping something from Trixie. It’s also obvious that Kim cares a lot about both Katya and Violet.

When Kim gets bored with the conversation a couple of minutes later, Trixie wraps her blanket around herself and tries to resist the temptation of checking out Violet’s Instagram. Nothing good can come of this, she knows. She resists for all of four minutes, then grabs her phone to find Violet’s profile like the intelligent, self-preserving woman she is. Thankfully, Violet’s profile is not private. Trixie wouldn’t have brought it over herself to send her a follower’s request. As Trixie expected, Violet’s Instagram doesn’t help her feel better about the situation. Violet is hot. Of course she is. She is tall, slim, has perfect dark 50s styled hair and makeup and looks nothing like Trixie. To make things worse, her body is barely covered in any of her pictures. Violet seems to have a preference for wearing a couple rhine stones and feathers, and nothing else.

Trixie has to scroll down quite a bit – trying hard not to admire the poses Violet gets into when doing aerial – before finding a picture of Violet and Katya together. It was taken in what looks like a night club. Violet is dressed in some glittery thing (she was probably performing that night, that can’t seriously be something she wears on a night out, Trixie thinks and feels more inadequate than ever) and Katya has her arms and one leg wrapped around her and laughs happily. She can clearly see the admiration in Katya’s eyes. The sight makes Trixie sad. She wants somebody to look at her the way Katya looks at Violet in the picture. (She wants Katya to look at her the way she looks at Violet in the picture, is a thought Trixie has, but refuses to indulge).

♥♥♥

It’s the first week of college, so there are a lot of parties happening on and off campus. Trixie loves parties, but barely ever gets to go, and it takes her a whole four days before she manages to talk Kim into going with her. Kim doesn’t seem to be too thrilled at the thought of spending the night at a club, but finally gives in at the prospect of getting to really dress up. She spends over an hour on her nails that end up so over the top she can’t use her phone. This is why she has Trixie text back and forth with Shangela, who wants to join them and bring some of the others along. Trixie wants to ask if Katya is coming, but doesn’t want Kim to tease her about it – and, also, she has managed to not talk (or think too much) about Katya for the last three days, and she is not going to break that streak now.

When they’re finally in front of the club a couple of hours later, everybody from Bob’s house,
except for Bob himself, is there. (“Bob has a husband and a kid, he doesn’t wanna hang out with our asses too much,” Juju explains when Trixie asks about him).

They are quite a sight to behold, Trixie thinks. Sasha is wearing a blue velvet jump suit and graphic blue makeup under the eyes, Shangela is in something that looks suspiciously like a cheerleading uniform, and Adore has replaced their blue hair with blond hair so big they are now taller than even Trixie. And then there’s Katya, in a bright purple dress covered in black hand prints and her hair in two messy buns on top of her head. The hands on her ears have long glittery fingernails today that Trixie is sure weren’t there last time. (Did she glue them on? Does she have more than one pair of creepy hand earrings? If yes, why?) Trixie hugs everybody hello and when she gets to Katya, Katya smells like daisies again. Well, daisies and cigarettes. Trixie tries to focus on the cigarettes. She wouldn’t want to date a smoker. But Katya is a lot shorter and skinnier than Trixie, and she feels so nice and right in her arms, and Trixie lets go of her with reluctance.

“What a beautiful,” Jinkx tells Trixie, and Trixie looks down at herself, feeling a little self-conscious. She borrowed one of Kim’s dresses, a tight black lacy one that shows off her curves in a way that makes her more than a little nervous, but Kim complimented her for a full twenty minutes, giving Trixie enough confidence to work this dress - also, if Kim gets away with that floor length golden dress covered in fans, cats, and fancy cutlery, Trixie should get away with this. She spins around twice to show herself off to the group, hoping for Katya to jump in on Jinkx’ compliment, but Katya is busy looking for her lighter in her purse and doesn’t look up at her.

♥♥♥

The club they have picked is a queer club - because why step outside your bubble when you don’t have to - and Trixie is delighted with the energy there. It’s pretty small and a little bit grimy, the walls are plastered with posters of upcoming events and events long passed, either smoking is allowed inside or at least nobody cares, and some people are dressed weird enough that Trixie and her group don’t raise too much attention. It’s also the club where Adore has most of their gigs and where they – and apparently everyone they know – get to drink for free. Trixie orders a Gin and Tonic and leans against the bar, taking in the club around her. Being in a club and not being drunk has an unreal quality to it, and something about the heat and the loud music always makes Trixie feel a little drunk before she even starts drinking. Katya gets up on the bar stool right next to Trixie, back to the bar, and crosses her legs so that her shoe lightly touches Trixie’s thigh. She is wearing green jellies and Trixie wants to comment on them, but Katya is busy taking a video of Sasha, probably for her Instagram. The spotlights on the ceiling rapidly change from green to purple and back, reflecting prettily in the ice cubes in Trixie’s drink and Trixie can already feel a bit of sweat forming on the small of her back although she has yet to start dancing.

So far, there’s no dancing except for a group of guys awkwardly shuffling around in one of the corners. Trixie feels ready to dance, but not ready to be the only one dancing and having all eyes on her, especially not in the daring dress she is wearing. Chi Chi, however, doesn’t seem to have such qualms. He has barely taken a sip of his vodka tonic before he abandons the drink on the counter, walks to the middle of the dance floor and starts going hard. The song they are currently playing doesn’t have any lyrics, but that doesn’t stop Chi Chi from singing along loud enough for Trixie to hear him over the music. Chi Chi’s moves are enough to inspire a couple of people to start dancing as well, although nobody comes even close to his energy. After drowning not only her own drink but also Chi Chi’s, Juju drags Shangela onto the dance floor, and Trixie trails behind them. She starts dancing rather carefully, her drink still half full in her hand, and her mind aware of Katya watching them with her phone in hand, texting someone. It’s probably Violet, Trixie thinks, and feels her stomach knot, and she probably should stop being hyper-aware of Katya when Katya obviously isn’t paying her any attention. It takes her another minute to truly shift her attention and instead focus on Chi Chi and the others, on their silly dance moves and their laughs, and the light
reflecting in their hair.

After an intense half hour of some of the most ambitious dancing Trixie has ever seen in a club, Chi Chi kisses Shangela goodbye, messes up Juju’s hair and gives a wave to Trixie and the rest of the group at the bar, before saying: “That’s it, I’m out,” and leaving the club. Trixie is slightly puzzled. The night was only just getting started.

“He always does that,” Katya, coming up behind her, says loudly into Trixie’s ear. She places both of her hands on Trixie’s right shoulder and unnecessarily gets on her toes to talk to her. With the spotlights on her face shifting from purple to green, her eyes shift from green to blue, and they remind Trixie of the ocean she has only ever seen in pictures. “He goes hard for thirty minutes tops and then just goes home to sleep. And then he makes fun of everyone else for being hungover in the morning.” Katya is so close Trixie can see where her red lipstick is slightly overdrawn. A strand of her hair is sticking to the side of her neck. She lets go of Trixie before Trixie can reply and starts dancing, suggestively grinding against Juju until Shangela squeezes in between them and all but shushes Katya away.

♥♥♥

Two hours later, Trixie is a little drunk and a lot happy. Everyone but Kim has joined them on the dance floor and they take turns sitting with Kim – which mostly involves gossiping and making fun of the rest of them dancing. Trixie tries again and again to get Kim on the dance floor, but every time Kim points to her nine-inch heels and tells her there is just no way. After another two gin and tonics, Trixie feels free enough to bust out her favourite dance moves, which resemble tap dancing and which she learned taking a class four years ago. She’s a little rusty and she can barely remember how to properly do the steps, but she’s making everybody laugh in the best way, and that’s all she can hope for.

Shangela and Juju are making out heavily against the wall behind her, without a care in the world for their surroundings. Sasha is talking animatedly to a stranger in a bowler hat, Jinkx has their arms around Kim’s shoulders from behind and seems to be taking a nap on her, and Adore is dancing with Katya and Trixie, every now and then mirroring one of Trixie’s moves in a half-mocking fashion. The music at the club is mostly 80’s pop in questionable remixes and they shout along with the lyrics (and pretend to shout along where they don’t know the lyrics), and when What a Feeling comes on, Katya starts cartwheeling in the too small space and manages to kick pretty much all of them at least once.

It’s almost 5 am when they make their way back home, Trixie and Kim to campus, the others to the house. Trixie’s hearing feels muffled, her feet and her back hurt, her voice is hoarse from screaming to the music, and the cold air bites into her skin where it’s sweaty from the club, and she decides they are going to this club at least once a week from now on. Kim, however, swears she’s not going to go out again for at least half a year.

When they stumble into their hallway, Trixie impulsively wraps her arms around Kim’s shoulders and hugs her as they continue walking.

“Thank you,” she says.

“No, thank you,” Kim replies dryly. ”With you in the group, I’m not the worst dancer anymore.”

Trixie’s already half asleep in her bed when her phone buzzes with a message from Katya.

Katya
You looked like a goth Barbie doll tonight and I love it.

♥♥♥

Trixie spends the rest of her first weekend in Boston in their apartment, where Kim teaches her how to glue on fake lashes and overdraw her lips. Trixie is pretty much in awe of Kim’s skills, especially since she found out that Kim makes most of her clothes herself. Trixie itches with the desire to go out and buy some more clothes she likes, but she has to save her money for rent. At least one good thing came out of her putting off college for years: she has some savings and can make rent without too much of a problem, but still, better not splurge before she has a new job. Kim says she can just wear whatever she wants from her part of the closet, so it’s fine. Trixie spends quite a bit of time trying on Kim’s clothes, finding out which dresses fit her, and which don’t, and which lipstick looks best with which dress.

She doesn’t see Katya that weekend, and in fact hasn’t even replied to her 5 am text yet, a text that had kept her up for another half hour. Katya likes her. Or, at least likes her style, and her style reflects who she is, doesn’t it? Honestly, the main reason why Trixie hasn’t replied is because in her happy buzzed state she had felt like replying with a string of several heart emojis, but knew this wasn’t an appropriate answer.

At some point during their lazy Sunday Trixie realizes that Katya doesn’t even know Trixie is gay. But it doesn’t matter, she decides. It’s not like Katya is available anyway.
In Which the Rain Is Metaphorical

Chapter Notes

another week, another chapter! thanks so so much to everyone who took the time to comment and talk to me on tumblr @ mallstars!
it really means the world, your feedback is so important! <3
also, did you guys know katya actually does butoh dance? she said it in a periscope once and i love this so much!
and, one last thing: i based trixie's job on how day cares/kindergartens work in germany, and i'm pretty sure it's different in the us, but bare with me here
hope you like this! also, the next chapter is one i'm super excited about already, so there's definitely gonna be an update next weekend :)

The second week of college is a lot more stressful for Trixie than the first one. She has a hard time focusing in her lectures and seminars, not because they are boring – ok, some of them are, but not all of them – but because she doesn’t like sitting and listening without talking herself for too long. The lights in the lecture hall are always a little too bright, her professor’s voices always a little too dull, and the other students always a little too loud. She finds herself drifting off a lot, and spends more time with anxious thoughts about upcoming exams than actually listening. She can’t fail at this, she thinks, she just can’t. Whenever the professors close the lecture, she is usually the first one out of the door.

On Thursday in her second week, she has an interview at the day care Shangela works at. It’s called Smiles for Miles Childcare, it’s painted an inviting bright blue and the windows are full of children’s art. There’s a jungle scene painted all over the big front window, with barely distinguishable animals obviously drawn by enthusiastic toddlers. Trixie likes it there right away.

Her interview is with a large woman with a deep booming voice. She’s called Latrice and is in charge of the day care, but looks like she might as well be in charge of the country. Trixie follows her through the hallway into her office, bumping into kids who cross her path in unexpected way not only once, but several times. There is a stray tomato lying next to a single shoe right in front of Latrice’s door, which Latrice picks up with a sigh and places on the desk in her office. Once they are sitting on opposite sides of Latrice’s desk, Latrice offers her tea and cherry gummy bears that are already set up on the table. Trixie takes two of the cherries and notices with relief that she feels rather relaxed. There’s something about the ugly yellow of Latrice’s office walls and Latrice’s calm smile that has a soothing effect on her.

“So, Beatrice Mattel,” Latrice starts off the interview, smiling. Her back teeth seem to be pushing her front teeth towards the middle of her mouth, making them stand slightly crooked. Trixie has always liked crooked teeth. “Shangela says she thinks you would be a good fit for our little day care.”

Trixie smiles back. She doesn’t know exactly what Shangela bases that statement on, but in that moment realizes she really likes Shangela.

“I prefer Trixie,” she says, and Latrice nods, scribbling something onto her note pad. “I don’t want
to lie, and, uh, you can gather it from my resumé anyway, I don’t have the most impressive work-experience in this field.”

Latrice nods, her eyes on her notes.

“I worked as a receptionist at a hotel for the past five years, but that’s not what I want to be doing with my life. I’ve always wanted to work with children, and I’m really hoping I get to, someday. Or now, if you would consider me. It would be wonderful to get practical input and experience alongside my classes. I love children.”

Latrice looks at her, gives her another crooked smile, then asks:

“Any experience working with children at all? Younger siblings, babysitting, charity work?” Her voice is deeper than almost any woman’s voice Trixie has heard, and she speaks with an accent that Trixie is sure isn’t regional, but that she cannot safely place. Probably somewhere West Coast, she thinks.

“Yes!” Trixie replies, relieved that she doesn’t have to lie. “I babysat my neighbour’s kids a lot. They are twins, four years old – no, five now – and a two-year-old. Their mom always called me over when their dad fu – umm, when their dad pulled some stunts and they had to go to their crises-restaurant.”

Latrice raises an eyebrow at her.

“Umm. It’s the restaurant they went to to discuss their marriage crises,” Trixie explains, knowing fully well she’s digressing, and this isn’t how she’s supposed to behave in a professional job interview. When she had her last job interview she was still in High School and, in hindsight, assumes the manager cut her all kinds of slack because she was pretty, and they didn’t have to pay her much. She’s relieved when she sees Latrice chuckle to herself. She doesn’t make a sound, but she’s grinning, and her stomach is slowly vibrating under her clipboard.

The interview lasts another fifteen minutes, fifteen minutes in which Trixie apparently holds herself rather well – or, at least, tickles Latrice – because at the end of it Latrice offers her to come back the next day and show what she can do.

“We can talk about your ideas and experiences all day long,” she says, getting out of her chair and showing Trixie to the door, “but I need to you really get with the kids to see what you’re made of.”

Trixie is nervous about that, nervous about an opportunity to fuck up yet another thing, but when she walks through the corridors of the day care, all bright and colourful and loud, she knows she really wants this.

She’s on her way back home when her phone buzzes.

Katya

Heard you have your interview today. You’ll be fine! I mean, they took Shangie, and she’s Shangie, so their standards aren’t too high.

This time, Trixie texts back immediately.

Trixie

You’re late, interview’s over. Went well!
Katya

Good!
Sasha ditched me for a date with weird-hat-guy, so I’m lonely
do you maybe want to get drinks?
I should get a hat like that, don’t you think
I could be a hat person
I want that.

Drinks? With Katya? Trixie’s heart starts beating way too fast and she sits down on a nearby bench for a second, weighing her options. She’s not sure going out with Katya is the best idea for her. After all, she is still only semi-successful in not developing a crush on that girl. At the same time though there is no way she could say deny Katya’s offer. She hasn’t had time to talk to Katya alone since they went to get plants and maybe, just maybe, hanging out with her would help her in demystifying Katya and moving on. Maybe hanging out with Katya is the best thing she can do.

Trixie

I hope it’s milkshakes

Katya

At that milkshake bar?
Yeah, sure
I’ll be there in twenty?

Trixie is at the 50s milkshake bar fifteen minutes later, her stomach fluttering doing tiny annoying backflips under her light jacket. So far, she’s barely spent time with Katya, and she’s not even sure she can hold a conversation with her. The last thing she wants Katya to think is that she’s boring. Trixie isn’t boring, she knows that, but she also knows that she’s too good at hiding that fact sometimes.

When Katya arrives it’s on a bike with a deflated wheel that seems to take her all her strength to ride. She probably would have been faster on foot.

“It’s Juju’s” she says, as if that was an explanation, and then “hi”.

She hugs Trixie and she’s a little sweaty from her ride here and Trixie can smell her shampoo in her hair for a second. She doesn’t know what it smells like, it reminds her faintly of…red? Trixie isn’t good with scents. Today’s outfit includes a dress with a pattern of coffee beans and a necklace of the crow they had gotten together. Katya has already broken her promise to wear that thing every time they had gotten together. Katya has already broken her promise to wear that thing every time they see each other, but apparently, she hasn’t thrown it out yet either. When Trixie lets go of the hug she can see angry red marks at the back of Katya’s neck where the heavy necklace digs into her skin. She wonders if Katya is wearing it just to defy her. She wouldn’t put it past her. She’s also wearing big brown glasses that make her look even more beautiful than the black ones Trixie has seen her wear before. Trixie internally rolls her eyes at herself. That’s just a little too much.

Half an hour later, while sipping the rest of her strawberry milkshake, Trixie is assured she doesn’t bore Katya. Quite the contrary, she’s rather successful at making Katya laugh; a laugh that makes her flail her arms in front of her almost every time. She tells Katya a little about the guests at the hotel, and brings out every funny exchange she can remember, sometimes shamelessly exaggerating, just so she can get that laugh out of Katya. It works every time. Trixie is pleased with herself.
After Trixie admits she doesn’t know what Butoh dance is (she had wanted to look it up but her refusal to indulge in her Katya madness had stopped her), Katya pulls out her phone and shows her a video on her friend Laganja’s Instagram. Katya and three other people, all of them in bodysuits, are…moving around to synthetic music in a dance studio. There’s a lot of dramatically exaggerated facial expressions, falling to the floor, and twisting your body in ways Trixie could never do. It’s mesmerizing, artistic, impressive, charismatic, and also hilarious. At one point, when Katya lies on her stomach, grabbing her feet with her hands and letting a silent scream into the camera, Trixie chokes on her drink. She goes into a little laughing fit, can’t help herself, and Katya, turning off the video grabs her shoulder and says:

“This is art, bitch. Get with it.”

“The art of what exactly” Trixie retorts, still laughing and a little relieved that Katya doesn’t look to be too insulted. “The art of moving your body in a way nobody ever wants to see?”

“Exactly. Yes!” Katya yells out, hitting the table twice as punctuation, making a man a few tables over shoot them a curious look. “That’s exactly it! I mean, it isn’t of course, but that’s exactly it!”

“Look at me, getting art.”

“Get it or it gets you!” Katya puts away her phone and flips through the short menu again. “You should come to one of our shows sometime. You’d fit right in with Shangie and Juju, last time they almost got kicked out of the theatre because they couldn’t pull themselves together.” Katya grins at that memory.

“Is there a show this weekend? I have, like, nothing on.”

Katya shakes her head no. “I’m actually not here this weekend and maybe all of next week. We’ll see, I’m visiting someone.” There’s beat of silence before that last word and Trixie wonders whether she should maybe not ask further questions, but her curiosity wins over.

“Who?”

“Violet.”

“Oh. Your girlfriend, right?” Trixie says as casually as possible, not looking at Katya and instead focussing on the ice cubes in her glass. There’s one that’s shaped like a foot. Trixie crushes it into pieces with her pink straw.

“Yeah.” Is Katya’s only answer. She closes the menu and leans back in her seat, looking at Trixie expectantly.

“So are you guys, like, long distance? Kim says she’s travelling?” Trixie asks after a few long seconds of silence in which she contemplated changing the subject back to the hotel, to Laganja, to her classes, anything else.

“Yeah. Uh, she’s travelling with a show as an Aerial performer, she’s pretty incredible.” Katya’s eyes light up at that. “We met at the house, she lives here too.”

Trixie knows all this.

“Do you manage to see her a lot?”

“Nope,” Katya says, playing with a crumb on the table. She pushes it back and forth with her straw, leaving a small trail of bubbly milkshake foam on the plastic table. “But it’s fine, you know,
or it will be. I’m done with college in February and who knows, maybe I can travel with her. I’ll try out for her group for sure. I have some talents as well, as you know!” At that, she grins before she immediately gets serious again. “She’s in New York sometimes and that’s when I get to see her most.” Katya takes off her glasses and rubs them on the bottom of her dress. The dress, which is a little too short anyway, rides up, but Katya is mostly covered by the table. Trixie forces her eyes away and looks out of the window they’re seated next to. It’s getting dark outside and her reflection stares back at her out of the window. She’s pale in the light of the bar and a strand of hair has gotten out of the bow at the back of her neck. She hopes her hair wasn’t messed up like this at her interview earlier. It’s drizzling outside, a big puddle is forming right in front of her on the sidewalk and the thought of Katya maybe being gone all week makes her feel forlorn somehow.

“So you’re going to be in New York all week?”

“Oh, I’m going tomorrow and then we’ll see. It’s not easy to plan this stuff and her schedule changes around all the time and I also never know how long I’ll want to stay. Sometimes she has time off and we get to do stuff, but then other times I’m just on my own a lot. But this time should be fine, I’m pretty sure we have a room just the two of us this time. There’s this girl travelling with her who’s a little, uh. Valentina. She’s cool, I like her, but she’s also awful, and, ugh, I’m not even sure what bothers me so much about her, but it’s something. It’s something!”

“Maybe you just want some alone time with Violet?” Trixie tries to sound casual, fixing her hair distractedly.

“Yes. Yes, alone time would help,” Katya says and sighs quietly. Then her mood suddenly changes and she’s grinning again. “Alone time would help,” she repeats, and winks at Trixie obnoxiously.

Trixie forces herself to grin and then focusses back on the puddle on the sidewalk. It’s growing and growing, and the rain is leaking in a trickle out of its corners down the empty street.

♥♥♥

Working at Smiles for Miles is a challenge, that’s for sure. Trixie arrives after her morning lecture and barely has any time to settle in before she has to comfort a little boy who’s crying because his mom is coming to pick him up half an hour later than usual. She awkwardly sits on the floor with him trying to come up with things to distract him, and when she gets up ten minutes later her legs have fallen asleep and she almost stumbles into a little bookshelf. Just when the boy stops crying, Trixie has to break off a fight between two girls. She’s not sure she gets what the fight is about. Apparently one girl uses the purple pen too much so that another one can’t use it, but when Trixie points to at least seven other purple pens right in front of them on the table it doesn’t seem to solve anything.

She barely gets to her actual task: to change the decorations on the window from paper bunnies to paper leaves the kids made this morning. Shangela is in the room with her, keeping an eye on her per Latrice’s orders. She’s sitting in a corner of the room with a couple of kids and builds a space station out of Legos. She looks to be a lot more relaxed than Trixie is and doesn’t come to Trixie’s aid once.

The kids are curious about Trixie and, not being able to distinguish between things that are important (changing the decorations) and things that are not (everything else), keep coming up to Trixie with things like this

“I’m sleeping over at Dan’s tonight. His mum is making chicken fingers.”

“Do you know where I live?”
“You have pretty hair.”

“My uncle is a fire fighter and his car is bigger than your car.”

“Can you count to 100?”

“Will you come to my birthday party?”

“Can I touch your hair?”

“Maisie is sleeping at my place tonight. We are making chicken fingers.”

“Ava says she’s a fairy princess but she’s not. She doesn’t even have the wings. But I have the wings. But they are at home. But I can get them, can I go?”

“I can count to six billion trillion. One, two, three, four, five…”

Trixie is stressed out at first, but slowly settles into the ridiculousness of it all, deciding that putting up the decorations can’t really be what Latrice wants to see from her. Instead, she engages with the kids. Turns out, a lot of them want to touch her hair. Turns out, Trixie likes having her hair touched - well, except by Sebastian, whose fingers are stickier than is acceptable. When Latrice comes to check on her two hours later, Trixie is sitting in a rocking chair with two kids on her lap and a couple more at her feet, reading the Rainbow Fish. It’s a good thing she knows that book pretty much by heart, because the kids on the floor insist on looking at the pictures the whole time, making it almost impossible for Trixie to get a look at the words. She has to read quite loudly to be heard over the space battle fight Shangela and her kids have going on in the corner. Trixie feels her voice getting hoarse already. The space battle ends as soon as Latrice walks in and looks over the room. Latrice gives Trixie a nod and a satisfied smile.

♥♥♥

The next day is a Saturday. It’s sunny outside and Trixie almost takes a walk before breakfast to enjoy the sun after the last days of constant rain. Almost. Kim is away visiting her mom, and Trixie, who had been looking forward to having the room for herself for a while, feels a little lost without her. With Kim and Katya gone, she doesn’t really know what to do with her weekend and spends most of her Saturday on her homework. It’s a good thing she has time to catch up, honestly. She tends to underestimate the work she needs to do for her classes, always counting on her smarts to get her through, but she had to learn pretty fast that she is one of the least experienced people in her seminars and that catching up with the others is not going to be easy. Trixie lies on the floor in between her and Kim’s bed and reads pages after pages of highly theoretical texts. The way they read, their primary intention seems to be to never be understood by anyone, ever. Trixie spends a lot of time marking key phrases in different colours and developing an organization scheme for her course work, and little time getting her reading done.

She is taking a break changing her nail colour from plum to light blue – to match her highlighter – when her phone buzzes with a text from Shangela.

Shangela

Talked to Latrice. You’re in & the kids won’t shut up about your Barbie hair. :) Text me the times you’re free and we’ll work out our schedule :) halleloo!! :) :)

“Yessssssss!” Trixie shouts out, jumping up from the floor and doing a silly dance in front of Kim’s mirror. She has a job! She’s going to be paid! When she picks her phone off the floor to text back Shangela, she sees she has an Instagram notification – which, given the fact that she barely
ever posts anything on there is pretty rare. She clicks it and sees Katya has liked one of her pictures. Her stomach cartwheels at the sight of Katya’s name. The picture she liked is one of Trixie’s notebook with some song lyrics she had been proud of at the time – the time being five years ago. The notebook lies next to her guitar on her bed, pink sheets, a pink pillow. She remembers having taken quite a lot of time to arrange things for this photo only to gather a whopping amount of two likes on it. Now there’s a third one. She’s instantly mortified and reads over her lyrics again, trying to pin point just how embarrassing this is. Well. Pretty embarrassing.

She had written the lyrics after her break up with Shea and they basically scream: I’m heartbroken and I don’t know how to express myself, but I really need to do it anyway, please metaphorically hold my hand by giving me likes on this picture, thank you.

Hang on.

How had Katya even found that picture? Granted, it doesn’t take that long to scroll though Trixie’s Instagram, but this is one of her earliest posts and there’s about two hundred pictures between this one and her latest one. Had Katya really scrolled through all of them? And if yes, why? Trixie sits back down on the floor where she spent most of today and scrolls through her own profile, scanning for any more embarrassing shit Katya could have seen. There’s some pictures of her in a lot of ugly makeup doing the Rocky Horror Picture Show. Given Katya’s own ventures with makeup, Trixie thinks these aren’t so bad. There’s a lot of pictures of Trixie with her guitar, some taken by friends from school, some awkwardly taken by herself. Those are fine, except for the occasional bad hair style. Most of the pictures show landscapes and farm animals and more or less dumb and or thoughtful captions Trixie had come up with. There was one picture of Trixie’s favourite cow that she had captioned with: ’You’re not fucked up. It’s your behaviour’. There was another one of that cow and Trixie in matching flower crowns. Then there are a bunch of pictures showing her and Shea, that don’t give any indication that they were ever anything other than friends and that make Trixie’s heart ache a little. But all in all, not much to see. It is then that she gets a text.

Katya

How you doing, Beatrice?

Trixie snorts at the sight of her own name. How does Katya even know this? Is Katya short for something? She doesn’t know.

Trixie

Got the job at the Smilemile. Am thinking all I’ll have to do is sit still and be a Barbie doll and then collect my check.

Katya

That’s the dream.
Well, a dream
Not my dream.
Sounds pretty bad.
baddddd
Liking the check part

Trixie

Also finished all my coursework
Workin it!

Katya

But it’s Saturday
Don’t you know homework is for Monday morning
When u already felt bad about it all weekend and you have a couple of minutes before classes and you’re freaking out
That’s the sweet spot, mamma

It’s 6pm on a Saturday, Katya is with her girlfriend in New York, and she is texting Trixie. She wonders where they are right now, what they are doing. Maybe they aren’t together yet? Maybe Katya is still on her way, bored at some train station. Maybe she has already gone through the news, and twitter, and everybody else’s Instagram and Trixie is the last bit of entertainment she has. Or, maybe, she’s at Violet’s show, waiting for it to start. Unlikely. She doesn’t know exactly what kind of show they’re doing but it definitely looks like a night time thing. Like, late at night. Maybe she should look at Violet’s Instagram some more. Violet is so pretty, and skinny, and perfect.

Unknown Number

Hi, Katya says you’re alone and standing in the rain outside being sad. If you want, you can always come over. There’s not much going on, but we are playing video games and Jinkx is showing Adore how to fry an egg. Sasha.

Trixie

Katya! It’s not even raining!

Katya

The rain is a metaphor
Metaphorical rain!
Get with it

Trixie

What’s your damage

Katya

You don’t know what to do with yourself because I’m gone
And Kim
But me mostly
The rain is the absence of meaning
And me
Can’t spell meaning without me HAA
Did u know that, I didn’t
MEaning
I love that

Trixie

I hate that.
Trixie

Hey Sasha, thanks for inviting me, I’ll be there in 20

Trixie spends another two minutes lying on the floor but neither Katya nor Sasha respond to her again, so she finally gets up, relieved that she has something to do now, somewhere to go. She gets dressed quickly, in one of Kim’s earlier dresses, that didn’t come out too well but that’s very warm and comfortable. When she checks herself in the mirror, she notices that she doesn’t care much about what she looks like today, because Katya isn’t going to be there to see her. That realization makes her huff. This is stupid. Since when does she dress for Katya? Dressing for Katya is pointless for at least two reasons: 1) Dressing for anyone is stupid. 2) Katya, specifically, dresses like if a scarecrow had a baby with some kind of alien life form.

This is why Trixie takes off the comfy dress and exchanges it for an uncomfortably tight pink pencil skirt and a fluffy pink sweater. Then she puts on a full face of makeup, just for herself, and likes it so much she even takes a selfie (or twenty-five) to upload to Instagram later. Well, maybe this isn’t just for herself. Who cares. This is complicated.

Trixie spends her first Saturday night without Kim in the Love Shack’s living room playing Mario Kart with Chi Chi and Adore. She curses herself a little for wearing a tight skirt just to sit on a couch and envies Adore who isn’t even wearing pants, but she is having a great night - even though she keeps checking her phone for more messages from Katya. But Katya is with Violet, and it’s not like Trixie’s last message invited a response anyway. Her phone stays silent.

♥♥♥

Trixie’s first week of balancing Uni and her new job is a struggle to say the least. It takes most of her Sunday to try and rearrange her schedule, so she can work at the day care three times a week. She even drops a class because of that, but that’s okay, she had taken on more classes that she needed, expecting for something like this to happen.

On her first real day of work Trixie finds out fast that working here is not going to involve a lot of sitting around like a Barbie, and instead involves a lot of quick tough decisions. At lunch time Kameko spits his tea into Evan’s face, which sends Evan into a fit of rage. Trixie knows what to do, sort of, but not really, and keeps her arms locked tight around Evan, who struggles to get free and screams at Kameko. Trixie is doing her best to calm him down, keeping her voice as soothing as possible and making sure not to hurt him with her grip. It’s scary to see how angry a child can get; he’s shaking with rage and she’s not sure she knows what he’d do if she let him go. Thankfully, Shangela and another co-worker, Betty, are in the room as well watch her calmly, so she must be doing an okay job. Ten minutes later, when Evan is peacefully playing with a train on the carpet, Trixie is still a little shaken. Her neighbours’ kids never got this angry.

Katya remains gone all week and doesn’t text Trixie once. She updates her Instagram daily, however. Most of her videos are random things she filmed in the streets of New York, things that caught Katya’s attention for some reason unknown to Trixie. Some of her videos contain Violet, leaning over a bridge, eating a waffle, and doing nothing much but making Trixie feel bad. Katya’s latest video is of a plate of ravioli that Katya keeps zooming in and out of, laughing hysterically.

When Trixie gets home from college and work every day, she’s exhausted, but always looking forward to evenings of Netflix, makeup and watching Kim make clothes. This is how her first month of her new life passes. Not every second is exciting, not even every day is, but every day something small has Trixie feel grateful that she came here.
“I don’t know. This is too much. Is this too much? It might be too much,” Trixie says, frowning at herself in their mirror.

“No, it is perfect,” Kim reassures her.

“But – “

“Perfect.”

It’s a Friday night and they are invited to Juju’s birthday party later. It’s 80s themed. Kim went all out with their 80s looks, claiming that motto- and costume parties are the only parties that matter. This is why Trixie is currently in a pink velvet body suit, complete with a fanny pack, yellow cuffs, and pink headphones on. Roller girl fantasy Kim calls her creation. It is too much. But she is not changing out of it, not now that she has spent almost an hour on the perfect hair and make up for it. She can’t stop looking at herself in the mirror.

Trixie has been looking forward to this party ever since she got the invite two weeks ago. Her social life hasn’t exactly been thrilling lately, between homework and her job, she’s barely hung out with anyone but Kim. She also hasn’t seen Katya in a while. The few times she went over to Katya’s, Katya usually wasn’t home. One night, Trixie was playing video games again with Chi Chi and Adore - her revenge after she lost dramatically the first time - when Katya walked in, sat down on the couch next to Adore, and watched them play, falling asleep on a bag of chips after a while. One other time Trixie was baking cookies with Kim and Shangela at the house and Katya joined them, making a mess of the kitchen. Other than that, they barely saw each other. The good news is, Trixie has used this time to ban Katya out of her thoughts. She has been mostly successful at that; she’s not thinking about Katya before going to sleep, she not looking at Katya’s Instagram, and she’s definitely not looking at Violet’s. The bad news is, she can’t wait to see Katya tonight and she hopes to get another compliment for her outfit from her. The ‘goth Barbie doll’ is still running wild in her mind. But that’s okay. Baby steps.
They get to Juju’s late, because getting ready always takes longer than you think. Also, if Trixie is honest, she got ready extra slow on purpose, because there’s nothing more awkward than arriving at a party early, when everybody just sits around and waits for the party feeling to kick in. No thank you. Trixie would like to think the party starts as soon as she enters a room, but knows this is a lie. Mostly she just sits around awkwardly, waiting for everyone to loosen up, waiting for herself to loosen up.

Luckily, when they get there, the party is in full swing already, with people spilling out of the house into the garden and music so loud Trixie feels like this can only end in a neighbour’s complaint. Somebody has set up a wading pool in the garden, full of ice cubes and beers. Classy.

Trixie and Kim head inside, looking for Juju or anybody else they know. The kitchen is stuffed with people, most of them wearing clothes that might have been fashionable some time between the 60s and the 90s – nobody seems to take the 80s motto too seriously - , there’s ABBA blasting from the stereo and a lot of smoking inside. Bob definitely wouldn’t approve. The first familiar person they find is Jinkx. They are sitting on the kitchen counter, sipping tea, looking calmly around the room, not interacting with anyone. Their 80s outfit isn’t really 80s at all. Like the dress Trixie wore to the club the other night it is black lace, but this one is a lot less tight and goes past Jinkx’ bare feet. Jinkx must just have stepped out of the shower, because their hair is still wet. They look like a witch, Trixie thinks.

“You look like a swamp witch,” her mouth decides to say, and she hugs Jinkx where they sit on the counter to make up for her words.

“Thank you.”

They stay with Jinkx for a while, Trixie hopping up on the kitchen counter next to them. It’s a nice view from here and for now she’s comfortable socializing with just Kim and Jinkx. Jinkx, as turns out, studied four semesters of Early Childhood Education before switching majors and goes out of their way to let Trixie know all there is to know about her professors and courses and even offers Trixie their old materials, including text books. The evening has already paid off just for this. Trixie is in the middle of complaining about one professor’s messy presentations in his lectures when Katya comes up behind Kim and yells “hi!” into Kim’s ear so loud that Trixie flinches. The stereo is loud, but not that loud. That was unnecessary. Katya is wearing a simple colour blocked dress that’s much too big on her, and her long open hair is teased into more volume than she normally has. Trixie awkwardly leans forward to hug her without getting up from her prime spot on the counter – she’s decided that’s her party spot for tonight. From her position, Katya feels even smaller than usual. As always between them, Katya lets go of the hug first, takes a step back and beams at her, making a motion that indicates Trixie from top to bottom: “This. Is. Amazing,” she says, validating all of Kim’s and Trixie’s efforts in three simple words. Trixie feels herself blush a little but hopes it’s not visible in the dim light of the kitchen. Only when Kim elbows her slightly does Katya make sure to compliment Kim as well.

“What are we drinking?” Katya asks, taking Kim’s cup and smelling the drink. “Tea? Really Jinkx?”

As if on cue, Shangela pops up behind Katya, a bottle of wine and some plastic cups in hand. “Kim, Trixie! Finally, we thought we would have to do this without you,” she shouts as a way of greeting, handing all of them cups and pouring in a generous amount of wine before leaving as quickly as she came. Trixie notes she didn’t offer Katya a cup. Does Katya not drink? She opens her mouth to ask Katya just that when Katya seems to spot somebody at the other side of the room.

“Hang on,” she says, holding up her hands in the air, sounding excited. “Be back in a second, I
want you to meet someone, Trixie.”

When she comes back, she is accompanied by a very tall, very intimidating looking girl, in a purple dress that’s a little too tight to be convincingly 80s but that looks amazing nonetheless. Violet. Of course. Of course Violet would be here for Juju’s birthday. Trixie doesn’t know why that thought hadn’t occurred to her before. She could have used some time to prepare for this. She takes a big sip of wine and sits up straight, crossing her legs and draping her hair over her shoulder.

Violet kisses Kim on the cheek and gives Trixie a small smile.

“Trixie, this is Violet. Violet, Trixie. Kim’s new roommate.”

“Hi,” Violet says, giving Trixie a once over. She looks a little bored. There’s nothing boring about Trixie, so Violet’s look pisses her off. She tries to mirror it, looking just as bored, and holds Violet’s eyes for a couple of seconds.

“Violet managed to get the weekend off just to come to Juju’s birthday!” Katya announces, her smile big and her eyes glistening.

Violet snorts slightly at that. “Well, mostly for you, babe. You know Juju can’t stand me these days.”

“Even better,” Katya says, grinning, and takes Violet’s hand.

This is bad. This is pretty bad. Of course Trixie knew that Katya is in a relationship, but knowing about it in an abstract way, and seeing it play out right in front of her are two very different things. Trixie withdraws from the conversation completely, trying to listen and not focus on where Violet and Katya stand so close their sides are touching. The group are talking about Violet’s show and her experiences on the road, with Violet, Jinkx and Kim doing most of the talking. There’s an aura of arrogance and disinterest surrounding Violet. She speaks in a mostly monotonous voice, sounding bored about experiences that to Trixie seem to be the opposite of boring. Apparently, she has spent the last couple of months on a tour bus with fire-eaters and acrobats, touring most of the US. She seems over it. With a stab of pain, however, Trixie notices that Violet’s eyes turn soft whenever she looks at Katya. At one point during the conversation, she loops her arm around the much smaller girl, hugs her closer to her side, and kisses the top of her head. This is when Trixie decides she needs to leave the kitchen. Her party spot be damned.

Once she is out of the kitchen, she leans against the wall in the hallway for a second. Deep breaths. None of this is news. None of this matters. She waits until her heart has stopped racing, grabs a bottle of wine that’s just sitting there on the ground waiting for her, and decides to see who else is there. She is going to have a good time tonight. Wearing what she’s wearing she just has to.

♥♥♥

Trixie finds Juju, Shangela, and a bunch of people she doesn’t know sitting in folding chairs around the wading pool. Juju has her naked feet in the pool, in the ice cubes, in the middle of October.

“Trixieeeeeee!” she shouts when she sees her, “come here, tell me happy birthday!”

“Happy birthday.” Trixie grins, sitting down in one of the folding chairs next to her. It’s covered in one of the ugliest floral prints Trixie has ever seen.

“I’m drunk, are you drunk?” Juju asks her, waving a bottle of vodka around and almost hitting Shangela’s head.
“Working on it.” Trixie indicates her bottle of wine.

Juju looks at her expectantly.

“What?” Trixie asks.

“So we’ve been talking,” Juju waggles her eyebrows at Trixie, trying to prompt her to ask her to go on.

Shangela puts her hand on Juju’s thigh and shakes her head lightly. “Come on, Jujubee, just don’t.”

“What?” Trixie asks again. She props up her feet at the edge of the wading pool, trying to not put too much weight on it so the water doesn’t spill out. Some spills out anyway, immediately seeping into her shoes and making her toes freeze.

“Do you like the ladies?” Juju asks gleefully, swatting Shangela’s hand away.

“Huh?”

“The Ladies. You know, I like them. Or, I like Shangie, but that’s the same thing. It’s the same thing!” She stops and blows Shangela an overdramatic kiss, who rolls her eyes at her with a little smile. This apparently prompts Juju to get up and sit in Shangela’s lap, who is trying her best to remain her balance in the cheap chair. “Ladies are lovely. If you like them, there’s somebody you should meet. Somebody likes you! Ahh!”

Shangela shakes her head slightly, stroking Juju's hair. "Do you really need to play matchmaker every second of the day?" she asks, but Juju ignores her in favour of grinning at Trixie.

“Oh. Umm. Yes, I, uh ‘like the ladies.’” Trixie doesn’t quite know what to make of this conversation. If Juju keeps bouncing up and down like that, the chair will break and maybe they’ll land in the pool. That would be funny. She hopes the chair will break.

Juju screeches at Trixie’s answer and slaps Shangela’s shoulder excitedly. “See! I told you!”

“You told me, darling.” Shangela nods patiently.

Juju seems to suddenly realize something. “But do you have a girlfriend? Please don’t have a girlfriend!” Her voice is whiny. She is too involved in this, Trixie thinks.

“I don’t have a girlfriend,” Trixie says, trying not to sound too bitter. She takes another big sip of wine. Was this bottle full when she got it? She isn’t sure. She tries to get excited about somebody asking about her but can’t quite manage to do that.

“Do you want one? I can introduce you.” Juju wiggles her eyebrows at her so vigorously that one of her fake lashes detaches from her lid and dangles left of her eye.

Trixie thinks about it. She should do this, she should. What’s the worst thing that can happen? Even if she doesn’t care about this person, getting to kiss somebody is always nice. She sips on her wine some more, leans back in her chair, and unwittingly her mind drifts off to kissing Katya. Leaning in, slightly down, and touching her pink lips against Katya’s red ones, feeling their softness, smudging their lipsticks. She thinks about putting one hand on Katya’s neck, pulling her closer to her, and one hand on Katya’s back, travelling down, slowly down.

An ice cube hitting her shoulder puts her out of her fantasies. “Trixie! You wanna meet her or what,” Juju whines impatiently, already fishing for more ice cubes to throw, but they keep slipping
through her clumsy fingers.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

♥♥♥

The party goes on for hours and everybody seems to have a good time. Trixie does her best to have a good time as well, but it’s hard when she runs into Violet and Katya at least another ten times. Violet and Katya dancing on the patio. Violet and Katya talking to people in the hallway, their arms wrapped around each other. Violet and Katya cheering for Chi Chi in his beer pong game. After a little while, Trixie ends up lying on the sofa in the living room, doing nothing but watching Adore blow smoke circles out of the open window, and half listening to the conversations they’re having with people outside. The music is loud, the people are loud, and she feels heavy with alcohol, but she is peaceful just lying here. Part of her is angry for not having a better time and using her chance to dance to some of her favourite songs, but she’s learned in her life that a good time can’t be forced.

She must have fallen asleep after a while, and when she wakes up, the sky is starting to turn pink with the sunrise, and the room around her is empty save for some people passed out on the floor and quiet hushed conversations. She thinks about just sleeping here, but her outfit is uncomfortable, and she needs to get all this makeup off, so she gets up to leave through the garden. She feels slightly buzzed, but she stopped drinking a couple of hours ago, so she should be fine.

There is a small group of people still at the wading pool and they are stumbling up to make their way home just as Trixie passes them. One of them can’t find his shoe, which Trixie spots floating in the pool. She doesn’t say anything.

Trixie is about to leave the garden when she hears a soft familiar voice behind her. “Hey, Trixie.” Katya is sitting leaned against the big tree, her knees pulled to her face, smoking. She’s alone.

“Hi,” Trixie replies, wondering for a second if she should continue walking or not. She takes another two steps, then decides to turn around and walks up to Katya. She looks lost.

“What are you doing here?” Trixie asks.

“Me? Oh, err, watching the sunrise. I like watching the sunrise.”

Trixie frowns at that. The sun is rising, is slowly tinting the part of the sky behind the house a soft pink colour; and Katya, with her back to the house, can’t see any of it. The part of the sky Katya is turned to is still a muddy dark grey colour. Trixie does not point that out.

“Where’s Violet?”

“She’s sleeping.” Katya puts out her cigarette against the cold ground and lights another one. Her lighter has big orange letters on it and Trixie tries to read the words, but they are covered by Katya’s fingers.

Katya looks at Trixie for a long second, chewing her lip, then asks “Do you maybe want to stay for a couple of minutes? I can’t go to sleep yet.”

Trixie has never seen Katya like this. She looks sad and drained of energy, very unlike her usual self. Trixie pulls of one of the ugly lawn chair cushions and sits down on it opposite of Katya. The ground is cold beneath her even through the cushion. She doesn’t quite know what to do and starts digging little holes into the ground with her fake pink nails that she spent too much time
decorating. There’s little hearts on every second finger, or there used to be. Most of them must have come off at some point during the night, and they took the underlying nail polish with them. Now there are heart-shaped holes in Trixie’s nails. Trixie wants to say something, fill the silence, but one look at Katya tells her Katya is trying to get up the nerve to say something herself, so Trixie waits.

This is what comes out of Katya after what feels like an hour, but was probably only a minute:

“I’m screwing this up.”

Trixie tries to catch Katya’s eyes at that, but Katya puts her head against the tree and faces the sky, her eyes closed.

“Screwing what up?”

“With her. With this! My life? Everything. Take a pick.”

“Did anything happen between Violet and you?” Trixie asks, hating herself for the small glimmer of hope she feels rise inside her stomach at that. This is not a nice thing to feel. Her right index finger hits a stone under the dirt in the garden and the nail comes off almost entirely. Trixie pulls it off and buries it in the dirt next to a patch of daisies.

“No. I don’t know. I don’t know. Did you know it took me months to convince her to even go out with me? Months. She just wasn’t interested. She rejected me again and again and I can still remember that. And we’re together now, but I can still remember that. I didn’t change, you know? I’m still the person she rejected.” Katya shakes her head. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be telling you this, you were on your way home. Sorry.”

“But, I don’t know, she kept getting to know you better and finding out new things about you, so that’s probably why she changed her mind. People change their minds, you know,” Trixie says softly, trying to be as helpful as she can. God, she’s not used to conversations like this. The only person she ever talked to about relationships was Shea, and she had failed at most of these conversations, obviously. At school, she always had friends, of course, but she was never anyone’s best friend, and people just didn’t come to her with their problems. Now she is Kim’s best friend, or at least Kim is hers, but Kim never seems to want to talk about romantic relationships. So Trixie is pretty new to this.

“But if people change their mind, they can change their mind again.”

“Yes, I guess. But – “

“Do you know the kind of people Violet is on the road with? They are all artists, they are all interesting, they are all creative. I’m not better than them. I’m not. This is a truth!”

“Are you scared Violet is going to cheat on you?”

Katya sighs at that and opens her eyes, finally looks at Trixie. She takes the time to light another cigarette before answering. How many cigarettes does she go through in one day? This can’t be healthy. “It’s not like that, Violet and I. We’re open, you know. She can fuck all of them, that’s fine.”

Oh. This is news. An open relationship. It had taken Trixie quite a while to wrap her mind around that concept when Courtney had first suggested it to her, ages before. She likes the thought, she thinks, but only in an abstract this-is-for-other-people kind of way. The thought of being in an open relationship herself makes her uncomfortable and a little sad. It just doesn’t line up with her idea of
romance, outlandish as that idea may be. Suddenly something occurs to her and her heart beats twice as fast as before. If Katya is in an open relationship, then –

“So you can, uh, do whatever you want then?”

Katya huffs out a breath of smoke; the smoke rises up and blurs Katya's face for a second. Through the smoke, Trixie sees a small smile forms on her lips, but it’s gone as fast as it came.

“Of course not. But if you’re talking about hooking up with people, yeah. Yeah, it’s just… I don’t know. I hook up with people sometimes, sure, but do you want to know what I think about when I’m with them?”

Trixie doesn’t.

“Violet?” she asks, her sudden rush of excitement over the news of Katya being allowed to be with other people already mostly gone.

“Violet. All the time. It all comes down to her, every time. I hook up with a guy with an ugly tattoo, I end up trying to memorize it, so I can tell Violet about it. I hook up with a girl who has the nicest hand writing I’ve ever seen and I want to take a picture of it and send to Violet. And it’s not like Violet cares. Not that much. Or maybe she does. I can’t tell anymore. God, this sounds so bad. She’s amazing, she really is, please know that I know that.”

Trixie doesn’t know what to say to this. She looks at Katya’s face for a long time. Katya has her eyes closed again and the sun behind her lights up her curls. Trixie wants to lean in closer and hug her, do something to get the sad look off her face, but she feels frozen in place. She’s cold, sitting there without a jacket in the early morning, and if she’s cold in her velvet jumpsuit, Katya must be freezing. She wants to suggest going inside, but feels like she can’t interrupt this moment, so she tries to clean the dirt of her hands on the ugly seat cushion and thinks of something to say. There’s a worm making its way over one of her shoes. She gets him off her with a folded leaf and watches as it buries into the cold ground again.

“It was different when she was still here,” Katya goes on after a while. “We were open then too, but it was more fun. I could go out, hook up with, I don’t know, the pianist at the mall, and then come home and hook up with her. That was brilliant. Brilliant! And it should work now too, but it just doesn’t. I miss her so much. I don’t wanna fuck anybody just because I can’t fuck her. Do you want to be fucked by someone just because the person this someone really wants is unavailable? Do you?”

This is an awful thought, Trixie thinks, but damn if she doesn’t love the way Katya says fuck. There’s so much force behind it. “No, I don’t.”

“See? This is why it doesn’t work. So I stopped sleeping with other people and I don’t think Violet even understands why. And she hasn’t stopped. And she shouldn’t have to. She’s not doing anything wrong at all. I mean, those were my terms, my fucking terms. I wanted to be open. And now I can’t handle it. And I just miss her too much.”

This is Katya’s breaking point, apparently, because she hides her face behind her hands and begins to sob. Shit. Trixie still doesn’t know what to do, but has to do something, so she gets up and sits down next to Katya, without her cushion, on the dirty ground. Kim will be so pissed about the dirt on her butt. Trixie snakes an arm around the smaller girl, who immediately leans into her side.

Katya is cold against her side and the smell of the cigarette she is holding where her hands are wrapped around her knees bites into Trixie’s nose. She cries for what feels like a small eternity,
and Trixie’s head is spinning. Where is a bottle of wine when you need one? She wracks her brain for helpful things to say, comes up empty, but after a while at least remembers she has tissues with her. She pulls one out of her fanny pack and hands it to Katya, who blows her nose loudly.

Katya’s sobs slowly subside after that and she rubs her face dry with the back of her hand. There's a smudge of dirt covering her left cheek now. When her breathing has calmed down, a small grin forms on her face.

“I can’t believe you’re wearing a fanny pack, by the way. Like, you did that.”

“I did that.”
Trixie is slowly getting the hang of things at Smiles for Miles. She knows which kids can’t have dairy, she knows which kids are prone to anger, and when there’s a single tiny shoe lying around in a corner, she knows who that belongs to as well. Today is one of the harder days though. It has been stormy all day, meaning they can’t go outside and the kids don’t know what to do with their built-up energy. This means it is loud, louder even than usually, and there is more complaining than Trixie can listen to.

“So this sucks,” she comments quietly when Shangela flops down next to her on a bean bag, her hair in even more disarray than usual, and stretches her neck, which pops audibly.

“Ya. Kids,” she sighs in mock exasperation. “It’s like this a lot when the weather is shit - Shift! I said Shift!” she quickly adds when two boys stare at her and giggle.

“So what now?” Trixie asks. She has already tried pretty much everything today. She tried reading out a book, but nobody was willing to listen. She tried getting the kids to draw mandalas, or fire trucks, or even mermaids, but nobody stayed at the table for longer than two minutes at a time. She tried building Legos, she tried playing dress up, and had to give up every time. As a last resort she tried yelling at the kids, which helped for all of two minutes and also made her feel bad about herself. At least Latrice is out today and will only come by shortly before closing. That way, she doesn’t see the mess they are right now.

“Ugh, don’t ask me. They don’t even wanna dance with me today. Right, Suzie? You don’t wanna dance with me?”

Suzie doesn’t answer and instead goes on with her game that seems to be: take random objects in the room and place them somewhere else where nobody would suspect them. Trixie spotted her favourite mug in a box of cowboy dolls a little earlier.

“Gotta miss Ginger on days like this. If she were here right now, she would just get out the guitar and make some noise, that always helped. Well, mostly. Why are you not Ginger?”

Trixie hesitates for a moment. She hasn’t played the guitar in a while, having slowly lost interest in the past couple years. When she moved here, it had been so long since she picked it up that she didn’t even bother to bring it. Besides, her guitar at home is complete trash. But she does know how to play. She’s not great with playing in front of people; she can count the times she’s played for her friends on one hand; but these are just a bunch of kids, and what do they know about music anyway, and she would do pretty much anything to make them quiet down a little.
“I’m better than Ginger. You have the guitar here?”

Shangela beams at her.

Half an hour later Trixie is sitting on the window sill, cross-legged, playing a guitar that has clearly seen better days, but that sounds fairly okay. The kids have gathered around her, and, low and behold! quieted down. There’s still the occasional kid running around the room, there’s shuffling, and talking, and a ridiculous amount of coughing, but most of the kids look at her with gleaming eyes. She’s racking her brain for every kid’s song she knows. Most of the songs she knows from her childhood the kids don’t know, but Shangela seems to be a walking book of modern children’s songs, never running out of new song ideas the kids can sing along to.

Trixie feels the tension she has felt all day slowly leave her body. She likes kids, she likes music, and she is not sure why she never thought about combining these two things before. There’s something incredibly validating about having all of them look up at her and screech delightedly whenever she starts a new song they like. And her voice sounds nice, she thinks, even when she’s stumbling over the words of verses she barely knows, going after Shangela’s lead.

When Latrice walks in towards closing time they are singing the theme of Sofia the First for the fourth time – back by popular demand – and by now even Trixie knows the lyrics:

_I was a girl in the village doing alright_
_Then I became a princess overnight_
_Now I gotta figure out how to do it right_
_So much to learn and see_

Latrice sits down on the carpet with the kids, gives Trixie and Shangela an encouraging smile, and starts singing along, her deep raspy voice drowning out most of the kids. After all the kids have been picked up, Latrice comes up to her.

“I didn’t know you could do that.”

“Yeah, me either. I mean, I knew I could play the guitar of course, but.”

“Yeah. Yeah, so I thought this wasn’t going to happen this year, with Ginger leaving and all, but listen: The last couple years we put on a little musical for the holidays. Just for the parents and siblings, a small thing. Is this something you can imagine doing?”

“Oh. Yes, sure, why not!” Trixie likes that idea. She still has the guitar wrapped around her shoulder, not quite ready to put it away yet.

“Excellent.”

“So, what kind of musical? Do you have the sheet music?”

Latrice thinks for a second. “Ginger always wrote the musicals. I don’t know, I think she took all that stuff with her. But I can call her and get her to send some stuff over.”

Shangela, who is busy getting the room back in order after their turbulent day suddenly chimes in: “We can write a musical ourselves, can’t we, Trix?”

“We can?” Trixie doesn’t think they can.

“Sure. I never liked Ginger’s stuff that much anyway, it’s so – I don’t know, we can top that. I can write some lyrics, and earlier you said you used to write music! Come on, it’s a challenge!”
“Uh, I guess.” A challenge for sure.

Latrice laughs. “That’s the spirit. No, really, just try it out, and if it doesn’t work, we can always still call Ginger.”

♥♥♥

This is how, the next day, Trixie comes back to Shangela’s straight after work. They have a musical to write, apparently. With Latrice’s permission, Trixie has taken the guitar from the day care with her. There’s no guitar case, and she carries it wrapped in a blanket to protect it from the drizzle outside. At the house, Shangela leads her into the living room where Adore is napping on the couch and Chi Chi is doing some course work on the floor. Shangela kicks close Chi Chi’s book as she passes him and plops down on Adore’s feet on the couch, waking them up.

“It’s musical writing time!” she announces, “be helpful or get lost.”

It is at least another forty-five minutes before they even start trying to write. Juju comes home right after them and squeezes into the space between Shangela and the back of the couch, holding her from behind and distracting her from getting anything done. They are kissing way too much, Trixie thinks. Chi Chi for his part doesn’t seem to be musically gifted, or at least he isn’t interested in being helpful, but is happy to stay in the room and side-track Shangela with dumb jokes whenever Trixie gets her to give her any attention. Trixie half wants to give up and tell Latrice to call Ginger after all, but she remembers the excitement she felt last night before she went to bed, when she fantasized about putting her own musical together. She wants to at least try now. She picks up the guitar and pulls on the strings thoughtfully, deciding that she would just start writing on her own, the others be damned.

Of course, this is the moment Katya walks in and simultaneously the moment Trixie stops trying to write. Katya enters the kitchen from upstairs and she looks like she’s been asleep until moments ago. She is wearing an oversized black shirt that says SAD GOTH and glasses with black rims; hair legs are naked and fuzzy and there is no makeup on her face. She looks tired. Trixie has to fight two opposing urges: the urge to get up and hug her, and the urge to make fun of her outfit. She sits tight and shuts up.

“What’s going on here?” Katya asks and yawns openly, joining Chi Chi on the floor and stretching her arms over her head. She looks so different without makeup. “Are we making music?”

“We,” Trixie answers, shooting Shangela a pointed look “are trying to write a musical for the kids. You’re welcome to be helpful.”

“I’m afraid this isn’t one of my myriad of talents but sure. What do we have so far?”

To Trixie’s surprise Katya ends up being actually helpful. Her biggest contribution consists in making the others focus, not yell over one another, and reel in some of their ideas. Trixie didn’t know Katya had it in her.

Trixie herself doesn’t get too involved in planning the plot and is already trying to come up with little melodies, only half listening to their ideas. Adore insists on an underwater holiday fantasy, an idea Chi Chi enthusiastically seconds. (“Come on, are you sure you can’t have the show at the pool?” he asks for the third time, despite Shangela’s note that most of the kids probably can’t swim yet). Katya and Juju love the idea of an outer space adventure and start coming up with a plot that doesn’t involve Christmas or any other holiday in the slightest (“But making a holiday musical for the holidays is so expected, let’s do something else instead”). After almost an hour of this, Shangela comes through and pieces together a short plot around an elf who is swamped with his
job as a first-time helper of Santa and gets help from various magical characters. It’s predictable, but cute. Trixie, who likes to have things perfect, takes a little convincing from the others.

“Listen, it doesn’t matter that much,” Shangela insists when Trixie circles back to an earlier Christmas Western idea. “The kids are damn cute, they are cute when they try to act and sing, and you know damn well they are going to mess up half of their lines anyway. And the parents are going to love it, like they do every year.” She is right, probably.

Apparently, this is enough work for today for the others. Chi Chi turns on the TV and they decide to order in pizza. Trixie, however, doesn’t put down the guitar, keeps trying out melodies, and after a while Adore goes to get their own guitar and together the two of them come up with the first song. It’s far from being a good song and Trixie knows she’ll change most things about it in a couple of days, but it’s the first song she has written in years and it makes her happy just to sit here and play and sing quietly.

Katya has traded in her place on the floor for a place on a big arm chair next to the couch. She is surprisingly calm today, no jumping around the room, no pulling Shangela’s hair, nothing. Instead, she’s playing around on her phone, constantly texting, but every now and then she looks up to smile at Trixie, who feels particularly self-conscious about her voice in those moments.

When Trixie gets home just before midnight she gets a notification from Instagram and clicks to see Katya uploaded a picture of her and Adore. She’s sitting on the couch, guitar in hand, looking down and smiling slightly, Adore next to her. The only caption there is is a pink flower emoji.

♥♥♥

The next day, Trixie wakes up with the itch to do something monumental. She can’t, however, figure out what exactly she wants to do, so she spends most of the day doing her homework and preparing a presentation she has to give the next day. She feels unsatisfied all day and apparently spends quite a bit of time sighing and huffing because finally Kim asks her, in an exasperated voice:

“What is going on with you today?”

“Ugh, I don’t know. I want to do something.”

“Okay? Let’s do something then.”

“Like what?” Trixie whines.

“We could go out? We could go to the milkshake bar you like? To the park? The movies? Throw stones into the river? Feed a duck? I’m down for whatever.” Kim shuts her book with a loud thud. She has spent all day on her homework as well and must be pretty annoyed with it if she’s so ready to go out. Kim likes staying in.

“I don’t know. Gimme more options!” Trixie turns fully towards Kim so Kim can get a good look at her pout.

Kim rolls her eyes and thinks for a moment. “Okay, so, uh, I didn’t know if I should bring this up because Shangela told me you said no, but Juju gave me something to give you.” She gets up and pulls her purse out of her bag. Inside, there’s a yellow post it note she hands to Trixie. There’s a phone number on it. Trixie raises her eyebrows in question.

“Shangela said Juju told you about this girl who’s interested in you. That’s her number.”
“Oh.” Trixie had completely forgotten about that. A couple of months ago, the idea of a girl being interested in her would have excited her to no end, but she can’t evoke that feeling right now. She lets herself fall down on her bed and hugs a pillow to her stomach. “What’s her name?”

“Pearl. Her name is Pearl.”

Pearl. “Like Pearl Slackhoople,” Trixie notes.

“Who?”

“Pearl Slackhoople. She’s Fred Flintstone’s mother in law.”

“Uh huh.”

“She doesn’t approve of him.”

“This Pearl is nobody’s mother in law. Do you wanna text her maybe?”

Trixie groans. “I don’t know. Do you think I should text her?”

“I can’t make that decision for you. But, umm. No, never mind.”

“Come on. You can’t do that.”

“Okay. It’s just, I’ve been meaning to ask you for a while. Uh, when we were at Juju’s party in the kitchen and you met Violet… I don’t know – what’s going on between you and Katya?”

Trixie throws her arms over her face and sighs loud and dramatically. “Do you want me to tell you more about the Flintstones? I have some opinions I’d like to share. Like, about their fashion? You like talking about fashion.” Trixie thinks she could pull some opinions on this out of her ass, probably.

“So I’m not wrong. I’ve seen the way you look at her, Trixie.”

“Oh god? How do I look at her?”

“Like you want to walk over and sit in her lap, basically.”

“Shit.”

“So do you? Want that, I mean?”

“Kim! Kim, I don’t know! She has a girlfriend.” This conversation is a lot to handle for Trixie. She feels blood rushing to her cheeks and hides her face in her pillow. She should have taken the chance to go out and feed ducks instead of having this conversation.

“I know she has a girlfriend. I love Violet. She doesn’t get along too well with some of the others, or maybe just Juju mostly, but I think she’s great.”

“Ugh.” Trixie doesn’t need to hear this. Trixie wants to hear how Violet does arson in her free time and steals from the poor.

“You know they have an open relationship, right? Violet definitely wouldn’t mind you sitting on Katya’s lap a little.”

Yes. Trixie does know this. Has known this for a little over a week now and has spent entirely too
much time thinking about it. “Yeah I know.”

“And you like her?”

“What is this, high school?” Trixie throws her pillow at Kim and immediately misses its protecting warmth on her face. “God, yes, I like her.”

“Do you…not want to go for her because of Violet?”

Here are the reasons why Trixie does not want to go for Katya. 1) Katya herself said that she thinks mostly about Violet when she hooks up with somebody else and Trixie just isn’t able to handle that knowledge. 2) Trixie feels like she should not take advantage of Katya’s state. Katya trusted her with her feelings, was open with her when Trixie wasn’t open with Katya, and it wouldn’t feel right to enter into something with Katya without Katya knowing about Trixie’s feelings. Whatever these feelings were. 3) Trixie is scared of getting rejected. She is nothing, absolutely nothing like Violet, and therefore probably not Katya’s type. The thought of her coming on to Katya and Katya just not being interested at all is mortifying. 4) Thinking a couple of steps ahead, Trixie is also scared Katya would hook up with her once and then never again. She can’t imagine what it would be like to know how it feels to kiss and hold Katya, to maybe even fuck Katya (this is a thought Trixie has managed to almost not indulge in at all so far, and she’s glad about that), and then never getting to do it again. 5) Going for a girl, any girl, even the most single girl, is terrifying.

“Yeah,” is the answer Trixie finally settles on. She buries her face in her hands and groans. “This sucksss. I just need to get over this.”

“Maybe, yes. So, uh, do you think maybe it’s a good idea to text Pearl? And go out with her tomorrow? Not today. You need to entertain me today.”

Okay, Trixie decides. This is happening. She has no idea who Pearl is, what she likes, what she looks like – and realizes that her lack of curiosity is probably a bad sign – but she enters her number into her phone anyway. Once Pearl’s number is in her phone, Trixie can see her profile picture in her messenger’s contacts. She zooms in. Pearl is hot. She’s either giving the camera bedroom eyes, or was caught halfway through blinking. She has a septum piercing, which Trixie loves. Her hair is short and curly, shaved off at the sides. Not at all like Katya’s hair, in her messy braids and buns, that Trixie feels the itch to smooth down all the time. Her hair looked so beautiful in the light of the rising sun that morning in the garden.

“Don’t know what to text her?” Kim prompts her. Trixie realises she has been looking at her phone, doing nothing, for a too long time.

“No. Let’s go out.”

♥♥♥

They head out not knowing where they want to go and walk around the neighbourhood for a while. Trixie suggests going into the opposite direction of Katya’s, half because she doesn’t feel like ending up there right now, and half because she realizes she barely knows any other part of the neighbourhood. They get some coffee to go and do window shopping when Trixie is struck by a bold idea. There’s a tattoo and piercing studio on the other side of the road. It’s painted an obnoxious red, the tattoos in the front window are unnecessarily ugly, and it is the key to the monumental thing Trixie needs to do today.

“Kim. Think about if you want any tattoos or piercings, because we are going in there.”
Turns out, you need an appointment for a tattoo, but Trixie didn’t want a tattoo anyway. When they walk out of the shop forty-five minutes later, Trixie is the proud owner of a septum piercing (and a very achy nose). It’s dark golden and ornate and Trixie is thrilled.

She tried to talk Kim into getting a matching one, but there was no way. Kim is more than happy, however, to indulge Trixie and take a bunch of pictures of her with her new piercing. She wants to upload one to her Instagram, showing her new self off to as many people as possible.

Once they are home, Trixie spends a whooping fifteen minutes to decide which picture looks the best, puts a filter on it, and uploads. Her first post in months. She’s a little excited about some of the people back home to see her, with all that heavy makeup and the septum. It’s a change for sure.

After uploading the picture, she spends some more time on her presentation, finally able to focus now that she has done something with her day. When she looks at her phone again, almost three hours have passed, and sure enough she got some likes and comments – the first one from Kim, of course, even though she took the picture and is sitting opposite her right this moment. She can count on Kim.

She scrolls through the comments, one from a co-worker back at the hotel, one from Sasha, one from Adore, one from Juju, three from former friends of hers that she hasn’t spoken to in years, and, finally, one from Katya. It just says yes bitch!!

The next day is a Sunday and Trixie spends the morning sitting in bed wrapped in a blanket and playing the guitar. Kim is out with Shangela. She asked Trixie to come, but Trixie felt like getting some song-writing done today. And she actually did. It’s only just past noon and she has already smoothed out the first song she wrote with Adore at their house, and she has a second song halfway done. She doesn’t need more than three or four songs for this musical, because the kids would never be able to learn more than that, so she’s already finished with a big chunk off the work. She feels more accomplished than she can remember feeling at any point in the last couple of years. Why did she ever stop writing music? It makes her feel so good.

Deciding she’s done with the musical for today, she keeps playing the guitar strings absentmindedly, lying on her back in bed. After a while she gets out her notebook that she hasn’t written in anything since her plane ride here and begins scribbling down lyrics.

When Kim comes back, a little wet from the rain and with an early dinner for both of them, Trixie has outlined her first non-musical song in years. There are lyrics missing every here and there, and she’s only written the music for the chorus, not the verses, but the knowledge that she actually got something written has Trixie in such a good mood she decides to text Katya for no other reason than she feels like it in that moment.

**Trixie**

*hey, hope youre doing okay :)*

Katya must have had her phone in her hand (texting Violet, maybe?) because she replies almost immediately.

**Katya**

*doing okay, thank you for asking.*

Trixie thinks a moment about a reply to that, but before she starts typing, there’s another message from Katya.
Katya

*Milkshakes?*

Trixie lets out a suffering sigh at that. Hanging out with Katya never helps. Of course it doesn’t.

Trixie

*Milkshakes.*

Trixie is at the milkshake bar a little early, freezing in the early winter air. The wind is particularly harsh on her newly-pierced nose, and Trixie makes sure to hide half her face behind her fluffy scarf. By now most of the trees around her are bare and her breath contorts the air against yellow light of the bar in front of her. She scrolls through her phone for a while, but has to put it away because the cold wind bites into her hands. She misses summer already.

When Katya shows up a couple of minutes later she is wearing one of the ugliest dresses Trixie has ever seen under her open coat. It’s made of a rough awkward knit, in a bright yellow and has big turquoise buttons. As if this wasn’t enough, she’s wearing suede heels with yellow fringe on them. Trixie wonders if Katya dressed this terribly on purpose and somehow her mouth decides this is an okay thing to ask Katya:

“Do you do this on purpose? Dress like this, I mean?”

This sends Katya in one of her laughing fits; there’s a split second where she looks at Trixie in disbelief, then she starts laughing without a sound, flailing her arms around.

“You cunt!” is the only answer Trixie gets.

Once they’ve settled into a booth as far away from the door as possible – Katya barely seems to mind the cold air, but Trixie minds enough for both of them – Trixie gets a strawberry milkshake like the last time they were here, because why change a good thing. Katya gets one with caramel corn that’s a special offer for the week. She picks out the popcorn with her fingers and chews it slowly, looking satisfied with her choice.

“So how are things going with the musical?” she asks through a mouth full of popcorn. One piece of popcorn falls out of her mouth and onto the plastic table.

“Good. Surprisingly good. I mean, I could strangle Shangela for telling Latrice we could write a musical and then doing basically fuck-all, but I’m coming through, so.”

“Oh, Shangie. She’s the worst.” Now Katya is sucking her index finger, getting a coat of sugar off it. Trixie focusses on the piece of popcorn on the table.

Trixie takes Katya’s comment as an opener to ask a question that has been on her mind for a while. “What’s it like living with this many people?” Trixie has only ever lived with her family, and now Kim. She can’t quite imagine being in a house with so much…going on all the time.

Katya grins. “It’s pretty great, mostly. There’s never enough room because Bob has trouble saying no to people, but Yara and Alexis moved out the end of last year, and now Violet’s gone, so it’s chill for now. I’m sharing my room with Sasha, but I love her, so that’s good. Did I ever tell you she’s my favourite person? If I would have to share a room with any of the others it would drive me up the walls, probably. Up the walls! But not Sasha. I don’t know, maybe Jinkx would be okay, or Chi Chi, but that’s it. But Jinkx listens to a lot of opera. I like opera, but it makes me antsy, kind of. It's always so, ugh, I don't know, it's a lot. Did you know Sasha is a real Russian? Did Kim
make your nails, or did you do them yourself? I like your septum.”

“Thanks. And I made them myself, but I used Kim’s stuff. Kim’s so good at sharing.”

“Kim is the best.”

“She is. So, uh.” Trixie decides now is as good a time as any to ask that next question. “How did you, err, come to Bob’s house?”

Katya smirks. “What did Kim tell you?”

“Nothing! Nothing. But when I first came over Chi Chi said something about you guys being Bob’s…” she trails off, knowing she can’t finish this sentence.

“Charity?” She pronounced the word in Chi Chi’s southern drawl and snorts. “Yeah, Chi Chi likes to say that.” She leans back in her chair and looks at Trixie critically. “Okay. Okay. So you want to have the story?”

Trixie nods, straightening her back and leaning forward slightly, propping her chin on her hands.

Katya takes a deep breath. “Okay. I don’t have the classic got-kicked-out-of-my-house-for-being-queer-story. Some of the others have, but those aren’t stories for me to tell. My parents are actually so wonderful. Always supported me, gave me all the opportunities, you know. But I ended up really anxious and fucked up anyway and dropped out of college and it all went downhill from there. Drugs mostly, I did them all, and some fucked up things to pay for them. I did rehab once, started using again, and now I’m sober again. But it’s a constant thing, it never ends. Sobriety, I mean. One day at a time, every day. I’m never going to be okay. Or, I’m going to be okay, I’m okay right now, I’ve been okay for a while, but, y’know.” All of this comes out of Katya in a fast pace, while she fiddles with her napkin. Trixie gets the impression this isn’t the first time Katya has told this story. She doesn’t have too much experience with drug addiction, but she thinks she understands, mostly.

“Oh wow,” she says, trying to look at Katya with a look that shows compassion, but not pity. That’s a hard look to achieve. She obviously fails because Katya says:

“Don’t look at me like this. I’m fine. Fineee. Bob even helped me pay back some of the money I owe. He’s incredible. And we don’t pay more rent than we can. Some of us barely pay at all most months. At least I don’t, I’m still paying off some debts, and I don’t think I’m the only one. Bob owns the house, you know. He lives in an apartment with his husband and kid, and it’s really nice, but of course the house would be nicer. But he keeps it for us.”

“That’s pretty incredible.”

“It really is. It really is!” she hits her fist to her thigh at that. “I’m just so lucky. And I haven’t lost too much time before I got my shit halfway together, which is great. So I’m twenty-seven and I’m only now finishing a three year degree but, like, I’m finishing a three year degree. Can you believe that. I can’t, sometimes.”

Twenty-seven. Trixie didn’t know this. She had just assumed that Katya was her age, or a little younger maybe. She looks younger.

Katya picks the last bit of popcorn out of her milkshake and looks at Trixie thoughtfully. Trixie has trouble holding Katya’s gaze. “Could you maybe tell me about you?” Katya asks when Trixie fails to pick up the conversation.
“What do you mean?” Trixie isn’t quite ready to close the conversation on Katya’s drug use. She has a million questions.

“I don’t know that much about you. I know that you’re very pretty, and you’re good at the music, and you’ve told me about where you’re from a bit, and those are good things to know, great things to know, but it’s also not much.”

Oh god. Katya thinks Trixie is very pretty. Trixie is having a hard time not to grin from ear to ear. She is going to ride that compliment till the end of time. “So what do you wanna know?”

Katya gives her a challenging grin. “We talked about my scary love life, so I guess it’s only fair we talk about yours.”

Oh shit. Trixie’s heart skips a beat at that and she focusses her gaze on a figurine of a woman in 50s clothing, carrying a tray of milkshakes. Trixie had put on an ensemble very much like this before she got here, liking the idea of matching the bar. She wonders if Katya noticed. She hadn’t said anything, but then it was probably hard to compliment Trixie’s outfit when Trixie had lost no time insulting hers.

“One. There’s nothing to talk about, really.”

“Why’s that, Barbra?”

“I don’t know I’m just not, uh, looking to date right now.”

Well, that was a blatant lie. Even if Trixie hadn’t met Katya, she was very much in the mood to date when she moved here, and she knows this damn well. She regrets her lie immediately, but it’s too late to take it back now. She hopes Katya can see through it.

“Yes, I get that,” Katya says, taking off her glasses for a moment to rub her eyes. “It’s, uh, a lot. Dating is a lot. Almost like opera, in that way.”

“Do you want to talk some more about Violet?” Trixie asks and thinks she deserves a medal for best friend here. But then again, she knows she secretly wishes for Katya to say things have turned from bad to worse. So maybe no medal for her after all.

Katya crushes the ice in her glass with vigour. “No, we’re talking about you here, Trixie. If you don’t wanna talk about dating and shit, then something else. Like, what’s your favourite movie? What’s your opinion on our foreign politics? Do you like the smell of lemon grass? Something.”

“The last time I dated someone I cared about was in high school.”

“And what happened?”

“I don’t know. I was scared pretty much the whole time. Like, of people judging us. Of fucking up in general. I have a hard time remembering what exactly the problem was, but I know I felt like shit most of the time, and so did she.”

At the end of that sentence, Katya shoots her a curious look that Trixie doesn’t know how to place. Katya doesn’t comment, so Trixie goes on: “It’s just the worst, you know, when you love someone, and they love you, and you still can’t make it work. It’s the worst. And then, years later, you’re left with this vague feeling of failure and regret, and you can’t even remember the details of what really went wrong.” She sighs loudly, realizing this is the most she has spoken about Shea to anyone, ever. “You love someone, and they love you, and you still can’t make it work,” she repeats, because this sentence feels important in that moment.
Katya looks at her with wistful eyes. “Tell me about it,” she says, and she smiles, but it’s a sad smile, and Trixie wants nothing more than to reach a couple of inches over the table and put Katya’s hand in hers. Instead, she knots her hands in her lap, and makes sure to change the subject to something lighter, something that isn’t Shea, or Violet, or failure.

♥♥♥

Trixie spends the next two weeks focusing on her classes, and, more importantly, her musical. She loves what she’s creating, and is more proud of the musical than anything else she’s ever written – even though it just a bunch of bullshit about a Christmas elf.

Her second date – well, friend date – with Katya at the milkshake bar is the last time they spend time alone together for a while. They see each other a bit here and there, but there’s always somebody else there with them. Trixie starts coming regularly by their house to talk to Jinkx about her studies and Jinkx turns out to be wonderful at making Trixie go from anxious to calm in record time. Sometimes the whole group do things together, there’s a movie night in which they try to watch all the Star Wars Prequels and Trixie falls asleep during the second one, and one time they go watch Chi Chi’s soccer game. Katya seems to be in a great mood most of the times Trixie sees her, but she’s also quiet. She doesn’t work well in big groups, Trixie notices, and itches to spend some alone time with her again. She never asks Katya to hang out, however, always talks herself out of it. It wouldn’t go anywhere and can only do harm.

By now, Trixie has gotten used to their relationship. Sure, she still thinks Katya is the prettiest, funniest, most fascinating person she’s ever met. Sure, she still sometimes catches herself dressing up for her, and even once wearing a dark red lipstick because she thought Katya might like that (she did). But she has also accepted the way things are. A couple of weeks have passed since their conversation in the garden, and things with Katya and Violet seem to look up a bit. Violet texts Katya sometimes when Trixie is present, Violet likes all of Katya’s dumb Instagram posts, even the ones that are too stupid for even Trixie to like, and a week ago they met up in New York for a couple of days, and Katya seemed to glow when she got back to Boston.

As much as Trixie is convinced she’s fine with the situation, she still hasn’t texted Pearl. She opens the messaging window sometimes, one time even gets as far as to type “hi, it’s trixie”, but she never contacts her.

♥♥♥

It’s 8pm on a Wednesday and she’s watching Netflix with Kim when Trixie gets a message from Adore.

Adore

Gig at the club tonight. Wanna come?

Trixie hasn’t been to the club since that first time – when she swore herself to go every week from now on. She has work tomorrow, and some homework she still hasn’t started on, but things like this never stopped Trixie.

Trixie

Yes!
I’ll be there

Adore
Adore sends the same invitation to Kim, but Kim can’t be bothered tonight. She’s already in her pyjamas, eating pickles again, and refusing to get out of bed.

“Suit yourself.” Trixie gives up on trying to convince her, and pulls one of her dresses out of their closet. When she’s doing her makeup, she decides she needs to know if Katya will be there. She has to mentally prepare. A little.

**Trixie**

*Hey! you coming to Adore’s thing tonight?*

**Katya**

*Don’t think so  
I’m painting  
And moody  
Moody painting  
Looks pretty bad  
And sad  
Sad and bad  
Me time!*

**Trixie**

*So what you’re saying is you’re not coming out because you’re making bad art?*

**Katya**

*Yes.  
But also  
I think I am coming out  
I just remembered your dancing at the club last time  
 Wouldn’t wanna miss that*

Trixie must have smiled like an idiot at this, because Kim looks at her with raised eyebrows.

“Katya?” she asks.

“Katya,” Trixie replies.

♥♥♥

When she comes to the club, Katya, Sasha, and Jinkx are already there. She hugs all of them, and is reminded of the last time she was here, how new they all had felt to her, and how much has changed since then. Here is what hasn’t changed: When she hugs Katya, she lingers and breathes in her flowery perfume. Katya hugs her back tightly and when she lets go Trixie feels cold. Tonight, Trixie is wearing a hot pink dress that by far isn’t the prettiest dress in their closet, but is the first dress she has finished herself, with only a bit of Kim’s help. She clashes beautifully with Katya, who is once again wearing bright red. As usual, Katya’s dress is tight and has a confusing geometrical pattern on it. Around her neck is a necklace made of cigarettes and her hair is up in a messy ponytail. Trixie tries to come up with a comment for the cigarette necklace, but has nothing.

The rest of the group aren’t coming. It’s a Wednesday, after all, and some of them have things to
do. The club is filled to the brim either way. Apparently, Adore has quite a fanbase. At the bar, there’s a group of three wearing self-made Adore shirts, and Adore is signing a guy’s biceps in a corner. The people Adore – or maybe this club in general – attracts fascinate Trixie. Again, even with their fashion choices, their group doesn’t stand out in the club. This makes Trixie frown a little. What does a girl have to do to stand out around here?

When Adore and their band start playing, Trixie knows immediately why people are excited to see them. Adore is great, their energy, their looks, their voice, their lyrics, everything is just right. Katya gets all of them beers and herself lemonade and they drink, jump, and dance till they’re sweaty and out of breath. Katya sweats a lot, Trixie notices. Katya is jumping up and down right in front of her, yelling Adore’s lyrics, that Trixie has never heard before, at full volume, spilling her drink quite a bit. She’s so close Trixie can see the individual beads of sweat on her neck and her hair sticking to her skin. Trixie isn’t drunk, or at least she doesn’t think so, not after two beers, but looking at Katya she feels a little buzzed. She wants nothing more than to reach out and touch Katya, snake her arms around her waist from behind and –

“You wanna go outside, catch some fresh air?” Sasha yells into her ear suddenly, interrupting her rudely. Trixie doesn’t really feel like going outside, but with the way she just fixated on Katya it is probably just what she needs. The last thing she wants to do is accidentally acting on her fantasies and freaking everybody out, including herself. So she nods. Fresh air would do her good.

She trails behind Sasha and Katya, following them outside, leaving Katya – who claims to be having too much fun to go – behind. It’s cold outside, they checked in their jackets so they’re freezing, and Trixie feels the cold air bite into every bead of sweat on her skin, making her shiver. It’s a welcome change to the stuffed air inside, and she walks up and down the sidewalk, trying to keep herself warm, humming to the music inside. She’s still impressed with what Adore does, and reminded of her childhood dreams of standing on a stage just like Adore does. Well, maybe not quite like her. Maybe a stage that’s a little cleaner, and filled with only acoustic instruments, and the people watching her would do less jumping up and down, and more peaceful listening.

She barely contributes to the conversation Sasha and Jinkx are having. At one point she hugs Jinkx closely from behind, half because she likes them, and half because she just really wants to hug somebody right now. Jinkx puts their hands over Trixie’s and gives her a big smile. Trixie loves their chipped front tooth.

“I love your dumb teeth,” she informs Jinkx.

“I love your dumb teeth as well,” Jinkx answers, and tightens her hands around Trixie’s.

When Trixie finally feels her hands go numb and it gets too cold to stay outside any longer, they make their way back on the dance floor, and Trixie immediately notices that Katya has left her spot. She looks around, suddenly worried, but finds her quickly.

Katya is standing by the bar, talking to an extraordinarily beautiful person. They are tall, slim, and androgynous – Katya’s type, Trixie thinks with a sinking feeling in her stomach. Their skin is dark, and their hair, long and grey, tied in a knot in their neck. They are covered in tattoos, completely flat-chested, and wearing a black glittery jump suit. And they have their hand on Katya’s, lying on the bar.

Too late Trixie notices that she’s following Sasha, who’s walking up to Katya, and introduces herself to the stranger as if that is something you do.

“Hi, I’m Sasha. This is Jinkx, and Trixie. We’re with Katya,” she says loudly over the music.
The beautiful stranger takes their hand off Katya’s—so at least this problem is momentarily solved—and gives them a small wave.

“Raja,” they say in a deep voice. They are quite a bit older than Trixie and Katya, close to forty, Trixie guesses. Their tattoos aren’t the ugly kind Trixie saw in the tattoo studio’s window a couple of days ago, they look fascinating and Trixie finds herself trying to get a closer look when out of the corner of her eyes she notices Katya giving Sasha a look that pretty much says: Go away, I’m busy.

To Trixie’s dismay, Sasha seems to get the message immediately, and returns to their previous spot on the dance floor, with Trixie following behind like a lost puppy.

Adore’s concert continues, the crowd is as enthusiastic as ever, but Trixie barely takes any of that in anymore. She keeps stealing glances at Katya and Raja out of the corner of her eye, and what she sees makes her lose all motivation to dance. Not only is Raja’s hand back on Katya’s, worse: Katya is standing very close now, her other hand on Raja’s naked biceps. They are talking, and Katya does her laugh thing, leaning her head into Raja’s chest with it. Trixie forces herself to look away for a minute, focusses on Adore’s blue fingernails on the microphone for a whole minute, but breaks down and looks again. Katya is standing even closer now, her hand tracing Raja’s tattoos on their arms. They are not talking anymore, just looking at each other with expressions Trixie can’t figure out from where she stands across the room, and as Trixie watches Raja’s hands go to cup Katya’s ass.

This is when Katya leans in. She gets on her tip toes, Raja is so much taller than her, and kisses Raja, once, softly. Then Raja pulls her in closer, their body’s now flush together and starts kissing her fervidly. Katya’s hands start roaming, go from Raja’s arms over their chest, to their face, their hair, and back, Raja mirroring her movements. Trixie wants to do nothing more than to look away, but can’t get her eyes off the scene. In a fleeting attempt to look at something else, she lets her eyes drift over the other people at the bar and notices at least two strangers who seem quite caught up with the scene in front of them. One of them licks his lips and blatantly looks at Katya’s ass. Trixie feels sick.

So this is happening. Of course it is. Katya is in an open relationship after all. She had told Trixie that she wasn’t interested in hooking up with anyone, but apparently this has changed, or Raja is just too hot to resist, she doesn’t know. All Trixie knows is that Katya is kissing somebody that is not her girlfriend, and it isn’t even her. For some reason Trixie had the fact that Katya has a girlfriend pinned into her head as the one and only reason she isn’t with Trixie. But of course this isn’t true. Of course not. Instead, somebody Katya just met gets to kiss her and touch her the ways Trixie wants to, needs to, when Trixie has been there all along. She feels tears well up in her eyes and does her best to swallow them down. If Katya saw her cry now that would be mortifying. She quickly checks for Sasha and Jinkx, neither of whom seem to pay her any attention. Good. Trixie decides to leave the club, go home, and have a good old fashioned cry in her bed. Her feet, however, seem stuck to the ground, and so she stays, watching Katya and Raja go on and on and on. Adore is holding a particularly high note when Katya shifts their positions and presses Raja against the bar, with their hands pinned against the counter.

Trixie watches, transfixed. Somewhere in her stomach a feeling besides hurt begins to rise and she swallows hard. Her eyes flutter close, blocking the scene in front of her and she replaces it with a similar scene. She’s in Raja’s position, one side pressed against the bar, one against Katya, locked tightly in place, Katya’s body against hers, her lips on her skin.

She is breathing harder, happy to indulge in order to chase the sadness away. She feels a tingling in her hands, slowly spreading over her body, and lets out a soft moan, inaudible over the music.
She opens her eyes just in time to see Katya taking Raja by the hand and leading them towards the restrooms.

This is happening.

Trixie is going home.
hello friends, i’m back again! a couple of things about this chapter:
- trixie is...trixie, and she's not perfect
- this is a liiiiittle bit sad, but don't worry, this is as bad as it's gonna get (well, for trixie. not katya, ofc) and things are going look up soon!
- also i know this is short but also i update all the damn time so as the president of this company i've decided it's okay.
as always, i'd love to hear your feedback, it's so so important. it is. comment here and/or come talk to me over on tumblr

i love you! okay, bye!

The next morning Trixie wakes up to her phone buzzing. Somehow, even with all the chaos in her mind after last night’s events, she was able to fall asleep. She can’t have slept for more than two hours, however. She wants to ignore her phone and go back to sleep until her alarm goes off, but the phone keeps on buzzing. She takes it out from under her pillow and forces her eyes open.
There’s another message coming in. It’s Katya. Why is she always sending ten messages when she could just send one? It’s uncalled for. Trixie groans and closes her eyes again, a picture of Katya and Raja at the bar flashing before her inner eye. She decides to go back to sleep after all; but now her mind is awake, and racing, and it’s only a matter of minutes before she gives in and opens Katya’s texts.

Katya

Babe
Are you up?
I wanna talk
To you
I'm looking at the sunrise and it reminds me of you
You remember when we looked at the sunrise together? So beautiful
Please be here

Trixie sits up in her bed fast, her head spinning slightly. She tries to wrap her head around the messages, but doesn’t quite succeed. Katya is out there, thinking about her, wanting – no, needing – to talk to her. Katya called her Babe. Her heart is pounding in her chest. Before Trixie can think of a possible reply, three dots appear, showing that Katya is typing another message.

Katya

You’re not here
Of course not. I miss you.
I went to one of Adore’s gigs last night and met someone
They had the best tattoos. Raja. I think you would like them, they're tall like you
I sucked their dick in the bathroom
It was so so good
Every new message has Trixie more confused. And more upset. She can already feel the tears well up in her eyes again, tears she didn’t cry last night after all, because she successfully managed to feel first too angry, and then too tired to cry. Why on earth would Katya tell her all this? Was she so drunk she forgot Trixie met Raja last night, Trixie saw everything? No, Katya doesn’t drink, Trixie remembers. There’s another text coming in.

Katya

*I kinda want you to tell me not to.*

Floored with unwelcome emotions as she is, is takes Trixie another full minute to connect the dots. And, sure enough, her suspicion is confirmed right away.

Katya

_Fuck Trixie_
_I’m so sorry_
_I’m used to Violet being the last person I texted and I didn’t check and clicked the wrong window_
_I’m so tired I’m so sorry_
_Sorry you had to read that. But I guess it’s better she didn’t get those, haha_
_What a mess_

This is all it takes for Trixie to start full on ugly-crying. Thankfully, Kim wakes up from her sobbing and makes her way over to Trixie’s bed, bringing her blanket and wrapping Trixie in. She doesn’t ask any questions, just rubs Trixie’s back and sits with her until the tears stop coming and her breathing quiets down.

♥♥♥

It is an awful day at Smiles for Miles. What kind of a stupid name for a day care is that anyway? Did Latrice come up with that shit? She would.

Earlier, Kim tried to convince her she didn’t need to go into work today, that it was okay to call in sick every once in a while, but the thought of spending all day in bed crying about Katya didn’t appeal to her. Also, Shangela has been absent from the day care the last couple of days, for reasons Trixie doesn’t know. This week it’s just her, Latrice, Betty, and a woman called Dela, who has a job at a different day care and only comes in when Latrice absolutely needs her to. So Trixie shows up.

Her main task today is to get the kids to draw self-portraits. It’s indicative of a child’s developmental stage to investigate how they perceive themselves, Latrice tells her, and gathers the first group of kids around at the drawing table.

Trixie is glad that she got the instruction to not interact with the kids too much as to not influence the outcome of their drawings. She doesn’t feel like interacting. The table they are sitting on is kid-size, as is her chair, so she’s only ever able to sit in a crouched sideways position, with her legs not fitting under the table. Her thighs look particularly huge today in a pair of creme coloured jeans.

Several of the kids are sick, there’s sneezing and coughing on every side of the table. So many runny noses. Trixie watches in disgust as a drip of snot creeps out of Josie’s nose, runs down her mouth and her chin, and lands on her portrait, reuniting with its friends and colleagues on the thin
There’s a fight over the pens again. There are eight kids at the table, and a box with at least a hundred colourful pens, but of course they all want the same three pens. Of course.

Kameko spills his juice over not only his own picture, but also Maisie’s. Trixie specifically told him to get his juice off the table not five minutes ago. Maisie hits Kameko with a ruler. Good for her. Trixie pretends not to see and has to stop herself from giving Maisie a thumbs up.

Opposite her, Liam is drawing what looks like a nightmare wearing Liam’s striped sweater. The head is formed like a bean, there’s hair spreading from the ears, and the body is shorter than the head. Trixie snorts.

The first group of kids finishes their portraits, and then the second, and then Betty comes over to relieve her. Good. Trixie doesn’t think she could stand watching another kid not knowing their arms don’t come out of their head. Betty brings over her office chair so she doesn’t have to sit like Trixie is sitting right now. Why doesn’t Trixie have one of those chairs? She should just take Betty’s. Betty isn’t tall, she isn’t big, she can sit on the damn kids’ chair. Betty smiles at her, coffee in hand.

“Oh, Dana, look at you, you’re doing a wonderful job,” she says to one of the kids who had not only gotten her skin colour completely wrong but also forgot to draw feet. Then Betty turns to Trixie. “You look so good today” she gives her unwanted opinion. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you without that makeup you always put on. You’re so pretty, you really don’t need it, don’t you think? It looks so nice today.” Trixie bites her lip, fighting a sudden urge to take Maisie’s example and hit Betty with a ruler. She isn’t wearing any makeup today because she’d been crying right until she had to leave and also just didn’t feel like making an effort at all today. Betty, being the natural flower she is, is wearing a generous amount of angry red eyeshadow and one of those glittering stones on her front teeth. Trixie just nods in acknowledgement and gets up without a word, leaving Betty with the group.

Trixie spends the rest of her shift mentally insulting Betty, having decided mean thoughts about Betty are still better than mean thoughts about the kids. When she finally gets home, she is in quite the mood.

“I’m not wearing too much makeup! I mean, I obviously am, but it’s on purpose, it’s supposed to be like this!” she announces loudly, slamming shut the door to her and Kim’s room and throwing her bag into a corner. It hits Kim’s ironing board, which collapses.

“Oh of course not,” Kim says earnestly, giving the ironing board only a short glance. “Your makeup is perfect.” She puts away the course work she has been working on, obviously getting that Trixie needs her attention right now. “So, uh. Did Katya insult your makeup last night? Is that why you were crying?”

Trixie almost laughs at that. Almost. Nobody had a right to come for her makeup but especially not Katya. And even more especially not Betty.

When Trixie doesn’t reply, Kim goes on: “Listen, I know you like her, but I think you might be giving her a little too much power here. And also, Katya says dumb stuff all the time, it’s not like she means it.”

“She didn’t. She didn’t say anything dumb. Or she did, maybe, but not about me.”

“Okay. Do you want to tell me what happened last night?”
“Yes.”

But she doesn’t start talking.

“Do you need cake before you do?”

“Yes. You have some?”

And she does. Trixie can always count on Kim to fill their place with delicious – and unhealthy – food.

Trixie is on her second piece of pecan pie when she starts telling Kim about the events from last night and this morning.

“I don’t know what the worst part is,” she says, after finishing the story, “the fact that she has a girlfriend, the fact that I’m not even an option next to her girlfriend, the fact that I had to see all of it, or the fact that Katya clearly has a type and I’m not it.” As soon as she finishes that sentence, Trixie knows what the worst part really is: having to witness first-hand the way Katya talks to Violet, having to witness Katya’s obvious pain and longing and feeling bad for her when she feels bad enough for herself already.

Kim chews her cake thoughtfully, pity clearly visible in her eyes.

Trixie feels her agitation slowly give way to sadness, and tries to cling on to the agitation, preferring it by a long shot. “Violet fully doesn’t deserve Katya. God, why can’t Katya just dump this bitch and move on? What’s so fucking special about Violet, hmm?”

Kim sighs. “Trixie, I don’t want to, err, say anything wrong, but. I think you need to get over this.”

Trixie didn’t expect this. She thought friends were supposed to indulge each other about their crushes. Isn’t that why you had friends? She feels her mood shift suddenly, scoffs, and crosses her arms in front of her chest. “Excuse me?” she asks, her voice sounding indignant, “But I don’t think I need to get over this.”

She half expects Kim to apologize and ask her to talk more about her feelings, but she doesn’t. Instead Kim raises her eyebrows, a challenging expression on her face.

Trixie goes on. “Katya is not happy!”

“And you would change that?”

“Yes!” Trixie says, feeling more than a little uncertain about this. She raises her voice slightly to make up for that unwelcome feeling. “I am a great girlfriend.” She purses her lips.

“And what do you base that on? Your amazing track record?”

Trixie’s mouth falls open at that. This bitch. “It is not my fault I haven’t had the opportunity to be an amazing girlfriend yet!”

“Whose fault is it then?” Kim asks, her lisp heavy on that question. Why didn’t Kim’s parents ever think to send her to speech therapy? Then Trixie wouldn’t have to listen to that lisp all day long.

“It’s fucking…I don’t know! That’s a stupid question. I am a good girlfriend because I say so!” She crosses her arms and stares Kim down. She’s being a brat right now, she knows this, but it’s not like she can stop herself.
Kim watches her, her eyebrows still raised slightly, and takes a long pause before her next comment. “You do know, Trixie, that even if Katya and Violet were to break up you wouldn’t be able to just sweep in and carry her into the sunset? I need to know that you know that, right? Katya is a person, a pretty complicated person, and I doubt you know her as well as you think you do.”

Trixie feels all energy leave her body and uncrosses her arms slowly. She wants to sit down again, but doesn’t feel like sharing the table with Kim, and remains on her feet, feeling drained. Kim, however, is apparently not done shutting her down yet. “Also, you don’t know Katya and Violet together. They really found each other. And yes, they are struggling right now, but I think they’ll pull through. And you need to start dealing with that. You hanging around Katya metaphorically holding her hand and more or less patiently waiting for her relationship to fall apart so that you can make a move is not cute, Trixie. It’s not cute.”

Where the fuck is all of this coming from? Trixie wants to ask Kim that question, but her stomach feels tight with anger and for the second time today she feels tears welling up in her eyes. She quickly considers her options. One, ask Kim what the fuck is wrong with her. Two, let the tears flow and hope Kim will go back to being nice to her. Three, considering Kim’s words.

She goes with four, storming out, slamming the door on the way. A dramatic exit.

♥♥♥

It’s raining, of course, because this is the type of day Trixie is having. At least she was smart enough to pick up her coat before she got out of their apartment. She starts walking, not knowing where to go. She never made friends with anybody from her classes, doesn’t socialize with them past some small talk and god-awful group projects, and this comes around to bite her in the ass now. She can’t go to Katya’s, she can’t go home, she can’t go to their milkshake bar and she’s not pathetic enough to show up at work after her shift is over. It’s not like she wants to see anybody there anyway. This is how she ends up sitting on a bench, in the rain - there is a bench under a protruding roof only a couple of steps away, but she is ready to embrace the rain and all it’s drama - cursing the way the rain messes with her hair, cursing Katya, cursing Violet, Raja, Kim, and Betty, cursing herself. She waits until she knows Kim is asleep and returns home, her hair wet and all kinds of messed up, and her feet soaked and freezing.

When she wakes up the next morning, she checks Kim’s bed first thing and sees with relief that Kim has left for classes already. It’s early and Trixie knows Kim will end up standing in front of a classroom for at least half an hour. Only to avoid Trixie. The second thing Trixie does is check her phone. There’s a text from Katya. Trixie groans. Waking up every morning to texts from Katya had once been a beautiful fantasy, but has turned out to be a nightmare.

Katya

Are you mad at me?

Trixie never replied to Katya yesterday, but she will now.

Trixie

You mean me or Violet?

Katya

You.
Come on, don’t tell me you never sent a text to the wrong person
It happens
Let’s go out for milkshakes and talk a little? I need someone to talk to today

The words ‘wrong person’ hits Trixie right in the heart and edge her on.

Trixie

Call Violet.

Katya

So you are mad at me
May I ask why
I really don’t get why

Trixie stops replying. She doesn’t see this conversation go anywhere, not in her current mood. She’s vaguely aware that she’s not in the right here. For a moment she is able to look at things from Katya’s perspective. Katya needs somebody to talk to, reaches out to a friend, is rejected, knows her friend is mad at her but doesn’t know why. That certainly isn’t fair, Trixie knows this. She also knows, however, that she feels okay with not being fair right now. She feels bad, she feels terrible, and even if things aren’t Katya’s fault they certainly surround Katya, and Trixie just needs a moment away from her. Also, she reminds herself when she still feels a little guilty, it’s not like Katya doesn’t have anybody else to reach out to. She has a whole house of people who love her. She has a fucking girlfriend even.

♥♥♥

Trixie spends the next of couple of days trying to push everything surrounding Katya – and Kim – out of her mind. Kim spends an excessive amount of time away, probably at The Love Shack. The little time they spend in their room together is filled with icy silence. Katya leaves her alone with the exception of one text she gets the morning after their one-sided fight:

Katya

I’m in nyc for a while
If you want to talk, you can always call me

The fact that Katya is, very clearly, the bigger person here is not helping Trixie’s mood. She tries not to think too much about what Katya is up to in New York (she knows who she is with, of course she knows), and throws herself into her studies. She has a midterm coming up that focuses mainly on children’s brain activities while learning and taking in information. It’s abstract, difficult, barely relevant, and Trixie hates it, but when she hands in her test a week later she knows she aced it. Apparently, replacing a social life with studying does that. But shit, Trixie decides, she’s not going to let her bitterness ruin this success for her. She should treat herself. She deserves it.

Trixie has some money saved, partly because of her old job at the hotel, and partly because working three days a week is enough for her rent – and also, and she tries not to acknowledge that thought, she barely spends anything on groceries and mooches off Kim quite a lot.

Trixie doesn’t need a lot of time to figure how she wants to spend her money to make herself feel good: after some googling and a bus ride to a shop that was recommended to her, she treats herself to a beautiful white western guitar, and it’s the first good day she has had all week.
hello friends! so far everything you read i wrote on a single weekend on halloween and this is the last chapter that's part of that mess. so after this week's chapter, things might feel a little different, the chapters are longer and i like them more, and i'm excited to share them with you, aaaaah!

i want to thank everyone who took the time to comment and send me nice messages on tumblr, you're so so important. <3 i also want to thank rosie and nina for being by my side as i'm trying to figure this fic out, and staray for being the best at giving feedback. thank you thank you thank you!

i hope you enjoy this, and get ready for trixie being plucked of the surroundings we're all used to by now and thrown into her family life in wisconsin next week! aaaaah!

It’s eleven days before Christmas and four days before the kids’ Christmas recital. Trixie has circled from loving her musical, to feeling embarrassed about it, over hating it, to liking it again. The past couple of days she hasn’t been able to get the songs out of her head. They come to her while she is standing in line to get coffee, while she is trying to pay attention in a lecture, and when she is putting on makeup in front of Kim’s mirror. They never fail to bring a small smile to her face – which not many things achieve these days.

It’s been two weeks since Katya’s make out session and Trixie’s consequential fallout with both her and Kim. She knows she has to fix things soon and that this has gone on long enough, but it’s not easy to mend things when she knows that 1) she is the sole problem in the fight with Katya and 2) she is also the sole problem in her fight with Kim. Well, maybe not the sole problem. Kim could have been a little kinder to Trixie, even if she was technically right. Maybe Trixie is only 95% of the problem. She was hurting, and Kim was her friend after all, so Kim could have shown a little compassion. Trixie isn’t more than 95% of the problem, she decides. Through everything, she can’t help but admire the determination with which Kim stood up for Katya and Violet. She really is a true friend, and Trixie needs that in her life.

She wanted to reach out to Kim a little over a week ago. She got them coffee and Kim’s favourite cake – red velvet – and set up their little desk in their room with a bouquet of flowers she got at the supermarket, and the candles from her night stand. But Kim didn't come home, and when Trixie checked, she saw some of Kim’s stuff was gone. She must be staying with Shangela for now. Apparently, being stared down by Trixie in her own home for days in a row wasn’t something Kim felt she had to put herself through. So Trixie ate both pieces of cake while feeling sorry for herself and thinking about going over to the house to make amends, but instead ended the evening on her own with some Netflix.

On the Tuesday before their recital on Friday, Trixie rehearses the musical with the kids for what feels like the hundredth time (but is actually only the sixteenth time). All of her co-workers, even Betty, came through and helped her putting the kids’ costumes together. They have little elves, fairies and snowflakes, witches and wizards, a troll, a snowman, a princess, a butterfly, and a Lady Santa. So far, neither the butterfly nor fairy number 2 can remember any of their lines, the snow
man costume keeps falling apart, and the last dance number is an incoherent mess of kids tumbling over each other and getting confused with every step. But it’s cute, Trixie thinks, it’s damn cute, and she’s proud of it. As always when Trixie is proud of something, she has the urge to show it off. And she will, of course, they’ll perform for all the parents, and grandparents, and whoever else the kids talk into coming. When Trixie started writing the musical, however, she imagined the whole group being there to see it, and this seems unlikely now. Although, she thinks, they might still all show up, even if just for Shangela. Shangela is as much involved in this as Trixie is, she did all of the choreography (and most of the studying the lines with the kids). To Trixie’s relief, Shangela is nice as ever to her, so either Kim didn’t properly trash talk her, or Shangela decided not to get involved. Either way, Trixie appreciates this a lot.

Kameko is up on their made-up practise stage right now, saying his lines about how he’ll go get the witches help to save the day, and he gets them just right and even does a bit of fitting gesturing, and Trixie’s heart swells a little. She wants everyone to come and see, damnit. She’ll have to suck it up and make things okay today. She will. Right when her shift is over and she’s on her way home she sends a text to Kim.

Trixie

Hey Kim. As you know I spent the last two weeks being an asshole and I’m very sorry. Pick one of these options please:

1) We talk through the whole thing
2) I apologize eleven or twelve times and buy you cake and you get to call me an asshole
3) We pretend this didn’t happen.

I’m happy with any option. Note that there’s no option 4 where this continues.
Please, I miss you.

Kim leaves her on read for an agonizing two hours.

Then she replies.

Kim

2) for now, red velvet cake, and also 1) for later because it’s probably important

Trixie sighs with relief at that. She’s in her room, trying to get homework done, but has spent the last two hours distracted and checking her phone constantly, and now feels like a huge weight has lifted off her chest. Spurred on by her success, she wants to text Katya next before going out to get Kim’s cake for the second time. With Katya it should be easier. Katya isn’t actually mad at her; it was a very one-sided fight after all. Simultaneously, of course, with Katya it’s also much harder. Trixie keeps staring at Katya’s profile picture, red eyes and fiery background, and comes up with nothing. After a while, she decides for a cop out and texts Jinkx instead.

Trixie

Hey, Shangela probably told you already, but our holiday musical is on Friday at 4 pm. If you want to come, we’ll save you seats. All of you are invited, just text me if you want to come!

Trixie puts her phone aside, half annoyed with herself, but mostly hopeful for an answer like: all of us (all of them!) are coming, save us seats!

Of course, Trixie isn’t off the hook just like that, and this is the response she gets:
Jinkx

Yes, I’d love to come. Juju, Sasha, and Adore too and I’ll check with Chi Chi later, he’s out. Also, Katya wants to know if she’s invited.

Trixie’s stomach sinks. She should definitely not have avoided Katya by texting Jinkx. She swallows hard before typing up her next message.

Trixie

Yes, Katya is invited. Please tell her I’d love for her to be there.

Jinkx

We’ll be there.

Okay, this was horrible, but at least it’s done. Maybe she can avoid talking to Katya about the whole thing altogether and just move on. She honestly doesn’t know what she’d say in a conversation with Katya about this, so better skip that part. As awkward as this was, Trixie feels more than relieved. She has been busy with her classes and work these past two weeks but that didn’t keep her from noticing how lonely she was all of a sudden. She can’t wait to see the group again.

♥♥♥

The day of the recital Trixie is buzzing with nervous excitement all day. She has a lecture in the morning, a lecture she shows up to but all but ignores in favour of worrying about every detail of the upcoming show. She knows she’ll have to do some last-minute changes because Betty texted her half an hour ago, telling her one of the kids is out sick with the flu. Trixie had been worried about the girl’s runny nose all week and pretty much saw this coming. At least she doesn’t have one of the bigger roles, so they should be fine. She spends her lecture mentally reassigning the girl’s part to two other kids – and also planning how to break them the news that they’d each have to learn two more lines short notice.

When Trixie gets home after her lecture, she has two hours to get ready. Kim is out but has left a post it note that says ‘chill out it’ll be great’ and leftover pasta for Trixie, and honestly, why did Trixie ever fight with Kim? She’s the best. Trixie warms up the pasta and eats it standing propped against the window sill, looking outside. She badly wants it to snow outside in time for their recital but given that the recital is in a few hours and there hasn’t been any sign of snow this year, she’ll have to give up on that fantasy. It is, however, incredibly cold outside and Trixie feels a shiver run down her spine just from standing near the closed window. She looks outside at the bare trees, glistening with rain, and chews her food as fast as she can, itching to get ready. A couple of days from now, classes will be done for the year and she’ll make her way home to Wisconsin for Christmas. She had considered staying here and celebrating at Bob’s – she knows some of the others don’t have families to go home to and will stay, and they invited her to their little holiday party – but she felt bad for basically ghosting on her family ever since she got here and also misses her childhood home just a little, so she settled on Christmas in Wisconsin. She doesn’t feel like going at all. She can’t quite imagine herself back home at their dinner table, with her mother barely touching her food and the dining room clock ticking loudly, demanding Trixie’s attention with every tick.

She shakes her head to chase the thoughts of her childhood home away and puts on her Spotify Christmas playlist in order to get into the right mood for the afternoon. Her playlist consists mostly of different versions of Carol of the Bells, and Trixie sings along, without really feeling like it at
first, but getting more and more into it with every version of the song. She can always count on her playlists.

True to form, Trixie has spent the last couple of days thinking about an outfit to wear. After all, she’s going to be on stage for the entirety of the musical tonight, being the one playing the guitar to the children’s songs and simultaneously functioning as a prompter. She finally settled on a light blue velvet dress Kim owns but never wears, and, with Kim’s permission, sewed a white fuzzy trim on the bottom of the dress to make it more festive. Blue looks good on her, she thinks, and makes sure her eyeshadow matches the dress. She puts on a little extra glitter for the occasion. Paint for the back row, they say. Trixie grins at her reflection. She’s got that covered.

♥♥♥

Trixie arrives at the recital with an hour to spare; enough time to go over everything with the kids one more time. Since the day care doesn’t have the space for an event like this, they are using the auditorium of a nearby school. With a groan Trixie notices that most of the auditorium is already filled with obnoxiously loud families. They shouldn’t be here already. Don’t they have lives to live? Bills to pay, unfulfilling marital sex to have? Apparently not. Trixie doesn’t want to rehearse the musical right in front of them before they officially start but begrudgingly has to anyway. Shangela, Latrice, Betty, and Dela are all here to help and together they fix the snow man costume one final time, teach the kids the sick girl’s lines, cuddle and soothe the kids that are freaking out over performing, and get the kids in line that think all of this is a big joke. It’s a busy back and forth and Trixie feels her attention effortlessly gliding from one problem to another, fixing every mess she sees. She feels right in her element and even manages to forget about all the people watching them already.

“I see you’ve given up on the no makeup look,” Betty comments dryly while they’re re-arranging a chain of fairy lights to be draped off the stage front centre. “What a shame.”

Trixie scoffs and turns away, leaving her to figure out the lights by herself. “Wanna settle this after the show in the parking lot?” she mumbles to herself, deciding that Betty’s obsession with her makeup is more funny than anything else.

“What?” Betty calls after her.

“I said you look lovely!” Trixie answers, and leaves the stage.

Twenty minutes before they show is set to begin there’s nothing left to do. Latrice and Dela have done a wonderful job decorating the stage, none of the kids are currently crying, and Trixie feels her nervous excitement transform into cheerful anticipation.

Only when she isn’t needed on stage anymore does she make her way through the audience, looking to find her friends. As usual, Kim with her purple hair is the first one she spots in the crowd. She is wearing a flowery head piece, and, with her height being what it is, the people behind her are surely cursing her existence. It’s probably Kim’s outfit that is the reason why five of Trixie’s kids are currently gathered around Kim and the rest of the group where they sit near the exit of the auditorium. Trixie wasn’t able to get them any good seats. She hadn’t calculated in all the overeager parents and grandparents getting seats weeks in advance, as if it’s so damn important to sit in the first row.

All of them are there, Kim, Adore, Jinkx, Juju, Chi Chi, Sasha, and Katya. They all get up to awkwardly hug Trixie in the small space between the rows of seats and Trixie hugs Katya tightly, trying to put her apology into the hug. Katya looks at her like she wants to say something, but then only gives her a small smile and sits back down. She is wearing an oversized green Christmas
sweater and leggings, and thankfully left her cigarette necklace at home for the occasion. There’s a candy cane earring on her left ear but not on her right, and Trixie wonders if she lost the right one on the way or if it was never there. How Katya manages to be the cutest person in a room full of four-year-olds is beyond Trixie.

“Are you Trixie’s parents?” little Maisie, who has squeezed herself into the row of the group, asks, looking at all of them with innocent eyes.

“What, all of us?” Juju giggles.

Maisie smiles at her uncertainly.

Juju points to Chi Chi. “That’s Trixie’s mum. The rest of us are her friends.”

Maisie nods.

“I like your friend’s flowers,” Lucía says and tries to reach up to reach Kim’s head dress. She only gets to Kim’s shoulder, but Kim takes off the flowers and puts them on Lucía’s head instead. Lucía beams.

Trixie is only half-paying attention to the interaction, stealing constant glances at Katya. Katya, however, is watching the kids with glowing eyes, looking delighted.

♥♥♥

When the show begins a little while later, Trixie leads her crowd of kids to the stage and makes sure they all stand in the right place before sitting down in a chair at the side of the stage and picking up her new guitar. Shangela, dressed as one of the elves, is on stage with them, because the kids need her so remember their dance moves. They even wrote in a line about Shangela being an enormously large but still lovely elf. Because she’s the prompter, Trixie has to focus on the musical the whole time, but she still takes time to try and make out her friends in the crowd. The spotlights are blinding her, the audience is in the semi-dark, and she can’t see them at all. She makes sure to smile in the direction where she knows they are sitting anyway. She hopes so much that they will enjoy this. When the first song starts, the kids aren’t singing quite loud enough, so Trixie has to sing louder than she planned, while simultaneously smiling at the kids to animate them to come out of their shell. When the little snowman comes on stage, of course his costume falls apart again, but only a little, and maybe it’s not even noticeable from the back of the auditorium. The kids’ dancing is cute, their costumes glitter and glisten in the spotlights, there is no crying and only a little fumbling for lines, and one kid sits down in the middle of the stage during a dance number, but the audience seems to find this adorable, so Trixie is fine with it.

Even though she can’t see Katya, she thinks about Katya looking at her the whole time. This not only makes it hard to concentrate, but is also conceited, Trixie knows. With all these kids and their dancing and singing on the stage, why would Katya be looking at her? Even though, Trixie notices with glee, her silver shoes glitter at least as prettily in the stage lights as the snowflakes’ costumes.

The musical is over way too fast – it’s only twenty minutes, after all, as this was the maximum of what they could expect of the kids – and Shangela pulls Trixie out of her chair into the middle of the stage with her and the kids, and they bow for the audience. Trixie makes sure to throw in a few curtseys as well. She is holding the hands of not just two but three kids, and feels incredibly proud and accomplished. She can already sense her face starting to hurt a little from smiling so widely.

“You did so well! Ahhhhhhh!” she keeps repeating to the kids over the applause, hugging and high-fiving some of them who come up to her.
After the show, Trixie and her co-workers have to stay to clear up the stage and the auditorium. They put chairs aside, remove fairy lights and pine branches off the stage, and small talk to some of the kids’ families at the same time. Trixie notices that her friends are still there, some of them in their seats and some of them up and stacking chairs with Shangela. When the stage is mostly glitter free, she makes her way over to the group, her heart still fluttering from being on stage, and her proud grin still on her face. Jinkx is the first one who hugs Trixie and tells her:

“This was so good! Thank you for inviting us!”

“We want this every year from now on” Adore agrees.

Trixie’s eyes flicker to Katya, who is crouching down next to their row of seats, talking to Lady Santa, Lucía. Lucía’s santa hat is lying sideways on Katya’s head; obviously Katya had tried to put it on but wasn’t able to fit it over her head. Trixie makes her way over to them, resisting the urge to thread her fingers through Katya’s hair under the hat, and sits on the edge of the chair next to Katya and Lucía. Lucía is in the middle of a story about Christmas at her grandparent’s house in Argentina; a story that involves her riding a sleigh on a meadow drawn by her grandparent’s big rabbit and that is very obviously made up. Katya is listening earnestly, nodding along and asking questions here and there that prompt Lucía to come up with ever wilder lies. Trixie’s heart swells a little when she’s looking at Katya. She’s so happy Katya is here.

It takes a long time for the auditorium to clear out. A lot of the families seem happy to stay and chat amongst each other for a while and Latrice even starts handing out coffee and mulled wine that Trixie has no idea where she’s got it from. Trixie, Katya and Lucía in the meantime have been joined by Shangela, Juju, and several other kids. The kids are happily chattering away, about the holidays, their wish lists and their little traditions, while trying to catch the adults’ attention at every turn. Trixie’s feet are beginning to hurt in her beautiful but impractical silver heels, but the mulled wine and cute conversations keep her warm and wanting to stay for as long as possible.

Juju and Shangela are touching each other’s shoulders and hips pretty much constantly, and when Juju snakes her arms around Shangela from behind and kisses her lips, Maisie looks at them with unmistakable interest.

“Why is she kissing you?” she asks Shangela, interrupting her own lengthy recital of her impressively long list of Christmas wishes and pointing at Juju.

While Shangela seems to take a moment to come up with an answer, Juju grins at Maisie and tells her: “Because she’s my girlfriend.”

“Oh,” Maisie says and scratches her nose. “Like Hanna and Ava?”

Trixie snorts at that. Only yesterday, Hanna had informed Ava that they weren’t friends anymore because Ava had pulled her ribbon out of her hair and drew on it with yellow marker. Earlier today Ava had apologized and restored their friendship by giving Hanna a bracelet that Trixie knows for a fact wasn’t hers and that Trixie then had to take away from her again.

“Yes. Just like Hanna and Ava,” Shangela agrees, smiling. She kisses the top of Juju’s head. She has to reach up a little, even though Juju is tiny herself. “Just like Hanna and Ava.”

Trixie, Katya, Shangela and Juju, together with Latrice and Dela, are the last people to leave the auditorium. It’s dark outside, and the wind pulls on Trixie’s hair and bites into her legs under her less than sensible thin and shimmery pantyhose. Trixie hold her cup of mulled wine against her
cheek keep the warmth in her face. She had gotten the last cup, and it was already mostly empty. They say goodbye to Latrice and Dela – who high five Trixie and Shangela for their work one last time – and Trixie tags along to the Love Shack, feeling too exhilarated to go home yet.

When they reach the house there’s Christmas music coming from out of the kitchen and Trixie catches sight of everyone in the kitchen, playing cards and eating cookies. Kim is there too. Trixie smiles at the prospect of getting to spend a night of Christmas fun with her friends; her last chance probably, as she is flying out next week.

She shrugs off her coat and is about to enter the kitchen when she feels Katya’s cold hand on her shoulder.

“Hey Trixie, can we talk maybe?” she asks, looking past Trixie into the kitchen.

Her hair is mussed from the wind and her glasses are foggy from the warm air in the house. Trixie bites her lip and nods slowly.

She follows Katya, away from the laughter and the light, up a creaky staircase that leads into a part of the house Trixie has never been in. The thought of her seeing Katya’s room for the first time makes her heart beat faster with excitement, but this feeling is mostly drowned out by anxiety over the conversation they will have. Trixie still hasn’t been able to come up with a way to explain her awful behaviour two weeks ago without a) admitting her feelings for Katya, or b) convincing Katya she’s just generally a bitchy, awful person. Neither option seems attractive to Trixie.

Katya is quiet on their way up the stairs and down the hallway. She opens the last door on the left, a door covered in pictures Trixie can’t make out in the dimly-lit hallway. Katya’s room is rather small and square, with her bed standing on the right-hand wall and Sasha’s on the left. There is a big lava lamp in the middle between their beds that spreads a shifting but calm orange light through the room and that Katya obviously deems enough because she drops down on the floor with her back against her bed without turning on the ceiling lights. Trixie sits down cross legged on a fuzzy carpet, leaning against Sasha’s bed and pulling down one of Sasha’s pillows to hug to her chest and cover her crotch under her short dress. There’s a picture of a big and rather strange-looking dog printed on the pillow. She looks at Katya with questioning eyes, wondering if she’s the one who will have to start this conversation. She doesn’t know how to.

“Are we okay?” Katya asks after a couple of seconds. Trixie nods while thinking of an answer.

“Yes. Yes, we’re okay. I’m sorry.”

“Sorry about what?”

Ugh. Trixie hates this question. She always feels like her ‘sorrys’ should just be accepted without question, but of course they rarely are.

“Sorry for getting angry over something dumb and ignoring you when you wanted to talk. And, uh, just for being a shitty friend, I guess.”

Katya looks at her with slightly narrowed eyes and leans her head to the side. “Any particular reason why you got angry though?” she asks, and Trixie wants to melt in into the carpet. “Because I’ve thought about it for a while and I can’t figure it out. And I want to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

Trixie bites her lip which hurts quite a bit by now and looks away from Katya’s scrutinizing eyes into the room. Katya’s bed is a mess of blankets, but she can’t see a single pillow. There are books
stuffed under her bed, bits of paper and clothing lying on the foot of the bed and on the ground in front of it, and Katya’s cigarette necklace dangles from the knob of her night stand. On the night stand, there are a bunch of burned down candles, ear plugs, and a set of tarot cards. Crammed into the space between the bed and the door there’s an easel. The canvas on it shows abstract blots of red and purple paint. When Trixie takes too long to answer, Katya goes on.

“Is it because you think I shouldn’t have done what I did with Raja when I have Violet?”

Trixie feels her stomach turn to knots at the mention of both of these names in the same sentence. She hasn’t considered putting this spin on the events. Could she get away with pretending to be ignorant about open relationships? Would that make sense? She tries to think this over but can’t focus on a single thought for more than a second when Katya’s eyes are on her face. Out of other options, Trixie speaks without thinking through her words first.

“I guess I just don’t understand why you’re with her. Violet, I mean.” Looking at the canvas on Katya’s easel again she thinks she can make out the shapes of two people dancing in the ink blots. She blinks, and when she looks again she can’t find the shapes a second time. Katya raises her eyebrows at Trixie’s words and draws in a long breath before answering.

“What?” Katya prompts, “what?”

This is horrible, this conversation is horrible and it’s a hundred percent Trixie’s fault.

“No. I guess not.” There’s pictures of several humanoid figures and monsters in different experimental drawing styles on the walls over Katya’s bed. They look beautiful and interesting and Trixie wants nothing more than this tension to go away and for Katya to tell her all about her art, or to lead her to the kitchen with the others and have game night, or to go home and hide in her bed. Katya’s eyes are still on her face, frustrated and questioning, and Trixie feels herself making several attempts to say something, but nothing comes out of her mouth.

“What?” Katya prompts, “what?”

Trixie sighs and goes with the most genuine and heartfelt thing she can express right now.

“Nothing. I just like you.” She looks at Katya’s knees. “I really do. And I want you to be happy. And you don’t seem very happy.”

Katya looks at her for a long moment, then her lips form into a small understanding smile. “Trixie, things are complicated with Violet and me. We fucked some things up and have a lot of work to do and the way things are right now I’m honestly not sure if we can work through everything and be okay. Most of the time I want to, but then I also sometimes think it’s too much work. It shouldn’t be this much work. Or maybe it should be, but I’m just not up for it. I don’t know.” She sighs and shakes her head slightly. “I guess what I’m trying to say is that I am figuring things out, we are figuring things out, and we can talk about all of this, if you want to, but I don’t really have time for you judging me without knowing anything about us. This isn’t a black and white situation, none of it is, Violet isn’t the monster who left me behind and I’m not the victim who sits home alone missing her, and I need you to know that. And I’m in a shitty enough position right now without my friends getting angry with me for bullshit reasons. God knows Juju is on my case all the time. I just don’t need another Juju, okay?”

For all of this, Trixie avoids looking at Katya’s face and instead focusses on her hands she’s using to make her point; Katya is letting her hands fly through the air between them with animated gestures and the lava lamp reflects off a chunky ring with an oval black stone on her middle finger. She feels sad for Katya, and a little relieved that she’s able to feel sad for her and not jumping on
the notion that Katya and Violet might split up soon. So she’s not that far gone yet. She still knows how to be a good person. That’s comforting. When she lets her eyes drift through the room to avoid facing Katya for a couple more seconds, she can see a flower growing in the ink on Katya’s easel. The two people dancing remain gone.

“I understand,” Trixie says, and tries to smile at Katya. When just two hours ago her face hurt from too much smiling, the movement feels strange and foreign on her face right now. “Is there anything I can do to make this up to you?”

Katya smiles back, the sadness slowly leaving her face. “Yes!” she says, already scrambling to get up. “We’re joining game night and you’re letting me win all night! I love winning!”

She pulls Trixie up by her hands and when they’re both standing in the middle of the room puts her arms around Trixie’s neck and hugs her close for a moment. Her sweater’s fabric is soft and warm on the naked skin of Trixie’s cleavage and she smells like flowers again. When she pulls back she keeps her hands around Trixie’s neck for a moment and smiles at her softly.

“And hey, Trixie?”

“Yes?”

“I really like you too.”
In Which The Past is Ever Present

Chapter Notes

hello friends, here's my christmas gift to you <3 i want to thank everyone who has commented and talked to me on tumblr, you're ANGELS.

the incredible (beautiful, wonderful, lovely) nina has made THE BEST ART for this fic, if you haven't seen it yet, check it out here and here . it makes me cry :')

can you believe this chapter has smut on it, if that's not your kind of thing you can skip over it without missing out on the plot, no worries! it's in the middle of the chapter.

please let me know what you think! i hope you have wonderful holidays and if you don't, feel free to come talk to me and i'll try and cheer you up! <3

Trixie arrives home in Wisconsin the day before Christmas Eve. Her mother picks her up from the airport; she has Trixie’s favourite candy with her and hugs her tightly, and only four minutes into their car ride home they are out of things to say to each other. Her mother has already gone over their plans for the next couple of days, repeating exactly what she had told Trixie on the phone when Trixie had called her to confirm she was coming home. Trixie has already told her that her classes are going fine, she has told her about the day care and her musical, and about Kim. Now the car is filled with silence. Trixie leans back in her seat, her joints aching from her day on the plane. It’s going to be a little over an hour from the airport to her childhood home. She barely knows the part of town they are currently driving through. The sidewalks are covered in a thin layer of freshly fallen snow, the sun has already set, and the street underneath them is muddy and wet. Her mom turns on the news and Trixie rests her head against the car window, wondering as always if the constant vibrations of the glass against her temple will cause permanent damage to her brain cells. She falls asleep in the car.

Trixie’s childhood home is rather big and mostly made from wood, standing between miles and miles of fields and only a handful of other houses. When they get there her mom wakes her up quietly, with only a slight touch to her forehead, as she has done so many times before. Her mom walks up to the house ahead of Trixie and Trixie looks her over from behind with a bit of worry in her heart. Her mom, who has always been a lot smaller and thinner than Trixie, seems particularly small and tired. She’s drowning in her heavy winter coat. Trixie wants to reach out and hold her mom’s hand, or maybe say something to her, maybe say something about her health, but she remembers all the failed conversations they have had about this, and stays silent, walking behind her.

As soon as they open the front door, Trixie is greeted with the scent of wood, the rose incense her mother has kept on the drawer in the hallway for as long as she can remember, and something distinctly home that Trixie can’t place, but that she’s never smelled anywhere else. Trixie’s lightest summer jacket is hanging on the coat rack, as if she was just here putting it on and off yesterday. Her brother Brad, his wife, and Trixie’s sister are waiting for them in the living room. Her brother and his wife made their way here from Ontario earlier this morning, and her sister lives with their
mom still, having another couple of years of school in front of her.

“Hey Bea,” her brother greets her and gets up from the couch to hug her. Trixie’s name sounds foreign in her ears. The smell of her brother’s cologne reaches her before he does. Why is it that men’s cologne always smells the same, and yet she still doesn’t know what that scent is? “You look, uh, that’s different.”

“College changes them,” his wife Brenda chimes in and shakes Trixie’s hand. Trixie barely knows Brenda because her brother only met her after he moved away, but she doesn’t care for her much, she thinks. Brenda flinches a little when Trixie’s chunkiest iridescent ring digs into her hand at their handshake, which Trixie makes sure is extra tight.

“I love it!” Trixie’s sister Alice comments without moving from the couch. “Especially the nose ring. Mom, don’t you love the nose ring?”

“Umm, I’m sure Bea likes it and that’s what’s important, sweetie,” her mother answers. She’s in the open kitchen that connects to the living room and already started making dinner for all of them. In all the years Trixie has lived here she barely ever saw her mom relax and sit down. She’s always busy cooking or cleaning or taking care of the garden, and sometimes it makes Trixie crazy how she can never just sit down and engage in a conversation.

♥♥♥

When they have dinner, it’s with the TV on. Trixie feels reminded of her dinners with Kim in their apartment, they usually have Netflix on, but they are always talking over it and it never feels lonely. Now, even though there are five of them at the dining room table, Trixie does feel lonely. The only other sound than the TV is the ticking of the clock over the mantel that has made Trixie anxious for years. She had tried to get her mom to take the clock down over and over again, but the rest of the family insist that you get used to the ticking and don’t hear it anymore after a little while. Trixie never got used to it. Every forth tick is a little louder than the previous three, making it impossible to overhear, demanding Trixie’s attention even if she’s managed to drown out the other three ticks.

It is only when Trixie’s plate is already mostly empty that Brenda starts talking.

“So, Beatrice, how is college treating you?”

Her mom has stopped eating a while ago, pushing the mushrooms on her plate from one side to the other. Trixie knows she can’t wait to get up and get the washing up done, but she thinks it’s rude to get up before everybody finishes their plate. Trixie chews extra slowly.

“It’s going good. I have my first big exams coming up in February, but I’m doing fine I think, and I found somebody to study with. Their – “she wants to mention Jinkx’ name and how they help her with her classes, but stops when she realizes she doesn’t want to open the can of worms she’ll undoubtedly open by using Jinkx’ pronouns. She doesn’t want to use incorrect pronouns either, so she finishes the sentence with “There are a lot of really nice people there.”

The clock is ticking extra loudly. She glances at it out of the corner of her eye. If the clock was pretty at least, but no; it’s basic and ugly.

“Mom, can you drive me to Lacey’s later, she’s having some people over,” Alice asks, batting her eyes at their mom, and with that the conversation about Trixie’s life at University is over.

After dinner, her mom drives Alice to her friend and Brad and Brenda go visit one of the
neighbours Brad used to be close to. This is how Trixie ends up alone in the kitchen wondering if maybe she should have stayed in Boston. During their game night after Trixie’s recital a couple of days ago Shangela added her to a group chat called ‘Love Shack Baby’ that has 14 people in it, including Violet, and has been buzzing with messages all day. Most of them are pictures of Bob dragging in a Christmas tree and Chi Chi and Sasha decorating it with various mismatched ornaments. The newest message is a short video of Chi Chi and Bob, singing along to Little Saint Nick on the radio. Chi Chi is sitting on the kitchen counter – Trixie’s party spot – and Bob is washing up a cake pan, looking over his shoulder every so often to grin into the camera. Shangela, Juju, Chi Chi, and Sasha are staying at the house over Christmas, Trixie knows.

Apparently, Bob’s turns into an open house for all kinds of people who don’t have anywhere to go over the holidays; Trixie knows there are at least seven other people staying at the house, and one picture Sasha sent into the group chat shows no less than eleven people crammed next to the Christmas tree. Trixie doesn’t know most of them, although she can remember seeing some of them at Juju’s party. Adore and Katya are missing from the picture, having gone home to celebrate the holidays with their families. Sasha’s family live in Russia, and the others either don’t have a family, or at least don’t have a family to come home to.

The thought of that makes Trixie a little mad at herself for being ungrateful about her family. At least she is welcome here. She makes sure to wash the rest of the dishes her mom wasn’t able to finish – diligently ignoring the dish washer just like her mom would – because Alice had pestered her about leaving. Trixie knows her mom is thinking about these dishes right now, driving her car. After wiping the counter tops, Trixie scrolls through the photos again – Juju sent two pictures of her presenting Sasha’s bald head that she stuck some glittering snowflakes to – and sends a smiling emoji and a pine cone into the group chat.

Then she makes her way up the stairs into her old room. It’s freezing cold, but when she goes to check the heating she sees that her mom has already turned it up all the way. She sighs. The heating sometimes takes forever to kick in. As she expected, her mom had “tidied-up” the space. For some reason all the furniture at the walls was pushed a little into the middle of the room, making it look smaller than it actually is. Some of the pictures Trixie had left on the walls have been taken off. For a reason that is incomprehensible to Trixie, her mom had put up a calendar of 2009, a calendar Trixie had gotten from her friend Max and that was mostly selfies of them made with crappy cameras. Trixie hasn’t spoken to Max in years. She takes the calendar off the wall.

Her phone buzzes again. This time it’s a message from Shangela asking if anyone has seen the cat. Trixie sighs and lets herself fall on her bed, which creaks loudly. She itches to text Katya, longing to hear from her now that she’s so far away. She hasn’t heard from her since two days ago when they said a quick goodbye on campus, with Kim standing right next to them. Trixie had made sure to not linger on their hug this time, and thankfully Kim had refrained from any sort of comment.

**Trixie**

*Do you ever look at pictures of yourself in 2009 and get embarrassed at yourself? Like, what even is this hair cut?*

She places the phone on her stomach, waiting for a reply and trying to come up with something to do tonight. Her mom will be back in about half an hour, maybe they could watch a movie or Trixie could help her around the house a little. She stares at the ceiling. There’s still a big smudge from where Brad killed a spider for her years ago. Now she could probably kill the spider herself, Trixie thinks, but isn’t sure.

**Katya**
Trixie

My sister has taken all the nice things from my room. I can’t see a single candle or plant or vase. Would it be petty to go and take everything back?

Katya

My sister decided to stay in Maine and not show up at all. My parents aren’t happy
I think I’m going to stay here for tomorrow and then head back to the house
It’s weird being home

Trixie didn’t even know Katya had a sister.

Trixie

So weird!
Did I tell you our house has three kitchens? One is outside in the barn, one is next to the living room and one is upstairs where my grandparents used to live. And my mom keeps all of them stocked. And she moves things from one kitchen into the other and she must have a system, but I can just never figure it out

Katya

Haha, maybe she just wants to piss you off
You specifically
I’d do that as a mom
I’d probably make a terrible mom

‘Katya’ and ‘mom’ are two concepts Trixie hasn’t brought together yet. Does Katya want to be a mom? Does she know? Has she thought about it? Trixie thinks about herself being a mom a lot – a little too much, if she’s honest. Trixie feels the urge to ask Katya about her feelings on this matter, but she can’t. That would be too much. Also, there’s no guarantee she wouldn’t get an answer like ‘yeah, Violet and I have been talking about this a lot and we’re gonna start a family real soon’. Better not to ask.

Trixie

I’m gonna make a great mom I’m gonna have only one kitchen so there’s no confusions What else could go wrong? Nothing.

Katya
Do you want to come to our New Year’s Eve party?

Oh wow. Way to change the topic. Trixie really wants to reel back to the motherhood thing.

Trixie

New Year’s Eve party? How many parties are there at this house, damn

Katya

There’s a party for everything
EVERYTHING
Last year Juju had a party for Shangie bc she was proud of Shangie for being brave when getting her wisdom teeth out
There were like 40 people
There was a stripper

Trixie

Shut up no there wasn’t

Katya

There was!
It was Juju But still!

Trixie

I’m coming back on the 30th so yeah, I’m gonna be there. Thanks for inviting me!

Katya

Sure
You should bring sb!
If you want to
I love New Year’s
Romance!

Oh god. Under no circumstances does Trixie want to spend New Year’s Eve with Katya and Violet doing ‘romance’, whatever that means. But, realistically, she doesn’t have a lot of options here. Kim is probably going to this party, and it’s not like Trixie knows anybody else. Also, she loves spending time with the group. Maybe she really should bring someone. Maybe she should bring Pearl? Trixie closes her eyes for a moment and tries to imagine herself going to Katya’s with Pearl. How would Katya react? Would there be a reaction at all? She doesn’t know if she wants to bring Pearl.

She decides to text Kim, to weigh her options.

Trixie

Kim! I hope you’re doing okay and you’ve told your mom you wanna throw business administration and become a makeup artist/instagram model!
Are you going to Katya’s for New Year’s?

Kim texts back after a couple of minutes, a couple of minutes Trixie uses to thoroughly freak
herself out over the idea of dating Pearl. What does Pearl’s voice sound like? What does Pearl smell like?

Kim

*My mom is so great at lying to herself, I wouldn’t be surprised if she’d never know. I fully showed her my Instagram last night and she thinks it’s not me, but just some friend of mine. And yes, I think I’m going. You?*

Trixie

*Like you have friends
Tell her, Kim! Be your best self!
Do you wanna be my date for the party?*

Kim

*I somehow feel like being your date would be a lot of work*

Trixie

*It is
But it’s worth it!
Come on, I need somebody to hold my hand and kiss me when midnight comes along :’(*

Kim

*I’m not going to kiss you*

Trixie

*? What??
But I’m so perfect and beautiful I don’t understand?? :’((*)

Kim

*You’re a mess. And I’m not going to kiss anyone. Ever. But especially not you. :)*

♥♥♥

Trixie stuffs her phone under her pillow after this, thinking this has probably been enough texting for one day. She makes herself comfortable on her bed and realizes with a sigh of relief that the heating has finally started running. Once its running, it usually gets the small room warm in no time, and Trixie feels more comfortable immediately. She sits up for a moment to take off her fuzzy sweater that is much too warm for the room within only a couple of minutes and lies down in bed in just her lacey bra and her skirt. It’s too early to go to sleep yet.

More out of boredom than out of lust, Trixie starts running her hands down her sides and up again over her stomach and her bra. Her masturbation habits have taken quite a dent ever since she moved in with Kim. It’s not that she never has the room to herself, but Trixie likes to take a long time to tease herself, and it’s just not the same with the constant threat of Kim walking through the door at any moment. For the last couple of weeks, Trixie has only touched herself in their shower. She loves the feeling of the hot water running over her head and back while she leans against the glass walls, paining them damp with her breath, and filling the small space with the sound of her uneven breathing, every quiet moan echoing back to her and spurring her on. However, she also
has trouble finishing, standing up and with the water working against her, desensitizing her. So this will be the good thing coming out of being home again, she decides. Her own room, and enough time for this.

Because Trixie likes to treat herself as well as she possibly can, she gets up and goes to Alice’s room, getting some of her scented candles back. For a reason she doesn’t want to dwell on, she decides to take only the floral scented ones. Then she goes downstairs to get her laptop from where it lies in her backpack next to the front door and puts on some atmospheric music. She considers getting the few toys she has out of the box on the bottom of her closet, but decides she’s more than happy with her own hands tonight.

To her music, she puts on a little show for herself, slipping slowly out of her tight skirt in front of the mirror on the inside of her wardrobe. Her pink lace bra matches her panties because that’s the way she likes it, and she decides to keep her underwear on for now. Trixie considers herself in her slightly milky mirror for a moment. Her makeup around her left eye is a little smudged; she hadn’t taken a moment to check on herself after coming from the airport. She feels a small sense of pride at her decision to not tone down her makeup before flying home. She turns in front of the mirror once. Her body looks just a bit heavier to her than it used to look in this mirror, but she can’t be sure. After all, it’s been a while since she saw herself in this mirror, and no two mirrors ever show the same thing. The soft skin of her belly and hips spills out of where her panties cut into it, and Trixie knows this sight would have had her worried at some point years ago, but now she touches her sides lightly, shudders a little where she’s tickling herself, and smiles at her reflection.

When Trixie touches herself, she likes to pay attention to every part of her body. She lies down on top of her covers, the air in the room warm and comfortable now, and draws slow circles on her thighs with just her fingertips. Trixie’s skin is very sensitive, more sensitive than the skin of the people she’s been with so far. She is extremely ticklish, but when she’s in the right mood, the motions on her skin make her feel all kinds of wonderful. She takes her time working up from her legs to her sides and back down to her feet, feeling a shiver running through her body when she uses her nails to lightly scratch her skin. Then she brings her hands up over her stomach and her breasts to her face, drags down her bottom lip with her finger and purposefully smudges her lipstick to match her smudged eye; puts her hands to her scalp and tugs on her own hair, first lightly, then a little rougher. Her eyes flutter close; the blackness she sees now is disrupted and constantly moving in the flickering of the candles on her nightstand and shelf. When her hands travel down to focus on her breasts over her bra, Trixie lets a moan escape her lips. Trixie loves moaning, it’s a big part of the fun for her. She moans again, this time louder. Her music is on pretty loud for when her family comes back; and anyway, it’s not like they haven’t heard her before. She likes being loud.

As she caresses and teases her body, different images and scenarios begin playing out in front of her inner eye, and she gives up control over where her thoughts wander, letting them roam freely.

Katya is sitting on top of her, straddling her hips, wearing one of her tight short dresses that has ridden up, exposing her red panties. Trixie can feel her weight on her hips, and her knees slightly digging into her sides. She reaches up to bite into Katya’s shoulder lightly, making Katya moan with the best sound Trixie has ever heard.

Trixie’s own moans ring in her ears and she grips her breasts tightly, digging her nails in, towing the line between pain and pleasure. Through her closed eyes she can see herself and Katya standing on the opposite side of her room now, her own skin bronze against Katya’s pale body. She watches herself lift Katya up and press her against the wall, Katya’s legs wrapped around her body, her nails digging into Trixie’s shoulders. Katya’s head is thrown back, leaning against the wall, and she’s panting heavily. Trixie digs her own nails into her shoulder, and slowly turns over to her stomach.
They are outside now, in a car parked at the edge of the forest near Trixie’s old school, a car that Trixie has spent quite a bit of time in, parked exactly here. She’s straddling Katya where she’s sitting in the driver’s seat, looking down into Katya’s eyes, her pupils blown wide open. Katya looks at her with reference. “So pretty,” Katya whispers into Trixie’s ear, her voice slightly hoarse and her breath hot and warm on Trixie’s ear where her lips graze her ear lobes. “You moan so prettily, Baby.” Trixie moans louder, revelling in the hot touch of Katya’s hands on her breasts, her hips, her neck. The steering wheel is pressed against Trixie’s back and Trixie doesn’t mind at all, can’t think of a place she’d rather be and then she is lying on her bed again, on her back, her head dangling off the edge.

The lights in the room are out and the room is only lit by a full moon, hanging low in the sky and shining through her open window. Katya is in the middle of the room, completely naked, the moon reflecting off her skin, dancing through the room with her eyes never letting go of Trixie’s for longer than a couple of seconds. The curtains get blown into the room by a sudden warm rush of wind that also catches Katya’s hair. It dances beautifully around her head. Trixie reaches her hands from her sides over her head, reaches for Katya, who immediately starts moving towards her. When she reaches the foot of Trixie’s bed, she drops to her knees. Her chest is just over Trixie’s head and Trixie presses a line of kisses over Katya’s small breasts before looking into her eyes for a long moment. In the moon light, Katya’s eyes are almost black, and Trixie can see the blush on her cheeks. Still lying upside down, she puts her hands on Katya’s neck and pulls her face closer and downwards, lingering for a second before catching Katya’s lips in hers. Katya’s lips are soft and warm and Trixie sighs against them, opening her mouth just slightly to feel Katya’s tongue against hers.

They are kissing still, hot and messily, in the bar where Adore had their concert. They are standing in the middle of the dance floor, bodies moving all around them, pressed tightly together. Trixie can feel the sweat of Katya’s scalp under her hands as she drags her fingers through Katya’s hair. Katya has her hands under Trixie’s dress, not minding the people around them; the green and purple spot lights are reflected in Katya’s eyes when she breaks the kiss to look into Trixie’s eyes. “You moan so prettily, Baby,” she repeats, and Trixie can hear every quiet word even over the music of the club. “Katya,” she replies, because the sound of this name is the most beautiful sound Trixie can think of, “Katya, Katya.”

“Yes, Baby?” Katya whispers, grinning at her cheekily. She’s lying on her own bed, the lava lamp casting a flickering orange light on her skin and her hair in disarray around her head. Trixie is straddling her, looking down at Katya, her hand on Katya’s face. She’s running her fingers over her cheek and stops at Katya’s lips, grazing Katya’s bottom lip with a trembling finger. Katya closes her eyes and parts her lips to take Trixie’s finger into her mouth, sucking on it lightly. “Tell me what you need, Baby,” she whispers around Trixie’s wet finger.

She’s hovering above Trixie now, still in her room. “Tell me, Baby. Tell me what you need.” She places both hands on Trixie’s breasts, with a barely there touch, and slowly lets them travel downwards. When she reaches Trixie’s panties, she pulls them aside lightly, before bowing her head down and letting her tongue flicker over Trixie’s clit. “Katya,” Trixie moans again, eyes focussed on where Katya has her face in Trixie’s crotch, “Katya, it’s you, I need you, I need you so much,” she lets out a strangled moan and throws her head back in the pillow. “I need you so much.”

Trixie comes with a moan that’s loud enough for her to throw her arm over her face and bite into the skin there in order to strangle the noise a little. Her breathing is fast and irregular and she takes a long moment before she lets her other hand slip out of her panties and wipes it dry on her thigh.

“So I just made things a whole of a lot worse, didn’t I?” she asks herself quietly once her breathing
has calmed down.
Oh yes, she did. Yes, she did.

♥♥♥

Trixie wakes up early on Christmas Eve. Her heating must have turned off at some time during the night and her room is once again freezing cold. Sitting up, she wraps her blanket tightly around her shoulders. There’s a mug of tea on her nightstand, a little steam still coming from it and contorting the air above it, so Trixie knows her mom came to her room just moments ago to bring it to her. Trixie picks up the mug, she knows the tea will be too warm to drink for a while, but she likes to hold it and warm her hands. She leans on the wall next to her bed and looks outside the window. The fields outside are covered in undisrupted snow and there’s still some snowflakes dancing through the air. She can see their garage from her bed; the edge of the garage roof is covered in icicles. Trixie needs to go and make use of the snow now, she thinks, who knows if she’s going to have snow this pretty in Boston.

She puts aside the mug, turns around and lies with her feet to the wall, then bangs them against it.

“Whaat?” comes Alice’s whiney noise from the other side.

“Let’s go outside!” Trixie yells. She barely has to speak up to be heard in Alice’s room, she knows that, but she likes speaking a little extra loud so that Brad can hear her too two rooms over and complain about it as soon as he sees her.

“No, shut up.”

“But it’s snowing!”

“But I’m sleeping.”

“But it’s snowing?”

“It’s been snowing forever. I’m asleep, bye.”

Trixie sighs and gets up. Apparently, she is going to have to go on her beautiful winter wonderland walk alone. Just as well.

Trixie climbs over her backpack and walks over to her wardrobe. She has barely brought any of her clothes here because she wasn’t up for carrying a suitcase and because she doesn’t enjoy dressing up for people who don’t appreciate her efforts. She puts on a plaid flannel shirt she hasn’t worn in years and jeans with a grass spot on the left knee. It would have to do. She also finds a woollen hat, scarf and gloves in the back of her closet and when she’s spent five minutes in the freezing cold bathroom and drowned her tea she leaves the house and steps outside into their garden.

Their garden is big and mostly empty, and Trixie is never sure where it ends, and their neighbours’ fields begin, especially not with the snow covering everything. Her mom is in the garage, pulling some things from a shelf and stacking it on the floor. Trixie is sure she has seen her mom rearrange that same shelf at least a dozen times. She gives her a little wave and leaves the garden, walking towards a little creek. Whenever Trixie used to go on walks, be it with her mom, or her sister, Shea, or her friends, she always picked the same route. If she follows the creek for about half an hour, she will reach the forest that lies between her home, and her old school.

The water in the creek is frozen solid, but Trixie has walked here so many times she imagines she can hear the trickling and rippling of the water like so many countless times before. As she’s
walking she sings to herself quietly, knowing chances of running into another person out here are slim. If there’s anyone coming, chances are their dogs will reach her far before they will.

When she’s about to reach the forest, Trixie notices some big bales of straw out of the corner of her eyes and is reminded of the time Max and her spend an entire day building a family out of snow people gathered around the hay. The family had consisted of two mothers, a grandmother, seven children, and an animal that was stuck somewhere between a monkey and a bunny and that they had called a bunkey. Trixie doesn’t know where Max is now. Hit by a sudden wave of nostalgia, she decides to build a snow man, now, alone.

She kneels down in the snow, the feeling of the icy ground biting into her knees a rather familiar one, and starts gathering the snow for her snow man. The first snowball she uses is rather small, and she decides to go bigger without changing the position of the first snowball, so that when she’s done, her snow man is stuck in handstand, the snowballs getting smaller towards the ground. She puts in twigs to support the illusion of the snow man making a handstand, and gives him a big smile with little stones. She knows just where to dig under the snow to get the right kind of stones.

When she is done she pulls her phone out of her coat pocket and finds the right angle to take a picture of her creation. She thinks about sending the picture into the group chat, but sees the last message in there is a rather heartfelt one from Bob, telling everyone he’s proud of them and that he loves them. She doesn’t think this message should be followed up by her dumb snowman, so she sends the picture to Katya instead. Katya’s reply comes before Trixie has time to put her phone away.

**Katya**

*I love her, is this me?*

*Hang on*

Trixie stares at the screen, taking a second to figure out why Katya asked that question. The handstand, sure. The thought of Katya believing Trixie would go and make Katya out of snow is a lot to handle for Trixie. There’s snow softly falling on her screen while she waits for Katya to continue the conversation, and Katya’s words get blurred out by the water.

Katya’s next message is a picture of her making a handstand in an unfamiliar kitchen. She’s wearing a plain black sweater and leggings and her left side is cut out of the frame.

**Trixie**

*Queen of selfies*

**Katya**

*One up me, bitch*

Trixie tries to remember at what point Katya had started calling her bitch. She’s not sure she likes it, but it feels natural to Katya, so no, of course she likes it, she decides. Trixie can’t do a handstand, has never tried it, but is pretty sure that’s a fact anyway. She quickly thinks about a couple of poses she could get into to take a good picture for Katya, but all of them would involve getting too much snow into her clothing, and she decides it’s not worth it. Instead, she just takes a picture of her face. She isn’t wearing any makeup, so she makes sure to cover up most of her face with her hat and scarf before taking the picture. Her nose and cheeks are slightly red from the cold and her hair on her shoulders is wet from the melted snowflakes in it, curling in a way Trixie doesn’t appreciate. She sends the picture anyway.
The rest of the day Trixie spends watching Christmas movies on cable with her sister. It’s the same movies they have already watched together year after year, and Trixie revels in the familiarity of the sight of Alice on her phone, not paying attention to the TV – but still yelling when Brad comes in and wants to change channels – and the noise of her mom in the kitchen, preparing dinner and refusing any kind of help.

Like the day before, the Love Shack Baby group chat is going strong. The latest message is a boomerang video of Adore putting a tree topper on top of a big Christmas tree in their family’s house. It’s send by someone named Bianca Trixie has never heard of before.

**Juju:** Adore! This is my tree topper! Did you take this to Azusa with you?
**Bianca:** Adore swears it’s theirs.
**Chi Chi:** The Grinch is up in five minutes, who wants to come watch
**Juju:** But it’s mine, I’ve been looking for this!! Adore!
**Juju:** @Chi Chi do you have snacks?
**Jinkx:** We’ve never had a tree topper. Don’t mind Juju.
**Sasha:** There’s never been anything on top of this tree, except this awful thing Katya made.
**Chi Chi:** Bring your own snacks
**Violet:** @Katya I love your awful tree topper
**Laganja:** :D :D :D
**Jinkx:** I made cookies, they’re in the silver box on the drawer in the hallway
**Alexis:** I made cookies, come and get them
**Bianca:** Shangela, get your girl in line.
**Chi Chi:** Cookies are gone Jinkx :( 
**Katya:** @Violet thanks babe
**Juju:** I’m not watching tv without snacks
**Chi Chi:** I GUESS I’LL BE WATCHING THE GRINCH ALONE AND WITHOUT SNACKS THEN; JESUS
**Sasha:** @Chi Chi I’ll be there in a minute. I have oranges
**Chi Chi:** It’ll have to do :/ 
**Bianca:** You’re going back on silent.
**Laganja:** On my way over right now, but no snacks :’((
**Jinkx:** Where is Katya’s tree topper anyway?
**Juju:** Oranges!!
**Chi Chi:** @Laganja stop by the store
**Violet:** @Jinkx it’s here, she gave it to me because I’m the only one who appreciates it
**Violet:** [pic]
**Juju:** unbelievable @Katya why do you hate us
**Juju:** who even invited Bianca
**Chi Chi:** Bring marshmallows
**Laganja:** I love the thing Katya!

Trixie smiles at her phone before putting it away and focussing on the TV again. The opening credits of the Grinch just started rolling, and Trixie has a whole bowl of marshmallows just for herself.
Trixie lets her mom talk her into going to mass on Christmas eve. She doesn’t resist long, gives in after looking into her mom’s hopeful eyes for a couple of seconds; she knows this is important to her. She doesn’t always know how to communicate with her mother, but she knows what she can do to make her content, and she’s willing to do that, at least to some extent.

When they leave for mass it’s dark outside and the short way to the car is enough for the cold wind to bring tears to Trixie’s eyes. Brad is with them. Like every year since she was eleven Alice had refused to come, and Brenda had stayed behind as well, skyping with her nieces in Canada.

Trixie has never liked car rides in the dark in the country. It’s different when they’re in a city and there’s different coloured lights swirling and dancing through the darkness outside. In the country, all she can see is her own reflection in the dark car window. In the dim light of the car she never looks healthy, and after a couple of seconds of avoiding her own eyes in the window, she forces herself to look away and focus on her mom’s hands on the steering wheel. Her mom’s hands are pale, and she’s wearing her grandmother’s engagement ring, that her grandfather had left them when he passed. Trixie loves that ring.

Brad is talking about the construction work they are having done in the attic to prepare a nursery. Trixie barely listens, only tunes into the conversation every now and then, feeling an array of conflicting emotions rising deep inside her every time she focusses on his words for more than a couple of seconds. Brad has been talking about having a child for years and Trixie can never wrap her head around the thought of Brad being a father. When he first told her, years ago, in a random moment of them picking up groceries at the store, Trixie had stared at him with an open mouth, almost running their shopping cart into a stack of bath products. She had wanted to ask him, right in this moment, a question that has been scratching at the edge of her mind for years and years, and that is still unanswered today: Had Trixie’s stepfather treated Brad the way he had treated Trixie? Trixie can’t remember ever witnessing him yelling slurs at Brad, nor hitting Brad the way he had Trixie, but she had always felt like Brad must have gone through the same thing. She imagines she can see this in his eyes sometimes, in rare silent moments when they look at each other, quiet understanding in their eyes. She wishes she could talk to him, thinks he must be the only one who would understand, but she can’t remember ever having a real conversation with him. Sitting in the car and watching the back of his head, she lets herself hope with every part of her body that Brad will have a child soon, and that his family will be whole, and warm, and wonderful. She believes Brad might be able to pull that off. She really wants to believe that. She doesn’t quite believe that.

Trixie likes being in church. Or, she likes parts of it. She likes the candles, their flickering light and the lingering scent of fire and wax. She likes the acoustics, the hushed voices echoing off the walls before mass starts, the booming voice of the pastor, the voices of everybody singing together, the thin cracked voices of elderly people somehow coming together to create something beautiful. She likes sitting in church, with her coat still on to protect her from the cold – even though she knows she’ll regret this as soon as she has to step outside again – and her shoulders touching her mom’s shoulders on one side and Brad’s shoulders on the other side. She likes being wedged securely in between them, feeling their warmth and being close to them without needing to talk. She likes the colourful church windows of scenes she doesn’t recognize but knows she should, and she likes the flower decorations and the way the older church-goers dress up for the occasion.

Here’s what she doesn’t like: She doesn’t like sharing this room with everybody she ever knew; she sees her history teacher, she sees her boss from the hotel who thankfully seems to not see her or ignore her on purpose, she sees at least four of her former classmates, a cashier from the only
remotely close supermarket, and most of their neighbours. She focuses on her hands in her lap, holding a small unlit candle they gave to everyone at the entrance. Earlier she had painted her nails a dark red because this was the only colour her mother owned, and Trixie forgot to bring her own. Now her nails match the candle and the roses at the altar, and Trixie feels at peace.

Trixie likes the actual ceremony of the mass, too. She barely listens to what the pastor is saying, instead thinking of her past self trying to understand his words countless times before, often shooting questioning glances at her mother, who had always just smiled slightly and shaken her head, indicating Trixie could ask her about everything later. Trixie never had. She had always liked this pastor’s voice, it seems familiar even if she stopped attending mass years ago. She closes her eyes and let’s his sermon wash over her, gets up or kneels with the people around her in time, and sings songs she is surprised to find she still knows by heart. Her voice sounds strong and beautiful in the masses of voices coming together to praise a god Trixie doesn’t believe in. Trixie isn’t religious, and probably never was, but sometimes she wishes she was. If mass calms her this much without holding deeper meaning to her, she can only imagine how it must help her mother, who is deeply religious. She scoots a little closer to her mother; now their legs are touching, too, when before it was only their shoulders. Her mother smiles at her warmly before turning her eyes to the altar again.

♥♥♥

When mass is over, Trixie feels calmer than she has in a long time. Not everyone seems to feel like her, however, because people aren’t leaving the church quietly and peacefully, focusing on the flame on the now burning candles in their hand. Instead, the building is suddenly filled with laughter, coughing, and even a few shouts of people trying to get their friends and acquaintances to notice them on the other side of the room. When Trixie, now irritated, looks up from her flame after one particular loud shout, she catches sight of somebody all too familiar, standing next to her siblings, waiting for people to shuffle by to get out of their row of seats.

There is Shea, looking straight at her, her full lips slightly parted in surprise. Trixie hasn’t seen her since their break up in Shea’s car, parked at the edge of the forest. They had looked at each other in complete silence for at least ten minutes before Trixie had opened the car door and started walking home, hot tears running over her cheeks. She had looked back at Shea when she heard her get the motor running again, but it had been too dark to see her face through the windshield. Trixie had always thought she’d run into Shea again, but never did. Shea had moved very soon after their breakup— which didn’t stop Trixie from being anxious about running into her at every corner. She knows Shea lives in Chicago now, or at least moved there five years ago, but now she’s here and she’s looking at her and slowly, carefully, a small smile forms on Shea’s lips.

Trixie smiles back. Shea’s hair is much longer now and lies in long braids over her shoulder and she’s holding her little brother’s hand, a brother who couldn’t even crawl when Trixie last saw him. Brad stumbles into Trixie. He’s ushered on by the people behind him who seem to be in a hurry to leave this place and Trixie walks on with the crowd, holding Shea’s gaze for a couple more seconds before Shea is behind her.

Outside, Trixie barely notices the freezing wind, it brushes her face but she’s warm enough to not mind it quite yet. Barely outside, she stops in her tracks. “Sweetie?” Her mom asks when she notices Trixie isn’t following them to the car.

“I’m going to be right up, okay? Just a minute.”

When her mom and Brad leave with the stream of people in the direction of the parking lot, Trixie’s heart starts racing. All of a sudden, she’s not sure she really wants to wait for Shea. What
would she even say? Maybe she should just walk away now, walk away before Shea comes out of the heavy double doors of the church. Wisps of smoke from her candle, no longer burning, drift up her nose and then Shea is there, wrapping a woollen scarf around her neck and part of her face. When she notices Trixie standing there, a little aside from the crowd of church goers chatting and standing in everybody’s way, she stops in her tracks for a second.

She looks into Trixie’s eyes, an array of emotions flickering over her face in a matter of seconds.

Then she turns her head, pulls the scarf closer, and hurries into the black night.

Back in her mom’s car, with her head leaned against the window, Trixie opens her messaging window with Katya as if on autopilot.

Trixie

*The past is haunting me today*

Katya doesn’t reply, and Trixie closes her eyes, trying not to think about Shea’s face in the car five years ago, when Trixie had broken her heart just because she couldn’t do any better, couldn’t be any better.

♥♥♥

Later that night, Trixie is lying on the floor next to their tree, watching Brenda open her gift from Trixie’s mom. It’s a mobile with little wooden animals dangling from it; Trixie knows her mom must have made it in her community college arts and crafting class. It’s beautiful and Trixie feels a wave of love for her mom wash over her as she’s lying on the wooden floor, half listening to her mom rambling about the poor quality of the mobile and how the giraffe came out all wrong. Trixie has always liked lying here, looking up to the ceiling with the big blue light, and now that she’s stuffed with Christmas dinner lying is her best option.

She has already opened all her gifts. She was always the fastest at that, and even at 23 can’t manage to open gifts slowly and carefully. Brenda does. Brenda makes sure not to tear the wrapping paper, folding it neatly and putting it aside. Will she really use it again, Trixie wonders? Her own paper lies next to her in a crumbled-up mess.

Trixie is already wearing the socks her mom knitted for her, warm, woollen, and pink. She also got a new knitted scarf, two books she would probably have enjoyed more a couple of years earlier, an okay-looking mug her sister made for her in pottery class in school (she appreciates the effort), and wonderfully sparkly earrings. The lights on the tree above her glisten in the half dark living room and she can still taste the hot chocolate with marshmallows they all had after dinner. Maybe coming home hadn’t been the worst idea.

Only hours later when she’s in bed, about to fall asleep, does Katya reply to Trixie’s text.

Katya

*Stand up straight, look your past dead in the eye, and say: You don’t own me, bitch. You don’t own me anymore.*
Pearl isn’t answering her phone. Trixie called her first thing when she got back to Boston last night, in a moment of spontaneous dauntlessness. This feeling, however, had vanished as soon as she heard the dial tone in the line, and she was relieved when Pearl didn’t pick up. But still, Trixie needs to take Pearl to Katya’s New Year’s Eve party. This is a conclusion she has come to on her plane ride home, and she is not going to change her mind. New Year’s cannot be another party of her single self watching Katya and Violet be a couple; she has to start the new year the right way – she’s not sure what the right way is, but she tells herself this over and over again anyway. Therefore, after one and a half days and only one other fruitless attempt to call Pearl, Trixie settles for a text.

Trixie

Hey, I got your number from Juju a while ago. She said you wanted me to get in touch and here I am, better late than never, haha. Do you maybe want to go to Juju’s party with me tm?

Trixie spends almost ten minutes on that message, writing and re-writing, deleting the ‘haha’ and putting it in again, hating every single word. If she were Pearl, she’d say no, she thinks. What an awful message. She presses send.

Pearl texts back immediately, meaning she must have seen Trixie’s calls as well and just couldn’t be bothered to answer. Lovely.

Pearl

This took u a while, I’m so flattered

Yeah I’m going to Juju’s anyway

You want me to pick u up?

Okay, so at least this is done. Getting a date for Katya’s party was pretty much the only thing on
Trixie’s agenda today, so now that that’s over with, Trixie doesn’t quite know what to do with herself. Kim isn’t going to be back until tomorrow evening, is going to go from the airport straight to Juju’s in order to make it to the party before midnight; so Trixie is left alone with nothing but her thoughts and some over-priced take out she picked up this morning.

The heating, which she had turned up when she got back home yesterday, still isn’t running right and the room is cold. Her orchid has lost all its blossoms, mirroring Kim’s on the nightstand on the other side of the room. She sweeps the limp withered blossoms together with cold fingers and puts them in the trash on top of some tea bags.

After staring at her dishes for a moment, considering getting the washing up done, she sits down on Kim’s desk chair, and spins herself around in it until she feels herself getting dizzy. She really has no idea what to do with this day. There is course work she could do, of course; there always is. But she has another week before classes start again, and without the pressure of a time crunch, Trixie can barely motivate herself to do anything. She walks up to their closet, the idea in mind that she should pick an outfit for tomorrow’s party, but she lets the doors of the closet fall shut as soon as she opened them and gets back into the chair, back to spinning. The new year is beginning tomorrow, and it’s the year of Katya’s graduation. Katya will move away from Boston, and move away rather soon, in March probably. Katya isn’t going to be here much longer. When Trixie spins as fast as she can, her room blurs into a mess of colours and shapes in front of her eyes, and she tries to make out different objects in her room while she spins, but can’t.

Her new guitar is propped up against the foot of her bed and Trixie can see a light layer of dust on it, having settled there in the few days she spent away from Boston. Trixie doesn’t feel like playing right now. She wonders briefly is she should go to Katya’s, but if the Love Shack Baby chat is any indication, she would have to help decorating and get everything ready for the party tomorrow, and Trixie’s not the one. Sure, she would help if they asked her, but she isn’t going to offer. She isn’t a saint.

It is early in the evening and Trixie has gone from spinning in Kim’s chair to pulling restlessly on her guitar strings after all, all the while trying not to think too much about Katya leaving, when she realizes with a sudden burst of panic that she didn’t think to get Christmas gifts for any of her friends. She can’t quite believe this happened to her. Trixie loves giving gifts, she does. She thought about what gifts to get weeks ago when there was still enough time to push the thought away without feeling too guilty, and then her fight with Kim and Katya happened, the musical happened, planning her trip home happened, and she completely forgot. As usual, her mom had gotten too many gifts for Brad and Alice and so gave some of her gifts to Trixie, to give to them. And Brad had organized something to give to Trixie’s mom, that Trixie just had to give him the money for. But with her friends, or course, she wasn’t let off the hook this easily.

Trixie jumps up from the chair, suddenly feeling rather frantic after a drowsy afternoon. The shops are still open, but Trixie isn’t positive she will find something without a plan and on such short notice. When she stumbles into her winter boots and wraps her new scarf around her neck she tries to decide who she needs gifts for. Kim, that’s for sure. Katya? Is Katya going to have a gift for Trixie? In her rush, Trixie lets her keys fall twice at that thought; what could Katya give to her? She probably doesn’t have anything for Trixie, Trixie thinks, but if she has, Trixie needs to be prepared.

In an ideal world, Trixie would write a song for Katya as a Christmas gift, and she would play it for her on Christmas Eve, huddled together on a couch next to their Christmas tree. Trixie can just see it, both of them in cozy sweaters, Katya holding a steamy mug of coffee, leaned against Trixie and listening to her song with her eyes closed and a peaceful smile on her face. Would Katya be into wearing matching Christmas sweaters? In the world she’s in, Trixie needs to find something for
Katya – and Kim, and oh god, maybe all the others as well? At least Jinkx? Jinkx has helped her so much – in the two hours before the shops close.

Outside it’s raining and dark, always dark too early in the winter, and the air is freezing as ever, but Trixie is in such a rush she barely feels the cold. In her mind she tries to go over everything she knows about Katya that could help her find a gift for her.

Katya likes dancing, especially the weird over the top expressive kind. Trixie thinks back to their first date at the milkshake bar, when Katya showed her her phone with the video of her doing Butoh. Trixie had cracked up. Trixie knows she was already less than casual about Katya then, but she must have had a little more chill than now – she doesn’t think she would laugh now, not when looking at Katya twisting her body in all these wonderful ways in all that red lace. She swallows hard. It takes a special kind of person to pull off that kind of dance, Trixie thinks, a lot of charisma to make it work the way Katya does. Katya has so much charisma.

Katya likes crazy jewellery. She wore a single candy cane in her ear the day she came to Trixie’s recital, a recital she went to before Trixie had even apologized to her, and where she was nothing but lovely to Trixie and the kids. Then there’s the cigarette necklace, the earrings with the tiny hands, the crow, the eye, and these are just some of Trixie’s favourites. This aspect of Katya’s character could actually be helpful in getting a gift for her, but Trixie doesn’t know where she should get weird things like this at short notice. Trixie can’t think of a single store that would sell the kind of jewellery Katya likes because Katya’s taste in jewellery is too unique. Katya’s taste in everything is so unique. Katya’s so unique.

Katya overcame addiction. This isn’t a helpful fact for getting her a gift, but Trixie takes a moment to remind herself of that fact before she chases it out of her mind anyway. Katya was addicted to drugs, and she got help and got well enough that she could go to college and live a life that’s pretty good as far as Trixie can tell. Trixie doesn’t know too much about addiction, but is sure it takes a lot of nerve to pull yourself out of it. Katya has a lot of nerve.

Katya likes painting. Trixie remembers the paintings she saw in Katya’s room; she was unable to make out all of them in the dim light of the lava lamp. She wants to spend more time in Katya’s room. She wants to spend time there with the lights out, lying in Katya’s bed, her arms wrapped around Katya’s middle, hearing nothing but Katya’s soft breathing, and feeling Katya’s warmth pressed against her body. She wants to spent time there with the lights on, getting a closer look at Katya’s paintings, learning about what she likes to draw and why, which paintings are her favourites, which mean the most to her. She thinks about the painting that stood out most to her during their conversation in Katya’s room, the painting that somehow showed her nothing, dancers, and a flower at the same time. Katya is so genius to create art like this, Trixie thinks. Katya has so much talent.

Only when Trixie steps ankle deep into a muddy puddle is she yanked out of her Katya appreciation fantasies and is brought back to her current dilemma. She can already see the mall in front of her; there’s two big Christmas trees still standing in front of it, but all the decorations have been taken down and the branches are dripping with rain. If they are going to keep the trees another week or two, why put the decorations down? The trees look sad without them.

♥♥♥

Sometimes, Trixie likes being at the mall. She likes sitting at one of the benches, eating ice cream and watching the crowds rush by. She likes the various kinds of music floating out of every store, intermingling with the sounds of the crowd into a wall of messy noise. Most of all, she likes to buy stuff. Today, Trixie doesn’t like the mall. It seems like all of Boston has gathered under the glass
ceiling of the mall, getting and returning gifts, standing in her way, making too much noise, keeping her from finding inspiration.

The first store Trixie tries is a drug store with a big perfume and cosmetic department. She’s been here with Kim at least twice and now goes through the shelves and stacks looking for products she might remember Kim mentioning. She will probably find something for Kim here; it isn’t going to be the perfect gift, but it will have to do. The air is heavy with the scent of different perfumes mixed together, some florals, some woods, some fruits, none of which Trixie can make out clearly. A shelf of glittery nail polish catches her eyes; there’s one bottle of a metallic shade of pink Trixie doesn’t yet own and that would fit to at least four of her dresses. As soon as she has the bottle in her hands she remembers her actual task. Getting things for her friends, not herself. It is when she puts the bottle back into its place on the shelf that she gets the idea for Katya’s present. She claps her hands in elation. Katya is going to love this.

When Trixie has everything she needs from the drug store, she makes her way past some of the other shops, still a little stressed out but feeling better already. She feels like the biggest part of her work is done. She stops in front of a bookstore, considering going in and browsing for gifts. It’s a big store and there’s round display tables with everything but books on them in the store front. She could probably find something there. She mentally bookmarks the stores for later and moves on, looking for more inspiration.

There’s a little girl throwing a fit in front of a toy store, she’s screaming at her mom – who looks both distressed and embarrassed – because her mom isn’t getting her something she wants. The girl goes from throwing around insults to throwing around literal objects, her tiny purse, a used napkin she picks up from a bench next to her, her bracelet. The bracelet lands in front of Trixie’s feet and she picks it up to give to the mom, who at this point looks like she’s considering leaving the mall without her kid. The bracelet is made of plastic pearls, all pink and purple, matching Trixie’s outfit.

Trixie mentally thanks the girl for making her mom’s life a living hell and giving Trixie the perfect solution to all of her gift giving problems. When she was last here with Kim they saw a store on the top floor that hadn’t opened yet but that had been about to and that should be open now. She heads up the escalator and yes, the shop has opened. It’s a little store with a golden store front, its windows mainly filled by fake golden tree branches holding necklaces and earrings. This store sells everything you need to make your own jewellery, mostly various beads, pearls, and different ornaments.

There are a few too many people in the store and for a reason Trixie cannot fathom they are still playing Christmas music, but she feels relaxed as soon as she enters. She shrugs of her coat and puts it onto a coat rack the store has been considerate enough to cram into the space behind the door. She needs to get comfortable here. This is going to take a while.

Trixie spends almost an hour picking the right pearls and everything she needs to make bracelets, and leaves only when the mall is closing for the night. When she gets back home, she puts on the same Christmas music they played at the store because the songs are playing on a loop in her mind, so it’s not like she can run from that. Then she starts crafting her bracelets. She got beads in different colours, sizes and patterns, wanting to make a unique and fitting bracelet for everyone at the house. Making the bracelets is rather easy and Trixie is done with Katya’s, Kim’s, Chi Chi’s, Shangela’s, Juju’s, Sasha’s, Jinkx’s and Adore’s in a little over half an hour. She’s quite proud of herself. Even if some of the others don’t have gifts for her, the bracelets will be a cute thing to give to them, not too much effort or expense to make things awkward. She feels like she just hacked gift-giving. Well, except for one thing.
With a sigh Trixie gets up and gets her drug store haul out of her bag. The excitement she felt over her gift idea only two hours ago is mostly gone. At the drug store, Trixie got a bunch of clear fake nails and nail decorations. The idea that struck her earlier tonight was to make Katya a necklace out of fake nails, with each nail painted a different colour and decorated a different way. She absolutely loves the idea – and knows Katya would love the necklace too – but she’s unsure whether this would be too much or not. It would definitely single Katya out of her group of friends, and Trixie doesn’t know if she’s up for that. She stands in the middle of the room for a minute, trying to figure out what to do about her gift. Because she can’t decide, and has nothing else to do anyway, she gets to work on the necklace, thinking she will make the decision whether or not she’ll actually give it to Katya later.

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Considering the fact that Trixie doesn’t really care about Pearl all that much, she should be way less nervous about their date. As it is, Trixie is pacing up and down her room, fixing her – by now impeccable – hair and makeup again and again in front of the mirror, fretting over every tiny detail. In order to enable herself to feel as good about herself as possible, Trixie is wearing a rather tight and short golden dress she bought for a New Year’s party at the hotel years ago. It’s the hottest thing she owns, she thinks, turning in front of the mirror and trying not to freak out over Pearl too much.

It would be amazing if she actually hit it off with Pearl. After all, Pearl has been waiting for her all this time. This morning, lying in bed, she had let herself consider for a moment that being with Pearl was an actual possibility. Pearl looks fine as hell, and, given that she showed interest in Trixie, she must be at least somewhat cool. She has good taste if nothing else. Maybe they’ll have a wonderful time tonight. Maybe, at midnight, Pearl will sweep her up in her arms and kiss her, kiss her under the fireworks. Maybe she’ll be kissing her all the way up to next year’s New Year, and the one after that, and the one after that. This thought makes Trixie smile into her pillow, even though it remains impossibly abstract. She can’t imagine this happening, not really. But then again, she hasn’t even met Pearl yet, doesn’t know her voice, her mannerisms, anything she’d need to know to imagine herself with Pearl. She would just have to wait and see. She really wants for Pearl to sweep her of her feet. She’s so ready to be swept of her feet. Or maybe she isn’t.

In the back of her mind Trixie knows meeting Pearl on a night where Katya is definitely going to be there, and therefore Trixie’s focus is definitely going to be on Katya, not Pearl, isn’t a good way to start this. But it is what it is now.

Katya’s – or Juju’s? – New Year’s Eve party starts at 6 pm, which Trixie thinks is way too early, but now that she’s spent all day doing nothing but getting worked up about the night, she is glad to get it started. Pearl is supposed to pick Trixie up in front of her building at 6 pm. Trixie is outside at 5.52 pm. Pearl shows up at 6.14 pm. She arrives with her hands in her pockets and big black headphones on. She doesn’t bother taking them off, only pushes them off her ears slightly, and Trixie can still hear the electro music coming from somewhere near Pearl’s shoulders now.

“Hi,” Pearl says, and gives Trixie loose hug with one arm. She’s about Trixie’s height, with short dark blonde hair that’s slightly curly on top and shaved at the sides of her head. She’s also wearing a septum that, now that Trixie sees it again, she realizes was her main inspiration to get one herself. She’s glad her own hair is so much longer than Pearl’s, and Pearl isn’t wearing any makeup, otherwise they would look entirely too similar. Wasn’t there a joke about gay couples looking too much alike sometimes? She can’t quite remember.

“Hi,” Trixie replies and makes sure to give Pearl her prettiest smile.
“So you’re Tracy,” Pearl says, more a statement than a question.

Trixie feels the smile slip off her face. Pearl doesn’t even know her name? Apparently Pearl didn’t pine after her as much as Trixie liked to imagine she had. Trixie swallows hard and forces the smile back onto her face.

“So Juju gave me your number,” Trixie finally comes up with.

“Yeah.” Pearl’s lips pull into a slight grin. “And then you didn’t use it for like a month.”

“I was busy,” Trixie lies and pulls her curls out of where they are tucked underneath her scarf. Busy pining about a girl we’re hanging out with tonight, she mentally adds.

“So how do you know Juju?” Trixie tries to focus her attention on the girl next to her; the break in their conversation has already been too long.

“Oh god I don’t know. I met her and Yara at a party like a year ago. Two years? Yara’s moved away now, don’t think you know her. And we kept hanging out, I guess,” she shrugs without looking at Trixie. “I love that house.”

When they reach the house, Trixie can tell they are too early immediately. Even though Pearl was late, they are still almost the first guests. The door is wide open, and Trixie goes in without ringing the door bell, feeling almost at home here after coming and going for so long now. There’s no music playing yet and only a handful of shoes are stacked up in the hallway. Trixie decides to leave her shoes on and walks straight into the kitchen, Pearl tagging along after her.

Katya is standing next to a kitchen table that previously wasn’t in the room, hunched over it, looking at something. With her are Jinkx, Adore and, of course, Violet. Trixie panics for a second thinking she doesn’t know whether she should introduce Pearl or not – does she know everyone here? – but then Katya turns around at the sound of them entering the room and jumps over to her. Before Trixie can gather herself, Katya is in her arms, feeling warm after the cold air outside, and Trixie’s heart starts racing again. She hugs Katya tightly. God, she’s missed her.

“Heyyy Trixie.” Katya is smiling, obviously in a great mood. Trixie grins at her widely, feeling mildly giddy. She’s focussed on Katya’s face, so she doesn’t miss that Katya’s expression changes all of a sudden, from happy, to slightly shocked, to indignant. “And hey, Pearl, apparently,” she
adds, turning around to go back to the table. Trixie wants to figure out what caused her reaction towards Pearl – obviously she was missing something here – but Adore and Jinkx come up to hug her, distracting her. Violet stays put on the table, but gives Trixie a smile that Trixie reciprocates with only slightly gritted teeth. Trixie realises Pearl hugs Jinkx and Adore as well, both of whom seem happy to see her, and then Pearl walks over to the table to hug Violet in her loose one-arm-kind-of-way.

“Did you guys come together?” Adore asks when Trixie and Pearl sit down next to each other on one of the sofas, almost an arm’s length apart.

“Yeah. She finally texted me,” Pearl drawls, sounding blasé about it.

Trixie feels herself blush. Did they all know about this? She takes a glance at Katya, but Katya’s focus is back on the kitchen table. There’s tarot cards spread over the table and as she’s watching, Jinkx is spreading out more of them.

“Jinkx is reading Adore their cards,” Katya explains happily when she notes Trixie’s confused face. Whatever problem she had with Pearl being here she seems to have gotten over at the speed of light. “Do you wanna go next, Trixie?” She’s so thrilled about this that she jumps up from where she sits on the sofa. “No wait! I’m next!” She claps her hands excitedly.

“You’re the last one today, Katya, I’m not going to read cards all night,” Jinkx says and gently pushes Katya back onto the sofa opposite Trixie’s.

Trixie settles into the sofa, half listening to what Jinkx is telling Adore – they are talking about Adore’s future in music – half freaking out about being in one space with not only Katya, but also Violet and Pearl. She’s trying to take deep breaths, noticing how her nails are digging into her palms, and forces herself to relax. Before she can think of a way to strike up a conversation with Pearl – who, for her part, seems completely fine with just sitting there, elbows propped on the table, watching Jinkx – Juju sweeps into the kitchen.

“Oh my God!” she giggles, loud enough for everybody to turn around to her, “Adore texted me you guys were here together but I didn’t believe it, ahhh!” She unceremoniously plops down on Peals lap, who smiles at her lopsidedly, but doesn’t otherwise acknowledge her comment.

“So what are you guys talking about?” Juju asks, looking at Trixie expectantly.

Trixie glances over at Katya. Katya is listening to Jinkx eagerly, nodding along to what Jinkx is saying, one hand on the table, the other hand on Violet’s thigh. She’s not paying any attention to Trixie, Pearl, and Juju.

When Juju doesn’t get a quick enough answer, she decides to take things into her own hands: “Pearl just snatched a starring role in a production of MacBeth at the Paramount! They are doing a modern interpretation, and get this, it’s called MacBitch! Can you believe? Discuss!”

♥♥♥

The next two hours Trixie spends in her place on the sofa, only getting up once to get a bottle of wine for herself and Pearl. Pearl turns out to be surprisingly easy to talk to now that Trixie has relaxed a little, and Trixie feels rather good about herself sitting there, talking to Pearl about nothing much in particular.

After Jinkx finishes reading Adore’s cards, it’s Katya’s turn. Katya is practically at the edge of the seat when Jinkx starts shuffling the cards, and Trixie can’t help but feel a wave of endearment
wash over her looking at Katya, all excited. Katya is pulling on Violet’s arm slightly, a way to get
Violet to share in on her excitement, but Jinkx hasn’t started laying out the cards yet, and Violet
only smiles and shakes her head lightly before she goes back to her conversation with Adore.

Before Jinkx starts spreading out the cards, they look at Katya expectantly. Trixie doesn’t know
what they are expecting, but Katya obviously does.

“What do I need to understand right now?” Katya asks, quietly, gravely.

When Jinkx spreads out the cards, Trixie does her best to listen. She doesn’t know what any of the
cards mean, hasn’t gotten in touch with tarot ever before, but she all but drops out of her
conversation with Pearl and Juju to focus on what Jinkx has to say.

The cards on the table are the Fool, the Tower, the Star, and the Queen of Pentacles. The Tower
and the Queen of Pentacles lie reversed, which Trixie quickly learns is important. Important for
what, she isn’t sure. Jinkx remains strictly professional, reading Katya’s cards as if Katya isn’t their
friend, but a stranger whose life they are only dipping into for the first time right now. Trixie has a
hard time following what Jinkx is saying. By now, somebody has turned on the music, and the
kitchen is filling with more and more people, all of them laughing and talking over each other.
Jinkx’ voice is so quiet.

Here is what Trixie gathers:

The fool stands for new beginnings, a fresh start, and also naivety. Katya nods along with the new
beginnings and the fresh start, and even grins at Violet at that, but Trixie catches her bite her lip in
what looks to be worry as Jinkx mentions naivety. Trixie can see Katya trying to find Violet’s eyes,
but Violet is turned away from her.

The Tower reversed stands for delaying disaster, and trying to avoid suffering. Trixie watches
Katya’s look of worry become more and more intense and half wants to tell Violet off for not
paying attention to her girlfriend. Right when she’s about to interject to say something, anything, to
make Katya feel better, Katya shakes her head lightly and the grin returns to her face. Trixie can’t
tell if Katya is faking it or not. She takes their bottle of wine out of Pearl’s hand and takes a long
sip, Pearl grinning at her contentedly. Well, Pearl is easy to get along with if nothing else.

The next card Jinkx interprets for Katya is the Star. It is, as she sums up, the hope after the fall of
the Tower, and backs up the Fool in that it indicates a new beginning for Katya. Every time Jinkx
says something about a new beginning, Trixie can feel a spark of excitement low in her stomach. A
new beginning for Katya! This sounds more than promising to Trixie. Katya, however, seems to be
expecting the new beginning, and Trixie realizes she might take it to mean her life with Violet after
graduation, when they can finally live together again. She drinks some more wine and focusses on
Pearl for a second. Pearl really is hot. Her hair looks like dark honey in the kitchen light and Trixie
wants to rake her fingers through it.

The final card on the table is the Queen of Pentacles reversed. Trixie gets lost in the intricate
design of the card and all but misses the beginning of Jinkx’ interpretation, but from what she
gathers the card implies a friction between Katya’s work and home life. Katya is being pulled into
too many directions, Jinkx concludes, and Katya nods, nothing but concentration and seriousness
on her face.

Trixie doesn’t quite believe in tarot, but this doesn’t seem to matter when she’s sitting here on the
couch, watching Jinkx in the same witchy dress they wore to Juju’s party, laying out Katya’s future
in front of her, with Katya clinging onto their every word. When Jinkx ends their reading and puts
their cards into an ornate silk bag they pull out from under the table, Katya seems rather anxious.
Finally, when Jinkx leaves the table to make themselves tea, Violet turns from her conversation with Adore, and puts her arm around Katya, hugging her close. “Come on,” she laughs, when she sees the expression on Katya’s face, “Everything is going to be fine. I promise.”

♥♥♥

Almost as soon as Jinkx is done with their reading, a new wave of people come into the kitchen, led by Chi Chi, followed by Shangela, and the amount of noise in the kitchen seems to double immediately. Chi Chi spreads a blanket on the floor right next to the table, armed with a pot, a candle, a spoon, and a small plastic bag. He sets up the pot on the middle of the blanket and yells loud enough for everybody to hear him over the music: “If anyone wants a real legit look into their future, come to me! So legit!” Juju is the first one to jump off from her spot next to Pearl and kneel down with Chi Chi and Shangela.

Now that Juju has left, Trixie turns to Pearl, realizing she has to carry their conversation again, but Pearl is leaned back on the couch, watching Chi Chi, a relaxed expression on her face. Maybe Trixie should get stoned, she thinks. Seems to work great for Pearl. Chi Chi is melting lead on a spoon over a candle, then throws the melted lead into the pot filled with cold water, where it gets cold and manifests into a shape. He then uses a handbook he pulls out of his back pocket to determine what that shape means for Juju’s future. From where Trixie is sitting, Juju’s shape looks like a dot throwing up other dots.

Chi Chi considers the shape for a while. “What could this mean?” he asks, in his heavy southern accent, and scratches his chin importantly.

“It means you’re gonna get lead poisoning,” Violet calls over.

“This looks like a broom. A broom thing. So according to this manual – “ he browses through a couple of pages – “this means: be aware of your mother-in-law.”

“I don’t have a mother-in-law?” Juju says, rolling her eyes, snatching the manual out of his hand and whacking him on the shoulder with it. “Not legit,” she decides.

“Don’t read my manual, I’m the fortune teller!” Chi Chi drawls, snatching it back. “It’s a broom. Right?”

He picks the lead up and presents it to everybody on the table.

“It looks like a tampon,” Pearl decides, sitting up to get a closer look at the lead Chi Chi is holding up. “What does a tampon mean?”

Chi Chi skips through his pages. “No tampon, uh uh.”

“What’s something good?” Shangela asks and takes the manual off Chi Chi again. “Here: a chimney sweep means fortune in love! I don’t know about you, but I can clearly see a chimney sweep in here.”

Juju nods. They kiss. Chi Chi sighs dramatically.

♥♥♥

Chi Chi has quite a lot of costumers stepping by, kneeling on the blanket one by one, watching him do his legit work. Trixie drowns them out after a while, instead getting involved in a conversation that is happening between the other people at the table. Jinkx is telling them about a Broadway audition they had two days ago, their third audition this month. It went over rather well,
and Jinkx is hopeful they’ll get a call back.

“Hey Trixie,” Chi Chi interrupts them after a while, “I’m doing yours now. I hope you’re ready!”

Trixie nods distractedly and gives him a thumbs up. Violet is asking Jinkx about a casting director she has met on the road, and they both agree he’s a nightmare to work with.

Two minutes later, Chi Chi comes over and places a lead figurine in front of Trixie at the table. There’s a thin piece sticking out one of the sides and it comes off immediately when Trixie picks it up. It doesn’t look like anything much, and she looks at Chi Chi expectantly.

“It’s a glass,” he explains, “it means somebody is out to get you.”

Trixie frowns at him. “Thanks, I hate it.”

Before Chi Chi can reply to her, Juju comes up behind him, and snatches Trixie’s figurine out of her hands. “This,” she claims, “is very obviously not a glass, but a vase. See?” She waves the thing in front of Trixie’s face. A vase, sure. Trixie can’t see that.

“What does a vase mean,” she asks, not sure she cares, but wanting to indulge Juju at least a little.

“It means,” Juju says, and draws in an excited breath, “that you’re going to fall in love. Ahhh!”

She doesn’t give Trixie time to respond, instead waggles her eyebrows at Pearl and makes a kissing noise towards them that Trixie hasn’t had directed at her since fifth grade. Then she goes to kneel next to the pot of water again.

Trixie decides she can see the vase after all.

♥♥♥

It’s well into the evening, and Trixie still hasn’t left her spot on the sofa. She’s comfortable here, happy with their conversations, and miraculously not too bothered with Violet sharing a space with her. This, she notes, might have to do with the fact that Adore started mixing cocktails about an hour ago, and Trixie has had her fair share of sweet, sticky, and syrupy alcohol. She’s leaning back on the sofa when there’s a lull in the conversation, closes her eyes, and listens to the music for a minute. Somebody put on Stacey Q. She is pleased. Violet is the one that starts the conversation at the table again.

“How’s Leo doing? Has he finished kindergarten yet?” Trixie opens her eyes lazily and sees Violet is looking straight at Pearl. She’s suddenly reminded that Pearl knows her friends pretty well, and that she wanted to figure out why Katya had reacted to her the way she had. Over all the fortune telling, this had sort of slipped her mind.

She sits up straight, blinking away a little dizziness she feels at the motion.

“So, how do you guys know each other anyway?” Trixie interrupts Pearl’s answer, pulling her straw out of her Mai Tai and waving it from Pearl to Violet and Katya and back to indicate who she’s talking to. The liquid clinging to the straw pearls off onto the table and leaves light brown bubbles there.

Pearl shrugs with a smirk and Violet is about to say something when Katya chimes in.

“Oh, you don’t know?” she tilts her head to one side, frowning. “They used to date.”
Trixie drops her hand that was still waving her straw over the table. It crashes into her cocktail class, throwing it over, and spreading her delicious Mai Tai all over the table. Because Violet is opposite her, some spills onto her tight black dress.

Violet and Pearl used to date. Trixie closes her mouth that she feels is hanging open and goes for a more casual look. She cannot comprehend why she didn’t have this information before. She reaches for her purse to get her phone and text Kim asking her how this could have happened, but stops mid-motion. She will just ask Kim later.

Meanwhile, Violet is looking at her with raised brows.

“It was forever ago,” Pearl says, shrugging again. “It’s not a big deal, we’re chill.”

“We are,” Violet agrees.

Trixie looks at Katya. Is Katya chill? She isn’t sure. The only thing she knows is that she, Trixie, isn’t really.

♥♥♥

After the awkward reveal of Pearl’s and Violet’s past relationship? Fling? Trixie thinks now is probably the perfect time to leave the kitchen and find something else to do. Getting up, she feels dizzy for a moment, and notices herself holding on to the table tightly. She takes her – now empty – Mai Tai glass and walks over to the kitchen counter, where Adore left their cocktail ingredients. Trixie finds a bottle of white Rum and starts pouring generously into her glass, wiping off the milky foam from the glass’s walls with the stream of white liquid.

“Want some?” she offers Pearl, who followed her and is now standing close behind her. She can feel heat radiate off Pearl’s body. Instead of an answer, Pearl takes the bottle out of Trixie’s hand, and takes a big sip.

“Let’s go dance,” Pearl says.

Trixie is dancing. The music coming out the speakers is electronic remixes of music she doesn’t know in the first place, and she feels a little out of her element, not knowing how to move to it. Next to Pearl she is probably doing just fine though, she thinks. Pearl moves like she has a stick up her ass, which is a weird change from her normal laid back – too laid back – behaviour.

The air in the living room is heavy and filled with so much smoke that Trixie isn’t sure if they have a smoke machine somewhere in here or if it’s from all the people shamelessly smoking and vaping in the room. The club feeling is heightened by a disco light propped upon a book shelf, that sends fingers of green and red light dancing through the room. There can’t be more than fifteen people dancing in here, but with the small floor space Trixie keeps accidentally bumping into people and rubbing herself against strangers.

Pearl is close to her, moving to the music. She’s taken off her hoodie, wearing only a loose-fitting black tank top now. Trixie can see her strappy bra through the wide arm holes of the top. The red light is dancing over Pearls muscular upper arms and before she knows what she’s doing, Trixie has her arms wrapped around Pearl’s neck, pulling her in closer. Pearl smirks at her and puts her hands on Trixie’s hips. Trixie closes her eyes, focusses on the heat of Pearl’s body close to hers – so close now their hips keep brushing against each other – and the feeling of Pearl’s arms under her fingers. Her grip on Pearl is quite rough, she’s aware of that, but so is Pearl’s grip on her when her hands wander from her hips to her ass. Trixie lets her eyes flutter open to see Pearl’s face only inches away, her pupils blown wide open. She makes sure to grind into Pearl’s hips, moves her
hands slowly from Pearl’s arms to her neck, and pulls her in. Pearl tastes like Rum, cigarettes, and a bit of leftover sugar from her Pina Colada. She opens her lips immediately, her tongue swiping over Trixie’s; a little too much for Trixie’s taste but still nice. Trixie’s hands are roaming through Pearl’s hair that’s slightly sweaty from the damp air in the living room. For a brief second, she is reminded of one of the scenes she indulged in when she masturbated to the thought of Katya. She grips Pearl a little tighter, to get back into reality.

♥♥♥

Trixie loves kissing. She kisses Pearl on the make-shift dance floor, she kisses her on the couch in the living room, the couch in the kitchen, and on the stairwell. Thirty minutes before midnight, she finds herself on the patio, hugging Pearl, who is taking a smoke break, from behind. Adore is with them, half of their attention on them, half on their phone where they are facetimeing with Bianca – who, in turn, is also only half paying attention to Adore as she’s in a bar with a bunch of people who randomly pop on and off the screen, shouting greetings at Adore. Trixie shakes her head. She likes to have all her attention on the girl in front of her. She leans around Pearl to kiss her neck and whine against her ear:

“Don’t smoke, it’s so gross.”

“You don’t seem to mind.” Pearl flashes her a grin and raises her eyebrows challengingly.

“I fully mind,” Trixie complains. She feels a hiccup coming on and tries to suppress it, letting out a strangled noise that makes Pearl laugh hoarsely. She brought their bottle of rum with her to the patio and takes a sip to get rid of the hiccup. It’s not working.

“Then why are you all over me?” Pearl drags on her cigarette one more time before she puts it out against the patio banister. “Why are you all over me?” she repeats with a grin and hesitates for only a second before she adds “Princess” to her question.

“Not a princess.” Trixie bats her eyelids and giggles, before going in to kiss Pearl some more.

♥♥♥

Before midnight comes, the only time Trixie unglues her lips from Pearl’s for longer than a minute is when she makes her round handing out her carefully made bracelets. In her drunken state, she feels rather benevolent searching the house and garden for people to gift, and everyone she finds hugs her and puts the bracelet right on. When she gives the bracelet to Katya, Kata is standing with Violet, Kim, and Shangela, and she gives all of them their gifts at once. Katya’s necklace stays hidden on the bottom of Trixie’s purse. Trixie goes back to kissing Pearl right after.

The next time Trixie stops kissing Pearl is when she’s startled by the sound of a firework going off. She looks up just in time to see the explosion of green far over the treetops. The garden is filled with people Trixie is only now fully noticing and somebody is shouting: “It’s not midnight yet, fuck off!” There’s people outside all of the houses in the street, popping corks, lightning sparklers, laughing and cheering. More fireworks go off. Trixie pulls her phone out of her coat pocket to check the time. It’s 11.49.

Trixie repositions them so that she’s leaning against the balustrade, looking into the garden and the sky above the city. It’s easier to stand when she’s wedged in between the balustrade and Pearl, because every time she makes a sudden motion she can feel her body’s confusion brought on by a little too much alcohol. Pearl is behind her, with her hands wrapped around Trixie’s waist, holding her tight. The crescent moon is hanging low, just above the tree tops, it’s opening facing slightly upwards.
“I love the moon,” Trixie informs Pearl. She hiccups again. “Like, love her.”

“Sure you do,” Pearl replies softly, and Trixie can feel her reach for her pack of cigarettes in her Jeans pockets, but stopping mid-motion and going back to stroking Trixie’s sides. When Trixie smelled mostly pot on Pearl a couple of hours ago, now she has noticed a scent that’s rather musky and reminds her simultaneously of the sea and the forest. She likes it a lot.

A big group of people, including Kim, Chi Chi, Sasha, Jinkx, Juju, and Shangela tumble out of the front door next to them, screeching and laughing. The group have a bunch of woollen blankets with them, which they spread on the wet grass in the middle of the garden. Juju is the first one to flop down on them, spread as wide as she can, so that the others don’t have enough room. Chi Chi and Shangela are carrying a big ikea bag full of fireworks, which they start setting up on the street leading to the house. Shangela runs past Trixie and Pearl to go back inside to get a lighter. Katya and Violet are nowhere to be seen.

“What do you want from this new year?” Trixie asks Pearl quietly, watching her friends on the grass.

“I don’t know,” Pearl answers in a tone that implies Trixie’s question is a stupid one.

“What do you mean you don’t know? You must have thought about it?” Trixie frowns. She thought about this question a lot, so surely everybody else did too?

“No.” Pearl shrugs non-committedly.

Trixie scoffs. Pearl, obviously noticing Trixie’s mood, sighs and Trixie can almost feel her roll her eyes.

“So what do you want from the new year, Princess?” Pearl asks.

Oh. Now that the question is posed to her, Trixie realizes it’s indeed a hard one to answer, even with all the thinking that she has put into it over the past couple of weeks.

“Uhhh, hmmnn,” she says, drawing out every sound. She just noticed Katya and Violet, leaning against the big tree with the swing set, in almost the same position she and Pearl are in right now. They must have been there all along. Katya, who is much smaller than Violet, is the one hugging Violet from behind, and she has to lean around her side to get a look at the fireworks that are going off more and more often now. Trixie doesn’t see Katya’s face, but there’s a pink firework raining down above them, and Katya’s hair is illuminated beautifully. The thought of Katya leaving early in the new year hits Trixie with an unprecedented force, and she has to grip the patio railing tight to not drown in the thought. Chances are next New Year’s Katya will be much farther away from her than she is now, standing at the other end of the garden.

“Find love,” she finally replies, her voice little because even in her drunken state she’s aware this is entirely too tacky a thing to say in the situation they’re in right now.

She feels Pearl prepare to say something, but this is the moment several people start shouting out the countdown to midnight. They are somewhere between seven and six when the sky lights up with fireworks from all over the city and Trixie lets her head fall backwards onto Pearl’s shoulder, taking in the spectacle. She’s vaguely aware of the people in the garden running towards each other, hugging, and wishing each other a happy new year, but they’re the only ones on the patio, and so far, nobody’s coming up to them yet. Trixie is glad, glad for every second she gets to watch the fireworks undisturbed. The sky lights up yellow, green, blue, pink, and yellow again, and the bang of the fireworks echo back to them loudly, almost drowning out the noise around her.
“Find love, find love, find love,” she sings quietly to herself while watching two blue fireworks frame the moon for a second. She knows nobody can hear her over all the noise.

Chapter End Notes

chi chi's fortune telling business is my absolute favourite (german) new year's tradition, if you wanna know more about it, google 'molybdomancy'

also i'm not too familiar with tarot reading (but really, really want to learn) and had help from trixiespads on tumblr for this one, thanks again! i hope i got everything right!
In Which Trixie Picks up Two Empty Soda Bottles

Chapter Notes

hello friends, here's part 2 of the new year's chapter. i hope you had a good start into the year, and if you didn't, remember that this doesn't set the tone for how well the rest of your year is going to go. i did chi chi's lead reading thing from last chapter and it either told me i'm going to win the lottery or it told me i'm going to run into some serious conflicts, but i've decided i'm going to win the lottery! remember that you are always a little bit stronger than you think you are and you are filled with a million tiny miracles <3

if you want to make me v happy, consider leaving a comment or dropping by on my tumblr.

It’s 5 am. Four and a half hours after the fireworks subsided, Trixie is lying on a yellow blanket in Katya’s garden, her head propped up on Pearl’s lap. Trixie is fully aware this position is giving her a double chin, and she half-heartedly tries to hide this by balancing a bottle of sweet wine – she moved on from the rum an hour ago when she tripped over her own feet twice in a row – on her stomach, a bottle that now blocks Katya from seeing her face. Katya is on the blanket with her, and so is, of course, Violet. Violet is lying on her back, quiet, her breathing slow and steady and the crescent moon reflecting in her eyes that look black and liquid. On the red blanket next to them are Shangela and Juju, Juju talking pretty much non-stop for the past half hour and Shangela curled up asleep next to her. She’s snoring lightly, and with every exhale a stray curl is blown up from her face, and falls down softly against her cheek again.

“So, Katya,” Juju says, after a long story about something involving LA – a job? An apartment? Trixie wasn’t quite following. Trixie is glad Pearl is fully engaged in the conversation with Juju, so she doesn’t have to feel too bad about not listening at all, instead staring at the moon hanging over the tree tops, illuminating all of them. Trixie often wonders why she doesn’t take a moment to look at the moon every day. It calms her.

“Yes,” Katya answers, not a question, but a statement. Katya is playing around with a lighter they found lying on the blanket when they got here. She turns it on and off, on and off, lighting up her face again and again. Her face is contorted through the almost empty glass bottle on Trixie’s stomach; Trixie can only see the harsh outline of her lipstick flickering in and out of her sight, and the deep shadows cast on Katya’s face by her black lashes. Pearl’s hands are on Trixie’s shoulders, rubbing slow circles, a motion Trixie cannot feel through her coat. Trixie wishes there wasn’t that much fabric between Pearl’s hands and her skin, wishes Pearl’s hands were in other places on her body, and catches herself making a motion to grab Pearl’s hands and put them just where she wants them, before realizing that that wouldn’t quite be appropriate right now.

“Friction, new beginnings, a fresh start,” Juju goes on, in a tone Trixie doesn’t find fitting for the quiet and peaceful moment she feels they are sharing. It takes a second for Trixie to remember what Juju is referring to: the tarot reading. She can’t believe that happened tonight; it feels like it was a week ago. What a long night this has been. “What do you think that means?” Juju asks,
when Katya doesn’t react, and continues switching on and off the flame.

With a sigh, Violet rolls over, propping up her head on her elbow. Her dark hair is curled perfectly at shoulder length and she brushes it out of her eyes with long elegant fingers. There’s three rings on her hand, all of them mirroring the black liquid of her eyes, and Trixie can’t help but marvel at Violet for a minute before she remembers Violet is her least favourite person here by a long shot. At least she hasn’t been touching Katya since they sat down here what must have been over an hour ago now.

“It means I’m going to get to travel with Violet,” Katya answers after a long moment, and Trixie can more hear than feel the grin on Katya’s face. “See the world! Entertain!” Katya spreads her arms as if welcoming a grand audience.

Trixie scoffs. The sudden motion makes the wine bottle on her stomach tip over, towards her face, and some of the wine spills onto her neck, cheek and ear. It feels sticky. Pearl laughs out shortly and takes the bottle from her, placing it in the grass just out of Trixie’s reach. Trixie’s view of Katya is undisturbed now. Her eyes glide over Katya, wrapped up in a plaid blanket and grinning in Juju’s direction, to Violet who’s considering Trixie with one perfectly shaped raised eyebrow.

Trixie doesn’t understand what Violet’s problem is and raises her eyebrows as well. She tries to raise only one of them, like Violet does, but she can never manage that, and after a couple of seconds of trying settles for raising both of her eyebrows. That’s twice as good anyway. Violet looks away, shaking her head slightly. Good.

“Are you sure that’s what you want? Besides, you didn’t seem all too happy with what Jinkx told you,” Juju says, a challenging quality to her tone. Trixie looks to her right to see Juju leaning back, propping up on her elbows in the grass, looking at Katya with a raised eyebrow. Damnit. Apparently, everybody around here can raise only one eyebrow. Trixie tries again but to no avail.

“Yes,” Katya says. Her grin has given way to a rather cold smile. “Are you sure you want to start this right now?”

“Start what?” Trixie asks, startled into alertness by Katya’s sudden change in tone.

There’s a moment of silence. Pearl takes a strand of Trixie’s hair and starts braiding it, tugging lightly on Trixie’s sculp. It momentarily calms Trixie down; she loves people touching her hair, and Pearl does it so much better than the kids at the day care, especially Sebastian and his ever-sticky fingers. Before every meal she goes to the bathroom with the kids and makes sure all of them wash their hands properly, and Sebastian always does; she can’t explain his sticky fingers. Maybe he was born with them. That would be tragic. Pearl wasn’t born with sticky fingers, Pearl has quick, strong fingers, Pearl isn’t wearing any rings that could get stuck in her hair, Pearl was born to braid her hair. She wonders when Pearl cut her hair short. Maybe Pearl used to braid her own hair, or maybe Pearl likes to date girls with long hair and braid their hair for them. She seems experienced. Trixie wants to ask Pearl how many girls’ hair she has braided, and if any of them had hair as beautiful as Trixie does, but when she looks up at Pearl and Pearl is looking at Juju with a frown she is reminded that there is a conversation going on, a conversation in which she was the last person to talk, a conversation involving Katya no less, and therefore a conversation she is inherently interested in.

When neither Juju nor Katya answer her, Violet does:

“Juju here likes to tell Katya she can’t come travel with me because of her problems. Not like it’s any of her business.”

“It’s fully my business though,” Juju replies coldly, looking straight at Katya, never at Violet. Next
to Juju Trixie notices Shangela stirring awake, opening her eyes for a second, only to give a slight roll of her eyes and close them again, pretending to be asleep still.


“Drug problems,” Katya says, with a small shrug.

“We are not having this conversation again, Juju,” Violet chimes in. “Listen, I appreciate your concern, but we have been over this. Katya is a fucking adult and knows what she can and can’t do."

“You’re taking drugs again?” Trixie sits up quickly, and feels her head spin. She’s vaguely aware of hot tears shooting into her eyes and she places her hands firmly on the ground on both of her sides, trying to centre herself. She feels like throwing up. Her ear is so sticky from the spilled wine. Is there anything she can do to help Katya stop taking drugs? She would do anything.

“I’m not taking drugs again, Trixie,” Katya says, giving Trixie a patient smile. Her eyes are so warm on Trixie’s, and Trixie can almost see the fire of the lighter still reflected in them, even though the lighter is shut off, lying in grass near Katya’s knee now. Katya is not taking drugs! Trixie wants to kiss her so bad.

“But then why –?” Trixie feels a little lost. She’s trying to connect the dots between Katya’s past drug use and her travelling with Violet.

Shangela, apparently, has had enough of this conversation. She gives up on her act of pretending to be asleep, groans, and drags both hands through her afro, as if dramatically ripping it out.

“This conversation!” she moans, “We’ve had it, what? A million times by now?”

“A million and one,” Violet answers coldly, stifling a fake yawn behind her hand. “Thank your girl, she keeps bringing it up.”

“I don’t follow,” Trixie admits helplessly.

“I can imagine,” Violet replies, somehow managing to look down on Trixie even though Trixie is the one sitting, and Violet is the one lying down.

Trixie breathes heavily, rummaging through her mind for an appropriate answer that teaches Violet not to talk to her this way. When she doesn’t seem to come up with anything, she opens her mouth to start speaking anyway, hoping for the best. Her drama teacher, Mrs. DuJour had called Trixie an excellent improviser once, and Trixie never gets tired of replaying that memory. But before she can say more than “You – " Pearl puts her hands on her shoulders and gently presses her back down into her earlier position in Pearl’s lap.

“Shhh, Trixie,” she says, her voice soothing and slightly raspy, and quiet enough that Trixie thinks the others might not be able to hear her. “I don’t think we should get involved to this. This sounds pretty serious.”

♥♥♥

Trixie spends all of January 1st in bed. When she came home around seven in the morning, Kim was already there, fast asleep, and Trixie fell into her bed without so much as wiping the wine of her neck. She wakes up in her sleep sometimes, irritated by her hair sticking to her neck.
When Kim brings a plate of scrambled eggs to her bed a couple of hours later, Trixie is almost too hungover to eat, but she knows Kim’s scrambled eggs too well to take a pass. Kim puts tomatoes and feta in them, and even though the recipe is simple enough, the eggs never taste as good when Trixie attempts to make them herself. She sits up slowly, checking in with every part of her body, and decides she’s feeling well enough for at least a couple of bites.

Kim sits down in her desk chair, facing Trixie, her legs crossed and her face slightly shiny from her lotion. She looks well rested. When did Kim go home last night? Trixie can’t remember saying goodbye to her. She vaguely remembers counting down to midnight standing on the patio with Pearl and watching her friends in the garden for a little while before turning around to claim her not-quite-midnight kiss. Shangela and Juju had kissed for only a short moment considering the way they are usually all over each other, and after, Shangela had hugged Kim through most of the fireworks, Juju taking off and throwing fire crackers with Chi Chi. For a second, Trixie wanted to run over there and hug Kim as well, but she felt at peace just watching them watch the fireworks. Trixie can’t remember seeing Kim after this, maybe Kim left not long after. It would explain the way her skin is glowing with the promise of spring, aloe vera, and wellness right now. Trixie’s own skin is sticky and itchy, and she knows she smells less of spring than of fireworks, wine, and poor decisions.

“So,” Kim says, in a manner than has Trixie already knowing where this conversation is going. “Pearl.”

“Pearl,” Trixie repeats, around a mouth full of eggs.

“So?” Kim asks. This conversation is containing surprisingly few words, Trixie notes. She decides to throw some more words into the mix. Her head hurts.

“Pearl didn’t want to take me back to her place last night because, in her words, I was way too drunk.” Trixie remembers how indignant she had felt at Pearl’s words, how whiny she had gotten when Pearl had told her no. She hazily remembers dragging Pearl’s oversize hoodie down her shoulders as far as it would go and kissing the skin there sloppily, trying to advertise what Pearl would be missing out on by not taking Trixie home with her.

Repeating Pearl’s decision to Kim now, she feels relieved. Good on Pearl for being the responsible one.

“She brought me back here and – oh my god, by the way, fully fuck you for neglecting to mention Violet and Pearl had a thing.”

“Is that important?”

Trixie stares at her. Unbelievable.

“And? How do you like Pearl?” Kim goes on, unfazed.

Trixie changes her position on the bed so that her plate is on the floor and she’s hanging off the bed with her face down, eating like this. It makes her head hurt a little more, but now that she’s just changed her position, she’s not changing it again. From her new position she can only see Kim’s feet, and has to squint up to get a look at her face.

“You know what?” she asks Kim, not quite sure what exactly it is that she wants Kim to know. “I don’t think Pearl is for me.” Trixie hasn’t thought about this yet and is a little surprised by what comes out of her mouth. It’s as if she’s learning what she feels only as she’s saying it.
“And why’s that?” Kim asks, in a voice that indicates she already knows. She spins around in her chair once, her feet in her thin purple socks flying out of Trixie’s sight for a moment, before they’re there again. Obviously, Kim isn’t as hung over as Trixie is. Kim always makes such good choices. Where was she last night?

“She’s so…” Trixie trails off, not knowing what she wants to say. Pearl is too chill? Too easy-going? Too relaxed? Too blasé? Pearl thought her name was Tracy? Pearl wasn’t pining for her when Trixie thought she was? Pearl isn’t romantic? Pearl smokes too much? Pearl isn’t Katya? A bit of egg gets stuck in Trixie’s throat and she coughs, making her head scream angrily at her.

“Hot and into you?” Kim edges her to go on. “Not your thing when they’re into you, is it?”

Trixie lets out a suffering groan. “Not now, bitch,” she sighs, and lets herself fall into bed again, “not now.”

This conversation is over.

♥♥♥

The first time Trixie gets up is at 2pm. Her bladder won’t let her wait any longer and, more importantly, she needs to go see where her phone is; she hasn’t seen it at all today. Once she’s been to the bathroom, she searches her coat pockets for her phone and comes up empty. She then proceeds to search the pockets of all her other jackets, and Kim’s jackets, fully knowing that her phone being in there isn’t a possibility. When did she last have her phone? She doesn’t remember. Why can’t it just be here in her hands when she needs it? She has a headache for christ’s sake, she doesn’t deserve this. She deserves to lie in her bed with some tea and scroll her Instagram in peace.

“What are you looking for?” Kim asks her, without looking up from her laptop. Project Runway is on again and Heidi Klum’s voice is extra grading today.

“Phone,” Trixie mumbles, “have you seen it?”

“Nope. When did you last have it?”

Ugh. If Trixie knew this she wouldn’t be looking for it, would she? “At the house, I guess? I don’t remember having it when I got here.”

“Maybe you left it there? You were pretty shit-faced when you got here last night.”

“Do tell,” Trixie says, rolling her eyes.

“Like, you were fully singing. I was sleeping. And you were singing.”

“My singing is fucking beautiful. You were blessed.”

Trixie decides she’s not up for going all the way to the house right now, especially since the sun is out and peeking through the blinds. What business does the sun have shining in January? The sun isn’t Trixie’s friend today. However, after ten minutes of sitting in her bed, not knowing what to do with herself without her phone – and Kim’s less than helpful comment “I wonder who has your phone right now, do you have anything weird on it?” – Trixie exchanges last night’s outfit for her softest light green yoga pants, an old ABBA shirt and a woollen cardigan, shrugs over her coat, and makes her way to the house. When she’s pulling close the door to their building behind her she realizes that she neither brushed her hair, nor her teeth, and that her leftover makeup from last night was more than a little messy when she checked her reflection in the bathroom mirror a couple of minutes ago. Little pieces of her golden glitter eyeshadow had travelled all the way over her face.
over night, and she knows the sunlight must be reflecting in the particles on her cheeks right now. She stops in her tracks for a second, considering going back and getting her shit together, but with a shrug decides it doesn’t matter. It’s not like people at the house are going to be in the best condition either today. At least she is covered in glitter.

♥♥♥

The house is a mess. Or at least the garden is. There’s blankets, forgotten jackets – who forgets their jacket in January, not even Trixie was that gone – firework wrappers, and half full and empty bottles scattered all over the place. Somebody carried one of the kitchen sofas outside and it’s lying under the tree, tipped over to the side with both swings wrapped around it. Four people are walking around, half-heartedly picking up things and throwing them into plastic bags, seemingly in a constant state of yawning. One of them is Sasha, the others Trixie doesn’t know.

“Coming for your phone?” Sasha asks when she notices Trixie walking up to her.

Trixie nods. Sasha pulls Trixie’s phone out of her back pocket and hands it to her. Trixie is relieved instantly. She doesn’t know Sasha well, but she knows enough about her to know she trusts her with her phone.

“How did you know it was mine?”

That makes Sasha laugh. As an answer she looks pointedly at Trixie’s phone, in its iridescent case, with tiny glittering stones glued onto it in the shape of a guitar. Oh well.

Trixie takes her phone and makes sure to pick up and throw away two empty soda bottles on her way – she can be helpful too after all – before she sits down on the steps of the patio and checks it. There are several notifications.

One is that her battery is almost empty and that she should activate energy saving mode. She thumbs it off her screen impatiently, wondering how much battery her phone wastes on reminders like that.

One is a notification that she was linked in an Instagram post by none other than Violet – who, Trixie makes sure to check this immediately: has not sent her a follower’s request. The picture is a group shot with about fifteen people in it. Trixie is in the top left corner, leaned against the wall, her head thrown back into her neck a little, and both of her hands wrapped around Pearl’s bicep. She looks about ready to rip her clothes off. Trixie sighs. What a weird night, last night. Maybe it’s a good thing she rarely ever parties.

There’s a message by her mom wishing her the best for the new year and thanking her for coming home for Christmas. She even added a picture of herself and a friend called Rose that Trixie has never heard of before. They are wearing paper crowns and big smiles and are standing in the kitchen of Trixie’s home. Trixie saves the picture immediately; she doesn’t have enough pictures of her mother smiling like this to not treasure them. Alice must have taught her how to send pictures with her messages, or maybe Rose did. Trixie makes sure to reply to her mom immediately, knowing she will forget to do so if she opens the next message before she does. She scrolls through last night’s pictures to find one in which she a) doesn’t look drunk and that b) doesn’t contain too many people whose looks her mom might find intimidating, and settles on a selfie she took with Juju and Shangela that she doesn’t remember taking but in which she’s laughing happily and Juju and Shangela are showing of the bracelets Trixie made for them.

Her sister sent her a string of cocktail emojis, apparently trying to boast that she got drunk. They were sent way before midnight, and Trixie knows fully well that Alice spent the night with just a
few of her closest friends in their family kitchen, with her mom keeping tabs on them and not letting them have more than one beer each. She replies with a sunglass emoji, a thumbs up, and a selfie she made with Pearl, Adore, and Bianca on the screen of Adore’s phone, held into the camera.

Pearl also sent her a message, around the time she got home last night.

Pearl

_Had a great time with you. If you wanna hang again, let me know. No pressure, we can just have some fun ;)_

Trixie likes that message except for the winking emoji. The winking emojis belong banished to the pits of hell, she thinks, and is about to text something like this to Pearl when she remembers something her mom used to tell her all the time when she was younger: it costs zero dollars to be a nice person.

Trixie

_Had a great time too!_

She sends this message fully intending it to be part one of a string of messages, but two minutes after sending it, her fingers are still hovering uselessly over her keyboard. What does she want to say to Pearl? She watches Sasha and one of her friends untangle the couch from the swings, tip it over to the right side and do their best to rub of the dirt that is now clinging to the cushions, visible even from where Trixie is sitting.

As far as Trixie can tell, Pearl doesn’t need her to tell her anything concrete right now, so maybe it’s okay for Trixie to leave things open until her mind feels a little less hazy and she can take a minute to really think about how she wants to proceed. She doesn’t know how to be non-committal. She feels out of her element already.

When she is about to get up and go home to where her bed is calling her, there are new messages coming in, this time from Katya. She opens them in a rush, praying for her battery to not die on her before she has the time to read them.

Katya

_Didn’t really want to get into it last night but the conversation_

_You know THE CONVERSATION_

_I actually need to have it again._

_I don’t know, if you’re up for it it would be cool if we could talk?_

Trixie remembers the confusing conversation that unfolded between Violet, Katya, Juju, and Shangela last night and that she wasn’t quite able to make sense of. She remembers them talking about drugs and Katya travelling, Shangela’s and Violet’s frustration, Violet’s beautiful rings, Juju’s confrontational tone, Katya’s face flickering in and out of her sight with the click of a lighter, Pearl’s hands on her shoulders, the moon reflecting in all of their eyes.

She starts typing out a message saying she’s here now and they can talk, but then remembers the current state of her hair, and her face, and her everything and deletes it. She decides she’s going back home for now to just spend the day watching Netflix with Kim. Tomorrow, she’ll have to
start studying for her exams and won’t have the luxury to lie around today, but January First is for lying around only. She’ll text Katya later.

She’s about to get up when the front door opens.

Stepping onto the patio is Violet, her hair open and a lot messier than Trixie has ever seen it, wrapped in a fluffy red robe that looks like it definitely doesn’t belong to her.

“Oh,” she says when she notices Trixie sitting there.

“Hi,” Trixie says, giving Violet a fake smile and brushing through her hair with her fingers, suddenly more than a little self-conscious.

“What are you doing here?” Violet asks. She hesitates for a second before sitting down on the door step next to Trixie, an arm’s length between them. She looks tired, and very different without her immaculate makeup. She looks so…regular. Her skin is breaking out.

“Forgot my phone.” Trixie waves her phone slightly. “Sasha found it.”

“Ah,” Violet says.

They sit there in silence for a minute and Trixie wonders what made Violet sit down with her. With every second Trixie can feel herself get a little more agitated, can’t she even sit on a patio in peace for ten minutes? When she glances over at Violet, however, Violet is wrapping a strand of her hair around her finger – hair that is much longer now that her curls have fallen out – and looks rather lost. Trixie bites her feelings down. Violet hasn’t done anything to her, she reminds herself. Violet is probably a nice enough person. Maybe she should give her a chance. Maybe she could be a better person this year. Trixie Mattel in 2018, basically a saint. She smiles at Violet, and Violet returns her smile, even though she looks a little taken aback at first. There’s a couple of cookie crumbs on her bath robe, clinging to the fabric around her chest and neck and Trixie can’t help but wonder if Katya and Violet just had cookies in bed together.

“So last night was fun!” Trixie says, as a way to strike up a conversation and unsure if she really means what she’s saying.

“Yeah,” Violet agrees, “I love being here and seeing everyone, it’s so good. I miss them.”

Trixie looks over just in time to see Violet biting her lip slightly.

“Must be tough to travel all the time,” Trixie states.

“It is. God, it is. I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world.” She hesitates for a moment. “But sometimes when I come here, it’s hard to leave.”

Trixie nods. Her throat is dry, and she gets up quickly to get to a bottle of soda that’s standing next to the front door. She remembers sharing it with Adore last night. There’s a little left still. She’s about to take a sip when she decides this is entirely too risky, who knows what happened to this bottle in the meantime.

When she goes to sit back down, Violet regards her with a raised eyebrow again, looking as arrogant as her usual self for a second. Trixie shoots her a non-committal grin and flops back down on the stairs, a little closer to Violet than last time.

Violet sighs. “Sometimes,” she goes on, her eyebrow dropping slowly as Trixie screws the lid onto the bottle again and puts it down next to her, “sometimes I don’t even want to come here because
leaving is too hard.”

Trixie nods again. She doesn’t quite know what to say to that. She doesn’t know Violet at all.

Sasha, two full trash bags in her hands, passes them to go into the house and shoots them a curious look, but doesn’t say anything.

“When I’m on the road, it’s easy to forget…” Violet pauses, before she shakes her head slightly and indicates the area around her with her hands, “this.” Where Violet’s rings were on her fingers last night, the skin is tinged green now.

“Because you’re too busy to think about this?” Trixie mirrors Violet’s gesture.

“Yeah. It’s crazy busy.” Violet pulls a hair tie from her wrist and puts her hair up in a messy bun. Trixie has never seen her look less like Violet. Or, she realizes, maybe she has never seen Violet look more like Violet.

“And I’m fully aware she feels like shit about all of this. I hate it,” Violet adds after a rather long silence.

Violet must think Trixie is the worst conversationalist in the world, Trixie notes. Maybe she should try being an active part of this conversation.

“Katya?”, she asks, never one to let an opportunity to say Katya’s name slide.

“Katya,” Violet confirms. Katya’s name out of Violet’s mouth sounds like an entirely different Katya than the Katya out of Trixie’s mouth.

“It’s not for long now,” Trixie says quietly, trying hard to ignore the knots in her stomach that are forming as soon as she opens her mouth. “She’ll be travelling with you soon enough.”

“Yeah. I mean, we’ll see. Did she, uh. Did she talk to you about us?”

Trixie’s heart beats faster. Where is this conversation going? She’s not up for it.

“Katya and I are friends,” she states, because it’s true and because she doesn’t know how else to answer Violet’s question.

“Mhm mhmm.”

Trixie looks over to see Violet’s eyes fixed on her, an unreadable expression on her face.

“Sorry, I just thought she might have said something. Would explain why you hate me.”

Trixie almost drops her untouched soda bottle into her lap. “I don’t hate you,” she says, only partly lying.

Violet scoffs, then grins at Trixie lightly. “It doesn’t matter,” she says, “it’s not important, I can deal with being hated.” Then she seems to think of something and fully smirks at Trixie. “And you’re what? A Pearl-Girl now?”

Trixie lets her head drop onto the patio so she’s lying on her back, and sighs the sigh she has specifically reserved for people asking her about her love life. “I don’t know?” she answers in a suffering tone, “I thought she was really into me, but she seems rather, uh, casual?”

“And you don’t want casual?”
What Trixie doesn’t want is to talk to this about Violet. The thought of getting up and walking home, however, makes her joints ache, so she stays put and answers, truthfully: “Not really. I don’t think casual is my thing.”

“Hmm,” Violet hums, followed by a deep yawn that she doesn’t hide behind her hand this time. From where Trixie is lying on the patio she can see all the way into Violet’s mouth to the back of her throat. Violet still has her tonsils in, she notes. Trixie had to have hers removed years ago.

“I’m sure she’s super into you,” Violet adds nonchalantly.

Trixie huffs. “You don’t know that.”

“I do.” Violet laughs. Trixie doesn’t think she has heard her laugh before. She has also never seen her talk so animatedly; there’s only a slight trace of arrogance and boredom left in her voice. “You’re her type.”

Trixie sits up and stares at Violet. “Aren’t you her ex?”

“Yeah. So?”

“So? Aren’t you her type then?”

“Sure.”

“So surely I’m not.” Trixie shakes her head. Case in point.

Violet looks at her seriously. “But you are. We’re so alike.”

Trixie can’t quite believe what she’s hearing. She pointedly lets her eyes drift over Violet’s tall slender body. Nothing about Violet’s body is like hers, and of course her personality is even more off. Trixie could never do what Violet does. And, maybe more importantly, Violet could never do what Trixie does.

“Believe me,” Violet says, “We are.”

♥♥♥

Instead of the promise Trixie has made to herself – to start studying for her exams on January 2nd – she gives herself another full two days of lying around, watching TV with Kim, and playing guitar. This is why, when she finally tries to get started on the evening of January 4th, only one weekend before classes start again, she is fully stressed out and anxious about her upcoming exams.

Kim does her best to calm her down, telling her over and over again how she’ll do just fine and how she, Kim, has gotten through all her exams so far, even when she freaked out before them. Also, exams are in February, so Trixie has all the time in the world to get ready. But, Trixie thinks, what does Kim know? Kim is smart, and Trixie is probably going to find out she herself is a dumbass in only a matter of weeks now.

She’s taken up all their floor space with her books and notes, everything marked in different colour highlighters, reminding Trixie that she’s read all these pages before, even if she wouldn’t be able to say what they’re about now. When Kim tells her once again that she’ll be okay, Trixie lies face-down on the floor, her face in one of her books, and grabs another book which she puts on her head, figuratively burying herself.

“I’m dead,” she informs Kim. “I’ve died dead.”
When after a full hour of lying in her books she still hasn’t magically absorbed their wisdom, Trixie decides to give up for the day. She is more than a little annoyed with herself and immediately goes to thinking about what non-college related thing she could do today in order to feel at least a little bit accomplished.

Other than studying, the only pressing task in Trixie’s life seems to be figuring out the next step to take with Pearl. The last two days she has put off thinking about Pearl again and again. Half a dozen times she took out her phone with the intention to shoot Pearl a message, maybe asking her if she wanted to go out – to the movies, Trixie has already decided, she wouldn’t want to take Pearl to the milkshake bar and she isn’t willing to put in enough thought to come up with any other option – but always ended up uselessly scrolling through her apps instead, unsure of what to do. Pearl is nice, she thinks, and she can definitely see herself having fun with her. When she closes her eyes and focuses long enough, she can see Pearl and her walk through Boston together hand in hand; maybe Trixie could watch her in MacBitch, maybe they could go dancing, and look at the stars together.

On the other hand, Trixie can’t help the convoluted, cocky thought that she herself is more interesting than Pearl – even if she realizes this is an unfair conclusion to come to since she really doesn’t know enough about Pearl to make any comparisons.

Trixie also can’t help but compare her reaction to Pearl to her reaction to the people she has been romantically interested in so far. There was Shea, who at first she couldn’t place her feelings for, but who had been her favourite person in the world for a long time and who she never would have passed a chance to spend time with. Then, for a little while, there was a girl working at MAC, a straight girl for all Trixie knows, and Trixie would often go browse through their products, swatching nail polishes until there wasn’t a clean spot left on her nails, thinking about the witty and wonderful conversations they could have if only she was brave enough to make a move. With Courtney, things had been miraculously easy at first; they had started their relationship with sex and successfully transitioned to actually caring about each other, and she had always enjoyed their time together until the very end when Courtney didn’t seem to want to commit to her.

Then there is Katya, of course, and Trixie rationally knows that she doesn’t feel more for Katya than she has felt for other people before her, but her feelings for Katya are so much more present, and feel so much more real to her, and they hit her in seemingly random moments, like when she picks up honey at the grocery store, or slips into her boots before leaving the apartment. Her feelings for other people never act up like that. They are stored in neat boxes in Trixie’s brain, and Trixie can peek into these boxes at will, but lately rarely ever feels the need to. Katya doesn’t fit into a box yet, and instead keeps bouncing through her brain untethered, even now when she tries hard to focus on what to do with Pearl.

No matter how she looks at this, she isn’t excited about starting something non-committal with Pearl, and even if Pearl wanted to be serious, she feels like her current state of mind wouldn’t allow for her to commit to Pearl either way.

When Kim asks her about Pearl for the fifth time, Trixie stops mulling things over and goes with her gut:

“Give me romance or give me death,” she informs Kim, and decides this is the moment to let Pearl in on how she feels.

Messaging Pearl about this is as awkward as it gets for Trixie, and it takes her a full nine minutes to finally press send on her two-line message. Within a minute, Pearl replies with a thumbs up, a grinning emoticon, and a “no problem”.


Trixie is relieved, and only slightly mortified.
hello friends, here's chapter 12, bringing you sad katya with dirty glasses. i hope you like her.

one quick thing i want to say: i've heard from a couple people that they felt scared commenting or talking to me on tumblr, and i just want to let you know that your comments and messages mean the world to me, and that i could never be annoyed with them. they make me so so happy and keep me going and i appreciate them a whole lot. please consider commenting and don't make me feel like im shouting into the void. <3

oh, also: i re-wrote the beginning of this fic bc it was seriously awful, so maybe check it out :) i changed a lot of stuff in chapters one and two (new details, new scenes, new and better words), the rest are mostly the same.

On January 5th Trixie almost forgets to show up to her first shift of the year at the day care. Classes don’t start again until Monday, and she’s in that weird state she slips into every year after New Year’s, where neither time nor obligations feel real to her. She’s reminded she has work today only when Kim asks her about it half an hour before her shift begins, and she rushes to get ready, putting on the most basic makeup and outfit and arriving fully out of breath. At least she’s only five minutes late. Five minutes is nothing.

Today Trixie and Shangela are working together to teach the kids the letter A. Trixie draws the letter on the blackboard, using yellow chalk and her very best handwriting. She wants to embroider the letter to make it as pretty as she can – she loves getting to use the chalk, it doesn’t happen often enough, and she wants to make the most of it – but remembers just in time that this is about teaching the children to write, and calligraphy might not be the best way to get them started.

“What things do you guys know that start with the letter A?” Shangela asks, walking slowly through the rows of kids sitting on their chairs, before putting both of her hands on Dan’s shoulders where he’s fidgeting on his tilted chair.

Immediately, all kids raise their hands and simultaneously yell over each other. Trixie claps her hands to get them to shut up, and the volume goes down considerably.

“Yes, Ava?”

Ava squints up to her raised hand, as if asking herself how it got there, then lets it sink slowly. Instead of an answer, she shakes her head, looking suddenly very timid.

“Can you think of anything that starts with the letter A, Ava?” Shangela asks her patiently, putting extra stress on Ava’s name. Ava pulls up her skirt to hide her face, the volume in the room is going up again, and Trixie claps her hands for the second time. The effect is much less impressive this time.

“Okay, anyone else?”

Dan falls of his chair. Nobody is raising their hand anymore.
“Okay, that’s okay. Ms. Mattel and I are going to give you the first word, and maybe then you can think of some more words, alright?”

Some of the kids nod.

Ava is still hiding her face in her skirt, a red skirt with a pretty white floral print, and it takes Trixie a second to realize what that skirt reminds her of. On one of her – admirable few – ventures through Katya’s Instagram, she saw a picture of Katya wearing a long red skirt with a white all-over print saying “no”. The picture was taken at a beach somewhere, Katya’s feet were bare and digging into the sand, she was wearing sunglasses and had a towel slung over her shoulder. The beach looked beautiful, warm and sunny, and just like Trixie has always imagined it. Trixie has never been to the ocean, has always wanted to, and something about seeing Katya there, smiling happily and her eyes the colour of the ocean behind her, made her heart ache. She wants to be at the beach. She wants to be at the beach with Katya.

“Ms. Mattel, what is a word that starts with the letter A?”

Shit. Trixie wasn’t prepared for that. Words with A. The only ones that immediately come to her mind are words she has enough presence of mind not to use in front of the kids. “Uh…”, she says, feeling like an idiot.

“It’s too hard!” Lucía whines, “if the grown-ups can’t do it, we can’t do it.”

Shangela looks at Trixie in exasperation, before fake smiling and saying: “Our first word with an A is apple! Ms Mattel, would you please draw an apple for us?” Trixie can hear the underlying exasperation in her polite voice, a nuance she is sure none of the kids pick up on, but that makes her want to cringe.

Trixie draws the apple. It comes out well enough that she feels she has redeemed herself.

Kameko jumps out of his chair all of a sudden, raising both of his hands in the air urgently.

“Do you have our next word, Kameko?” Shangela asks him.

“Apple juice!” he yells out excitedly.

“Oh, umm. Well, I guess? Why not. Ms Mattel?”

“Uh-huh,” Trixie shrugs, and goes about the task to draw apple juice on the board. If the next word the kids come up with is apple tree or apple sauce she isn’t sure she could keep a straight face.

♥♥♥

Half an hour later, Trixie has drawn an ax, an arm, an ant, the air (for which she just circled a bit of nothing on the board), the Aristocats, Ava, an adapter for an i-phone, and an animal ambulance (which is like a real ambulance and which works only under very confusing conditions the kids were in the middle of discussing when Trixie had to intervene).

Now the kids get the task of copying everything from the board onto a piece of paper, and Trixie knows this will take at least another half hour. After, they’ll get the kids paper with lines on it and have them start trying to write the letter A within the lines. Trixie vaguely remembers doing this herself when she was young; her mom keeps all of Trixie’s old school work in the attic, and a couple of years ago when she was finally ready to throw away all the belongings of Trixie’s stepdad, the two of them had spent a day in the attic, going through Trixie’s old things, laughing and remembering. The ‘e’ in Trixie’s name had been inverted for the first year of her scribbling it
in the bottom right corner of every piece of paper she came across.

Betty is in Latrice’s office, so Trixie snatches her office chair and gets settled at the table where she now towers over Shangela and the kids. Naturally, none of the kids have started working yet, instead, the fight over who gets which marker has started again. Trixie sighs quietly and doesn’t intervene.

Suzie, who’s sitting right next to Shangela, stands up to tap Shangela’s knee. “Ms. Wadley?”

“Yes?”, Shangela asks with a smile, putting her hands on Suzie’s sides. Trixie had taken a little while to become as physically close to the kids as Shangela seems to be naturally, but she’s getting there. Not many things make her happier than the kids snuggling up to her randomly or in the middle of a conversation.

“My friend Nina lives in L.A.”

“I know, she used to go here.” Shangela pokes Suzie’s side, and Suzie giggles.

“She moved there with her mom because of her mom’s job. Her mom is…she does, uh, she’s a…”

“A Professor, her mom is a professor,” Shangela says and nods.

“Yes, a professor. For animals.”

“For biology, yes.”

“She has black hair that’s like this long.” She indicates the sides of her chin, “and she’s almost as tall as I am but I grew a lot over Christmas break, my dad says. He says if I keep on growing like this, I’ll be as tall as Micky soon.”

“You grew so much!” Shangela agrees. “At least this much.” She raises her hands way up into the air.

Lucía is drawing something that looks suspiciously like a horse, and Trixie watches her progress, figuring out if she should ask Lucía how this fits the task. She decides to wait and see what the girl turns out. Maybe “a horse”? That would be clever, almost like hacking this exercise. She puts her faith into the little girl.

Suzie is very happy now that Shangela has confirmed her enormous growth. “Nina says you have to visit her in, uh, in where she lives in the summer. You can find her easy, she has black hair!”

“I know Nina, don’t you remember she was in our dance class?” Shangela laughs.

“Are you going to visit her?”

“Maybe! I’ll probably see her around.”

“She goes to the beach.”

“Oh fun, me too!” Shangela high fives Suzie, who’s beaming. Apparently, the conversation is over, because Suzie sits back down at the table and immediately begins drawing her A in the middle of her page.

“LA?” Trixie asks Shangela distractedly. She’d just gotten up to go over to two boys who keep elbowing each other, but as soon as she gets up they stop, looking at her sheepishly, and she sits down again.
“Yeah.” Shangela grins.

“When are you going to LA?”

“Umm. In March? We’re going to LA in March?” Shangela cocks her head to the side and squints at Trixie.

“We are?” Trixie realises this is a comical question immediately, but she has trouble focusing on any conversation while she’s watching the kids, and if anyone understands, it’s Shangela.

“What? No. Juju and I are going.” She speaks rather slowly. Maybe she doesn’t understand after all. “We are going to LA in March.”

Trixie smiles. “Oh fun!” she says, even though she mostly feels jealous. “Are you going for the – you two, if you don’t stop right now one of you is sitting over here and one of you is sitting aaaall the way over there! Or you you want to spend some quiet time in Betty’s office? I’m sure she’ll be happy to have some company help her stapling her papers. We can go over there right now! No? Good. – are you going for the holidays?”

Shangela’s squint intensifies, then she shakes her head. “Trixie! Juju and I are moving to LA in March. Everybody knows that!”

“What?” Trixie feels her mouth fall open. “Juju and you are doing what now? Literally nobody knows that!”

Shangela just stares at her for a moment, then calls “Hey everyone, listen up for a sec!” over the noise at the table. At least five of the kids shut up and look at her. “Where am I moving to in the spring?”

“LA!” the five kids yell in unison.

“Umm, ok? Maybe you told them.” Trixie scratches her head. “But this is so sad? Why are you moving?” Trixie feels a little sombre at the thought of Shangela and Juju moving and leaving her behind. They have grown on her, even though they really kiss too much. If Trixie ever found someone she wants to kiss as much and as often as those two do, she would want to move to LA with them too, she thinks, and they would spend their weekends on the beach, with their naked feet buried in the sand.

Shangela takes a deep breath and shakes her head lightly, before telling Trixie: “We’re graduating in March, and we’ve always wanted to live in LA and Juju has a friend there who got both of us jobs for the start until we can find something real, and we found a little apartment. Well, it’s not ours yet, the guy wanted to call me yesterday and didn’t, but yeah. We’re moving.”

Trixie stares at her.

“Juju and I were in LA to check things out for a whole week in December? You must have noticed I was gone at least? Plus, I remember we talked about this for at least like half an hour on New Year’s. Like, when we were lying in the garden together?” she laughs. “God, Trixie, you’re such an airhead sometimes.”

“I might have been a little, uh, distracted that week. And also that night.” Trixie says sheepishly. Now that she thinks of it, Juju definitely did mention something about LA. Pearl probably knows all about this, Pearl was listening to Juju when Trixie wasn’t. Pearl complements her well. Maybe she should have given Pearl a chance.
“Haha, I got that. But yeah, we’re definitely leaving.”

“Oh wow.”

“Oh wow, I know! We’ve been wanting to move there forever, I was headed there before I came here to study even, but you know how things work out.”

Trixie doesn’t know how things work out, not really. “But everything’s…going to change if you go!”

“I mean, yeah. Everything’s going change for sure. But that’s a good thing? Things are supposed to change.”

“But I just got here.”

Shangela laughs.

“I just don’t think that’s fair.”

♥♥♥

After all the kids have been picked up – Dan being the last one, as usual, and Trixie spending the fifteen minutes after her shift soothing him and telling him that his dad will be here any minute now and that he hasn’t forgotten about him – Trixie walks up to where Shangela is kneeling down and sorting some folders into a bottom shelf, and hugs Shangela from behind.

“Why are you leaving me?” she whines.

Shangela scoffs. “I mean, we would stay, but now that you moved here, this city has lost all its appeal.”

“Can we at least do something right now?” Trixie asks. She hopes she gets to spend as much time as possible with Shangela before they leave.

“Oh. I’m meeting up with Katya now, but yeah, I’m sure she wouldn’t mind if you tag along.”

Now that’s two birds with one stone, Trixie thinks and smiles to herself. “Yes! Good. What do you guys have planned?”

Shangela gets up, looks around the room one last time, before heading towards the door and switching off the lights. Trixie follows behind her. “I’m helping her with her audition for Violet’s group,” she says, and Trixie feels the smile slip off her face. “She’s such a great dancer but not the best with choreography, so we’re getting her ready together.”

After her shift, Trixie goes straight home. She doesn’t need to be there for that.

♥♥♥

Sitting in her seminar on early speech development on Monday, Trixie almost has a heart attack when, while staring blankly at the band shirt of the person sitting in front of her, she understands the reason why Katya hasn’t gotten back to her about the conversation she wanted to have: It wasn’t Katya that wasn’t replying; she, Trixie, forgot to reply. Until a moment ago she had been sure she replied days ago, telling Katya they could talk anytime, but now she realizes she never actually sent that message. That’s what she gets for going over her messages to Katya in her head too much. Immediately she feels guilty and stressed, and even though her professor has already
snapped at two other people for using their phone today, she gets her phone out from under her pencil case and tries to make up for her lack of response.

**Trixie**

*I’m so so sorry for never responding to this, I’m a garbage person living the garbage life*

*I really want to talk to you, I’m here and ready to listen if you’ll still have me*

*So sorry*

Trixie is basically glued to her phone from the moment she sent the message, keeps checking it, holding it in her lap or half-heartedly hidden behind her pencil case, and it takes Katya until Trixie’s next class to get back to her.

**Katya**

*Thanks for the offer!*

*No need to talk, I'm good.*

Trixie’s stomach twists uncomfortably. Does Katya just not want to talk to her because she feels like Trixie doesn’t care about her now? She needs Katya to know she cares, and, moreover, certainly wants to know what Katya wanted to tell her so much. Of course, she also doesn’t want to press Katya, and tries coming up with a message that makes Katya want to talk to her without feeling pressured.

**Trixie**

*Okay. But if you change your mind or just want to hang out, I’m up for milkshakes any time. I saw the other day that they have a happy hour for all drinks now, and I think it’s today!*

She is almost a hundred percent certain that the happy hour is Tuesdays, so not today but tomorrow, but Katya doesn’t know that.

**Katya**

*It’s not today, it’s Tuesday.*

Oh.

Trixie feels a little weird over their interaction all afternoon, but once she gets home she decides not to dwell on this too much. Even though it’s the first day of classes, she already has homework to do, and there’s an unopened package of magnetic nail polish that Kim ordered online waiting for her to treat herself once she’s done. She has things to do besides worrying if she’s upset Katya.

It is two hours later and she has just decided that the nail polish was not worth it’s eleven dollars when her phone lights up with a message from Katya again.

**Katya**

*Screw this, I really would like to talk to you*

*Not the milkshake place though if that’s okay with you?*

*Maybe I could come to your place?*
Trixie looks over their room, suddenly feeling rather frantic. How long will Katya need to get here? Ten minutes, twenty at the most if she needs some time getting ready. Ten to twenty minutes to make her room look presentable and like the room of an interesting person. She jumps up and throws her guitar on Kim’s bed, before texting Katya to come over.

There’s clothes spilling out of hers and Kim’s closet, a mess that Trixie is solely responsible for. She grabs the stray clothes and crumples them up, putting them on the bottom of their closet. No time to hang them all up now. Kim will understand, won’t she?

There’s an empty plate on her nightstand, next to two mugs; one filled with leftover tea, one filled with at least five tea bags she never knows where to put. For a minute she considers Kim’s much cleaner side of the room, a half-baked plan in mind to switch a couple of things around and pretend Kim’s part of the room is hers. She can’t, however, get past the fact that Katya would undoubtedly think the cat pictures on the wall to be Trixie’s and throws the plan out of the window, right alongside some dried up leaves of her potted ivory hanging down the sides of their shelf.

She gets the dishes of her nightstand and puts them into the sink before she quickly wipes over the stove. In the back of her mind she’s aware Katya isn’t the most neat and tidy person either, so it’s not like it matters, but it’s important to her to present her best self – and her best self knows that used tea bags belong in the trash.

The biggest mess in their room is the part of the shelf occupied by Trixie’s makeup. It’s too much of a mess to tackle right now. One of her glitter eyeshadows, a highly pigmented one, dropped out of her hands a couple of days ago and spilled a coat of glitter over part of the shelf. She can’t find the cap of one her favourite lip sticks, and there’s a stray fake lash lying next to an array of dirty makeup brushes. She sighs and leaves the shelf be.

The next thing Trixie needs to sort out is herself, of course. As she checks her reflection in the mirror she notices with relief that she looks cute today, having spent a good amount of time on her hair and makeup this morning, wanting to feel good for going to college again after a two week break. Her eyeshadow is golden – the remains of the one she dropped into her shelf – so she uses this as a starting point to get her outfit together. Five minutes later she’s settled on a soft golden sweater and her cream jeans, the only pair of pants she likes to wear anymore.

After twenty minutes – in which Trixie puts on too much perfume and has to open the window to get in some fresh air, and also starts trying to re-organize her makeup shelf after all – Katya is still not there, and Trixie starts feeling anxious. Now that her room and herself are decent and presentable, her mind is free to worry about the conversation they are going to have. Something tells her this conversation has to do with Katya leaving Boston – leaving her – soon, and she still isn’t ready to confront that thought. Why does she want to talk to Trixie about this when obviously Trixie is the only one who doesn’t know what’s going on? Could she maybe have figured out what’s going on and prepared for this conversation? She feels like she should have. Instead, she spent the past couple of days wrapped up in herself, and a little salty because Katya wasn’t replying to a text she never sent.

The sound of the doorbell yanks her out of her misery and she rushes to buzz Katya in without using the speaker first. She leans in the door way, one side pressed against the wood of the frame, trying to calm her breathing and listening to Katya’s footsteps in the stairwell getting closer and closer. The cold air from the hallway creeps into her sweater and makes her shudder.

When Katya enters her field of vision, Trixie has to force herself to stay in her place in the doorway and not make towards her to hug her. Katya’s hair is wet from the rain outside, an unopened
umbrella dangling unused in her left hand. She’s in a big unflattering coat that Trixie so far only ever saw Jinkx wear, and as she’s approaching Trixie she opens the coat to rub her glasses dry on her blouse underneath. It’s read and has a confusing pattern of white stripes, polka dots and triangles, and there’s big plush earrings dangling from her ears, the same colour as her blouse.

She smiles at Trixie, not quite meeting her eyes, and Trixie doesn’t know if Katya’s avoiding her eyes on purpose or if she has trouble seeing her without her glasses on.

“Hey, Trixie,” Katya says, her voice soft, and pulls Trixie into a hug as soon as she’s reached the door. She’s wet, almost drenched with rain, and cold against Trixie’s body. Trixie doesn’t mind. A strand of Katya’s wet hair sticks to Trixie’s nose as Katya lets go of the hug.

“I’ve never been here before,” Katya notes, shrugging off her coat and boots and throwing them carelessly in a corner behind the door. The material of her blouse hasn’t soaked up the water of her glasses well, and they are smeared with water now. Trixie doubts she can see any better than she would with them off. She takes Katya’s coat off the floor and hangs it on the coat rack, so that there’s at least a chance of it drying a little before Katya has to put it on again.

“Oh, you never visited Kim?” Trixie asks, surprised.

“Nope. I don’t think Kim loves having people over? I don’t think any of us besides Shangie have been here. Besides, Kim is at ours all the time, so it’s not like-” She leaves the sentence unfinished, letting her eyes drift around the room.

“I like it,” she decides, “can I sit?” She vaguely points to Trixie’s bed, apparently having figured that the one with the daisy covers and the four pillows must be hers. Good thing Trixie didn’t try to pretend Kim’s bed was hers.

Katya’s legs and feet are wet; and Trixie would never climb into her own bed in wet clothes. “Of course.” Trixie smiles. “Do you want some tea? Or, uh, something else? I’m not sure I have anything else. Milk, probably. Maybe not. Sorry.” She hasn’t been grocery shopping in a while, a fact that makes her feel inadequate now. She isn’t used to hosting people. She likes people hosting her.

Katya shakes her head no and lets herself fall down on Trixie’s bed, bouncing up and down slightly. Trixie stands in front of the bed, a little lost at the sight of Katya on it. Katya cocks her head to the side, her left earring coming to rest on her shoulder, and scoots back until her back is to the wall and her feet dangle off the edge of the bed. There’s wet spots on her socks where the rain seeped into her shoes and Trixie turns around to turn up the heating.

“I can give you dry socks, if you want?” she offers.

“Oh! Yes, please. Do you have real comfy ones?”

Trixie does. She picks out the socks her mom gave her for Christmas, the pink woollen ones, and Katya pulls her own socks off her feet, throws them on the floor in front of Trixie’s bed, and puts on Trixie’s. They look foreign on her body, and a little too big, not matching with anything she’s wearing in the slightest. Katya smiles as Trixie awkwardly climbs onto the bed and sits cross-legged in front of Katya, facing her.

“Okay, so what’s ‘The Conversation’?” Trixie asks, trying her best to keep her tone fairly neutral. After all, she has no idea how she’s supposed to feel about any of this. “I’m so sorry I forgot to reply. I’m the worst. Ask my mom, she knows best.”
“Don’t worry about it.” Katya sighs and leans her head back against the wall, just the way she leaned against the tree when they had their conversation about Katya’s relationship after Juju’s birthday party. This position must calm her. Her makeup is the same as then as well, dark lipstick and heavy foundation, and the mascara clinging to her bottom lashes is turning the skin under her eyes a fuzzy shade of black. Trixie wouldn’t be caught dead in makeup like this, and yet she can’t get enough of Katya’s face.

“I’m sure you were busy with Pearl, I understand.” She drags her hands over her face quickly, and Trixie wants to respond, wants to tell her there’s nothing between her and Pearl, but Katya goes on before she can say anything. “So you remember when I told you about my drug problems, yeah?” she says, letting her eyes drift around the room, looking at anything but Trixie. “Sorry, this isn’t going to be a fun conversation. You should come over for dance night some time, I swear I’m fun at dance night.”

“Uh huh, I remember what you told me,” Trixie answers, with a little nod. Truthfully, she rarely ever thinks about Katya’s drug problems. Her idea of Katya doesn’t quite align with the Katya of Katya’s past. “But you said you were okay now.”

Katya scoffs. “I’m almost a hundred percent sure that’s not what I said at all, Trixie.”

Trixie frowns.

Katya goes on. “God, you’re…”

“An airhead?” Trixie interjects, and even though her stomach is churning, she tries to give Katya her most charming smile to make up for her flaw. She has been called out on this too much lately. Should she maybe work on herself? Could she? Would it be worth the hassle?

Katya gives her a quick once over before returning her smile; it tugs on her lips and makes Trixie feel lighter immediately. As long as Katya smiles at her, she knows she’s being a good enough person. Then Katya gets serious again.

“So this is what the conversation boils down to,” Katya says, holding her hands up in front of her and narrowing her eyes for a moment, as if she has to concentrate to get the words across her lips. “Violet is travelling. It’s her dream, and she’s achieved it, and she’s making a life for herself out there, and that’s damn impressive. She is so ambitious, it’s unbelievable, she just…she just sets herself a goal, and then she goes out there, and achieves it. And I,” she squeezes her eyes shut, before looking straight at Trixie for the next part, “I’ve been clinging on to the idea that I’m going to join her on the road and that that’s going to be amazing, and that’s going to be our lives. But I don’t think I can do that.”

“Why not?” Trixie asks, realizing that she’d probably be a more impressive conversation partner if she figured out the reason herself, but wanting to fill the silence after Katya’s words immediately.

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“Because I’m a drug addict, Trixie,” Katya replies, and the way she tells Trixie this as if she is supposed to know exactly what this entails makes Trixie aware of the fact that not only is Katya older than her, but Katya has lived through vastly different experiences than she has. “I’m a fucking drug addict, and of course it’s ruining my life. Why did I think I could live a life on the road, why did I think that? I can’t. I don’t think I can. Can I?”

Trixie’s brain is doing its best to help her come up with a good answer – appropriate, helpful, charming, lovely – but she wishes she could be a little quicker on her feet. She is, usually, but not when it comes to conversations as serious as this one. She knows she has a way of saying the wrong thing, playfully insulting people in those moments when she shouldn’t and ending up truly
insulting them, and she weighs her answer carefully before letting it leave her lips.

“Do you it’s going to be harder to be clean on the road?” she asks to make sure.

“Exactly. Can I get some tea? Sorry. I just need something, I don’t know. I can’t smoke in here, can I? Don’t answer that, I’m not gonna smoke in here.”

Trixie gets up wordlessly, her mind racing. She doesn’t feel prepared for this conversation, and feels like a complete idiot because of that fact. She should have seen this coming. Prepared some arguments, thinking points, advice. What does she know about trying to be clean? Absolutely nothing. Is she supposed to talk Katya out of her crisis? Or back her up in that she cannot travel? If Katya doesn’t travel will she stay here? Trixie stays with the water heater until the water is boiling, only once catching a glance at Katya over her shoulder. Katya has reached over to her night stand and is thumbing through a fashion magazine she found on there, barely looking at the pages.

“What kind of tea do you like?”, Trixie calls into the room, browsing the cupboard to find her favourite mugs, and realizes they are sitting in the sink, unwashed. She settles for two plain white mugs that look like somebody stole them from the cafeteria.

“Black, if you have that. But doesn’t matter,” Katya replies.

Kim owns a lot of black tea, so Trixie gets some for Katya, before putting a bag of blueberry flavoured tea into her own mug. The scent of blueberries fills the air immediately and makes Trixie feel a little more at ease.

When she gets back onto the bed, she sits down in the same position as before. She’d like to sit against the wall as well, but having a good view on Katya’s face is more important right now. She hands Katya her mug and thinks of a way to pick up their conversation, but Katya starts talking as soon as she has her tea.

“I mean, imagine. I go to a different city every fucking day, or every other day, it doesn’t matter. I don’t get any sleep. I have no fucking routine. I hate routine, and I really need it. Like, need it. Sometimes the only thing that keeps me from using is, I don’t know, painting, or dance class, or talking to Sasha, or just taking a walk, or going to group, which I’m not doing right now but I know that I could, whatever. Could I do that on the road?” She looks at Trixie, like she desperately wants her to say yes. “Could I?”

“Probably not,” Trixie replies. She can’t quite believe that she spent all this time around Katya without ever thinking about Katya’s struggles. She tries to bite down the feeling of fury at herself that rises in her stomach, trying her best to not make this about herself for once.

“Of course not,” Katya says, and takes a sip of tea. It’s obviously way too hot to drink; Katya’s eyes tear up and she puts the mug on the night stand immediately after. “And I don’t only need a routine, I also need a support system. God, I hate the sound of that. But it’s true. I need one.”

“You mean people being there for you?”

“Yes. People being there for me. Do you know how much time Sasha invests in me? It’s a lot of time, that’s how much time it is. And the others as well. I mean, Juju has been on my case about this whole mess for fucking months, and it’s been bugging the hell out of me, but it’s because she cares. She truly cares! I need people that care. I don’t know if I have them on the road.”

“You’d have Violet,” Trixie says, though she doesn’t know why she says it.

“I know.” Katya nods, first slightly, then more vigorously. Suddenly she stops and shakes her head.
“I don’t think that’s enough.”

“Violet’s not enough?”

“One person is not enough.”

“But there’s other people there with you.”

“I know. I know, and maybe they’re amazing! I mean, I know most of them, and they are. Or, well, they are okay. I really fucking lucked out with my people here, you know that? It’s gonna be real hard to replace that.”

“They are amazing, yes,” Trixie replies, and allows herself a small moment to feel happy that she, too, met these people. She needs to print out some of the pictures they have taken together so far and put them on her walls, next to the pictures of her grandfather and her High School theatre group. Her walls are still mostly empty, and a little sad. She is neither empty nor sad, so her walls shouldn’t be either.

“You know what’s the most amazing thing about them?” Katya asks, sounding rather aggravated. Her voice is getting louder with each word and Trixie half expects her to get up and fill her whole room with her nervous energy, but Katya stays put, digging her thumbs into her knees over her polka dot tights.

“What is?”

“They are not fucking drug addicts.”

“Oh.” That’s not an answer Trixie saw coming.

“Do you know where there are a lot of drug addicts?”

Trixie thinks she does. “In Violet’s group?”

“In Violet’s group.” Katya nods. “I know some of them are sober, or are trying hard to be, but I know of at least four people in that group that are super blasé about using? I mean I’m sure they’re not actually proud of being addicts, but they sure act like it. I don’t know. It fucks me up to spend too much time with them.”

“Oh wow.” Trixie doesn’t know what to say. She really needs to hold herself better in these heavy conversations with Katya.

“Oh wow,” Katya repeats, a small grin pulling on her lips suddenly, “Oh wow is the perfect answer. I’ve known shit is gonna hit the fan as soon as I graduate, but I just kept pushing it away, lying to myself like the idiot I am. And it’s not like I believed myself. It’s not like Juju ever let me forget.” She takes in a deep breath of air. “Did you know I knew Juju before any of the others? We went to school together. She was there for some of my best moments. And by that I mean worst moments. She’s the only one that knows, that truly knows. I guess that’s why she’s doing what she’s doing now.”

Trixie didn’t know Katya and Juju went to school together, and feels upset at another reminder that she doesn’t know Katya – or any of them, really – as well as she thinks she does. Kim was right when she threw that fact into her face in their fight a couple weeks ago. She takes a big sip of her tea that’s still technically too warm to drink. The smell of blueberries is always so nice, and the actual taste of the tea always so disappointing. It never tastes like blueberries at all.
“Have you talked to Violet about this?” Trixie asks, knowing the answer already based on Violet’s reaction when Juju brought up the topic on New Year’s.

“God yes. So many times. And she gets it. Or I think she does? I’m not sure. She hasn’t seen me on drugs, so I don’t think she can, fully. But she says she understands where I’m coming from. She just really wants me to come travel with her.”

“That’s selfish.”

“Of course it is. She is! But it’s not like I can accuse her here, because I’m the one who kept saying I want to go travel with her. Because I can’t stand the long-distance thing. And that’s the thing: she seems to be fine with long-distance, so if I were to tell her I can’t come with her, she’d probably be annoyed and sad, but it would be okay. It wouldn’t be a deal-breaker. For her.”

Trixie rearranges her legs on the bed, pulling her knees up to her chest because she feels her right foot falling asleep. She is wearing light blue socks her mom made her a couple of years ago and that look almost the same as the ones Katya is wearing right now. Her mom used the same pattern and the same kind of wool. Their toes are almost touching. If Katya is neither okay with travelling, nor with long distance –

“Would that mean that that’s it with you and Violet?” Trixie asks, relieved to hear there’s no trace of hope in her voice. She barely has to suppress that feeling. She barely feels it. If she feels it, it’s quickly choked by the pained expression on Katya’s face.

Katya makes a notion with her head that seems like she’s about to shake it no but then goes for a nod. Then she shrugs. Well, that wasn’t a helpful answer.

A more helpful answer comes a couple of second later and is spoken into the direction of Katya’s knees.

“Yes”, she says. “I think that would be it for me and Violet then.”

Following this is a long moment of silence, only interrupted by the sound of Trixie sipping her tea and Katya shuffling around on the bed, only to end up in the exact position she was in before.

Suddenly something occurs to Trixie. “But Shangela said yesterday that you’re working on your audition together. So, uh?”

Katya grins at that, a grin that doesn’t look happy in the least. “Oh yeah,” she says, then snaps her tongue. “Watch me keep up my lie for as long as possible, fooling all of them, and myself the most.”

“So you’ve known for a while that you’re not going?”

Katya’s eyes widen slightly. “No!”, she claims, “No, it’s not like that! I still don’t know I’m not going. It’s just…it seems less and less likely the closer I get to graduation. But I still think I should try it.” She sighs. “I guess what I really want is to put everything into the audition and then get rejected, and then maybe I can say to myself: I tried my very best and they didn’t want me, so I’ll have to stay behind. And that’s slightly better than: I didn’t even try because I know I can’t do it. I guess I’m a failure in both scenarios? Huh. But one feels slightly better.”

“Because in that one you don’t have all the responsibility.” Trixie nods.

“Exactly.” Katya runs her fingers over her face, pushes her glasses away in the process, and rubs her eyes. “Thanks for listening, I guess. Sorry, I’ve really had this conversation a million times
over, but I’m, uh, not done having it.”

“I understand,” Trixie says, because she does. “Do you want to hear my insight?” She regrets the question as soon as it’s left her lips. Insight? What insight does she have?

Katya nods, looking at her expectantly. Oh god. Now Trixie will have to pull some insight out of her ass. She racks her brain for a moment, but gets caught up in Katya’s eyes. Katya looks so sad, and Trixie’s heart aches for her. If only she could scoot closer, put her hands on both sides of Katya’s face and tell her everything is going to be okay, because Trixie is going to make it okay. She can’t do that, of course, because Katya isn’t hers, and even if she were, Trixie isn’t stupid enough to think she could solve Katya’s problems. Trixie can’t focus. She’s going to have to make something up as she goes.

“I don’t think it matters how well you do in the audition and if you get in or not. If you’ve really been freaking out about this for months, it means that you know this isn’t the best path for you. I don’t think there’s a point in trying to take this path.” Okay, she thinks, this wasn’t so bad. This makes sense.

“But I don’t want to not go after my future because of my anxiety. Who knows if my reasons for freaking out about this are even rational! Could be the anxiety. You never know with the anxiety, she’s a sneaky cunt-ass whore.” Katya feverishly runs her hands through her hair, getting stuck in some knots, and yanking her hands away angrily. She’s looking agitated now, and never lets her eyes stray off Trixie. Trixie reaches over her to get Katya’s mug off the nightstand and place it in her hands, where Katya’s fingers wrap around it, tapping quickly against the ceramic.

“I mean, they sound like pretty solid reasons to me,” Trixie says, making sure to keep her voice calm to balance out Katya’s. She cringes a little when she realizes she uses the exact same tone the women reading her mom’s self-help audiobooks use. “List them to me.”

“Huh?”

“The reasons you’re scared to go. List them to me.”

Katya frowns, then goes along. “I’m going to lose my routine, I’m going to lose my support system, and I’d have to be around addicts a lot of the time,” she says, no emotion in her voice, as if she’s tired of going through these three things over and over. Her glasses are still smeared with rain, and Trixie can only imagine how blurry her field of vision must be.

Trixie nods. “Those are, like, super valid reasons. Trust me.”

“You sound just like Sasha,” Katya says, raising her eyebrows slightly. “Or, you don’t sound like Sasha at all, but yeah, that’s basically what she’s been telling me.”

“Sasha knows what’s up.”

“She does. God knows she’s been through enough shit to know.”

Trixie doesn’t know the shit Sasha’s been through. She nods.

Katya looks at her for a long moment. Her eyes stay focused on Trixie’s long enough for Trixie’s heart to start beating faster. She swallows hard and lifts her mug to her lips, only half-aware that it’s empty. She pretends to take a sip anyway, glad for the opportunity to focus on something else for a second.

Katya’s weird grin is back all of a sudden, her eyes gleaming, and she says: “Do you want to know
what the worst part about this is?”

Oh god. There’s something worse than what she’s already said? Trixie indicates her to go on by tilting her head to the sight. She’s scared of what comes next. Why is there no tea left in her mug? She could use it now.

“The support system? I’m gonna lose that anyway. Doesn’t even fucking matter what I do, because I’m gonna lose it anyway.”

“Oh,” Trixie says, realizing how Shangela’s and Juju’s graduation must affect Katya. She hadn’t thought of that. Why didn’t she think of that? She knows how close they are.

“It’s not even just Shangie and Juju, Katya goes on, as if she read Trixie’s thoughts. “Jinkx is on the verge of leaving, they have auditions in New York all the time, and they’re fucking brilliant, and have been so close so many times, it’s only a matter of time now. And besides Juju and I, none of us are from Boston originally, and I know most of them have plans to go somewhere else as soon as they’re done. And they should! Things are supposed to move, things are supposed to change! Not everyone struggles with change as much as I do! So they will leave, and I’m gonna have to figure shit out by myself anyway.”

“But that’s not true, is it?” Trixie says, realizing this here is something she can actually be helpful with. “You’re not going to be by yourself.” She wants to reach out and put her hand on Katya’s knee, thinking this wouldn’t be too inappropriate, but then falters because she’s scared of being too tacky or intense. “I’m here, Katya. I’m here. For at least three years I’m here.”

Katya’s eyes dart over Trixie’s face, her forehead, her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. Trixie licks her lips nervously.

“And besides, I have a feeling you attract cool people. There’s always going to be people around who will care about you.”

Katya nods, her eyes urging Trixie to go on.

“And the others aren’t going to stop caring just because they moved either.”

Katya nods more forcefully. “And,” Katya now goes on, “I’m going to get better. I’ve been getting so much better. It takes fucking years, but I think I can do it?” What started out sounding sure gets less and less sure towards the end of the sentence, but Katya nods along to her own words anyway. “I’m going to be stronger and I’m going to be able to handle things better,” she adds. After this, she sighs loudly and lets her head drop against Trixie’s bedroom wall, looking relieved.

Katya looks at Trixie for a long moment, the faintest of smiles on her face, then she squints and yanks off her glasses with a frown. She starts rubbing them clean again, this time using the fabric of a tank top she drags out of where it’s tucked into her skirt. Most of the water stains come of, now the only stains left are right at the rim of her glasses, and when she puts them on again, she nods to herself.

“That was helpful,” she says, and for a second Trixie thinks she’s talking about her glasses, but then Katya gives her a smile that makes her heart want to melt out of her chest. She’s talking about her, she thinks Trixie has been helpful. She feels some of the tension she has been feeling ever since Katya got here drop off her shoulders, and makes sure to keep her voice light and breezy on her next question.

“So what are you going to do?” Trixie asks, and returns Katya’s smile.
Katya’s smile gets bigger, exposing more of her perfect teeth. “I don’t know.” She laughs out loud and claps her hands once, “I really fucking don’t know!”
Hey friends! I’m not one for long disclaimers, but I need to address something here: As most of you know at this point, I write my chapters weeks and weeks before I publish them, meaning I have several of the following chapters already written. The storyline I have for Katya (that started in previous chapters but that is only really unravelling now) is now uncomfortably close to real life events, what with Katya cancelling her tour and gigs and focusing on her mental health. This is why I want to say this: I in no way feel like I’m writing about the real life Katya (or Trixie, or any of them), and of course there also isn’t a real life Katya, because she herself is a character. I know the lines are blurry here, but in my understanding, I’m taking these amazing characters that real wonderful people created and throwing them into a world that I built and using them to tell stories I want to tell and that I hope bring you happiness and move you. Love Shack Katya’s storyline corresponding to real life like this was never my intention.

I hope all of you are doing okay and taking care of yourselves, and I would love for you to tell me your thoughts on my chapter because writing feels weird and confusing at the moment.

Thank you katyaapetrovna for beta reading this chapter and for being a wonderful person who is always supportive and nurturing when it comes to new stories and new writers, you really help me (and lots of other people) a whole lot.

The second day of classes after the holidays is the day Trixie stops only thinking about getting her act together, and actually starts getting her act together. After overhearing a group of girls in one of her lectures talk about their studying progress, she goes straight home after classes and starts summarizing the notes she took over the course of the semester. Her notes, neat and tidy in the beginning, get messier and messier the further she moves into the semester, and by the time she gets to the past couple of weeks the pages are filled with tiny question marks she scribbled at the side whenever her mind had wandered off too long for her to catch up with what her professor was saying. She considers giving up straight away and asking one of the girls she barely knows for their notes – she is sure theirs aren’t covered in question marks and drawings of pretty flowers – but then decides she isn’t allowed to give up before she’s even started. Lying on her bed, her feet up the wall and her head dangling over the edge, she starts memorizing.

♥♥♥

Trixie spends the next two weeks studying. She still feels stressed about her upcoming exams, but knows she will be able to manage. She is relatively confident she knows enough to pass those exams, and curses her ambition that denies her to be satisfied with just passing. She wants to do perfect, of course. Her social life has shrunk down to only Kim again, and Trixie sometimes catches herself getting anxious over the thought of wasting the little time she has left with Shangela, Juju, and probably Jinkx here, but for once her drive to do well in her exams is stronger
than her wish to be social. Maybe she can visit all of them once they have moved away. Maybe she’ll be less busy next semester, or the one after that. At least now that she’s busy, always in classes, at work, or studying, Trixie finds herself fretting less and less over Katya.

Her conversation with Katya keeps replaying on her mind, distracting her from her work every now and then, and she makes sure to text Katya in those moments, asking her how she’s doing or telling her something that’s just crossed her mind and that she thinks would make her laugh. Sometimes, she catches herself taking a minute to think of a hilarious text she could send. One time when she can’t stand the thought of a whole night of staying in and studying, she asks Katya if she wants to come out with her, to the milkshake bar or literally anywhere else, and it takes Katya almost 24 hours to get back to her, telling her she’s in New York again. Lucía asks Trixie about Katya the next day, telling Trixie to say hi to Katya for her, and Trixie types the message up, but never sends it. She doesn’t send Katya any more messages after this.

For the whole month of January, Shangela covers a third of Trixie’s shifts, needing to save up some money before her and Juju’s move. Trixie is relieved, appreciates the timing of this, because now she can focus a little more on her studies right when she needs it most. This is why today, for the first day in a long time, Trixie is done with studying early in the afternoon, with nothing pressing left to do.

“Hey, Kim,” she calls over to Kim, who’s lying on her bed with her headphones on. Kim has spent the last two weeks blatantly not studying. Kim doesn’t yet stand by her decision to bomb her exams on purpose because she doesn’t want to continue with her business administration major any longer, but it is getting more and more obvious that she isn’t willing to put in any effort anymore.

“Yeah?” Kim sits up on her bed, her eyes hopeful. Compared to Trixie, Kim doesn’t need a lot of outside entertainment, but over these past couple of weeks she has let Trixie feel that she isn’t exactly being a fun roommate anymore.

“I’m done for today,” Trixie announces, grinning, and spins around in Kim’s desk chair once. Her side of the desk is at this point a little too messy for her to get any successful studying done, and since Kim isn’t studying anyway, she overtook Kim’s side about a week ago. It looks worse than it ever has before but still neat and tidy compared to Trixie’s space. “Let’s do something!”

“Sew stuff?” Kim suggests, after a second of thinking.

“Yeah. Let’s sew stuff.”

Trixie bounces of her chair and makes sure to put on her favourite 70s pop playlist before rummaging through Kim’s fabrics in her drawer, looking for inspiration.

“Umm, Trixie. Shangie just texted me. I don’t really know what it’s about, but she says it’s super important and I should come over.”

Kim is frowning at her phone from where she’s kneeling on the floor to get out her patterns from underneath her bed.

Trixie makes a face. “But the dresses!” she whines, referring to the matching dresses for her and Kim she had just started designing in her head. Hers would be mauve and Kim’s would be pastel green and they would have ruffled trumpet arms and fall wide and open from their shoulders, making them look like ethereal fashionable jellyfish. “What about the dresses?”

“Shangie says it’s important?”
“Ugh,” Trixie says, slamming Kim’s drawer shut with her hip. “Can you ask her if I can come? I’ve been meaning to spend some more time with her anyway.” She doesn’t want to spend the evening home alone, not now that she’s gotten it into her head that this is going to be a fun night.

Kim nods distractedly, already typing away on her phone. When Kim texts her fake nails create a clacking sound against the screen and Trixie is almost certain Kim does this on purpose because Trixie can avoid making the sound herself even when she’s wearing the same type of nails.

“I’ll ask her.”

♥♥♥

They are on their way to Shangela’s only a couple of minutes later, Trixie practically skipping alongside Kim, excited at the prospect of being social again. Kim is grinning and teasing her on the whole way over, relieved after Shangela let her know not to worry and that “this is going to be fun”, apparently realizing that her initial text could be interpreted as something rather dramatic going on.

When they arrive at the house they let themselves in and throw their shoes onto the pile of shoes next to the staircase before turning straight to the kitchen. Someone has taken down all the Christmas decorations that were still up for the New Year’s Eve party and the kitchen looks empty without them. Trixie misses the ugly caricature of Santa that Katya had drawn and pinned on the shelf over the sink, featuring Santa throwing up a bunch of gifts like magic balls or crucifixes. She hopes no one threw it away. She should have saved it and taken it home with her, it would have looked wonderfully out of place next to her crocheted art of succulents and flowers. Shangela is sitting on one of the sofas, sipping coffee and waving them closer urgently. Next to her is Chi Chi, eating chips out of an enormous glass bowl.

“Finally,” Shangela greets them, drumming her index fingers fast against the table top, “come on, sit down, I need to tell you something.” From the exasperation in her voice it sounds like Trixie and Kim took hours to get there, not a reasonable twenty minutes.

Trixie helps herself to a bottle of grape juice before she sits down cross-legged next to Kim, on the sofa opposite to Shangela and Chi Chi. Shangela is bouncing up and down a little, apparently less than willing to wait another moment before sharing her news.

“Okay, so I have news.” She squints into the direction of the front door and lowers her voice a little. “Juju is at a study session right now, I don’t think she’s gonna be back for a couple hours, but ahhhh, I’m scared she’ll be early. All of you watch the door, okay? Should we agree on a sign for when she comes in so I know to stop talking? Anyway. I have decided—” she draws in a breath, out of nervousness or for dramatic effect Trixie doesn’t know, “to ask Juju to marry me.” She grins widely and claps her hands twice. “I’m gonna ask her to marry me!”

Trixie is stunned. She did not see this coming. Should she have seen this coming? She’s glad Chi Chi high fives Shangela immediately, congratulating her, so she has a moment to collect herself. People taking big steps in their lives when she, Trixie, isn’t doing the same has always made her feel a little lost, like they are leaving her behind, like she is supposed to be moving at their speed with them.

Kim gets up and rounds the table, pulling Shangela off the couch to hug her and Trixie follows suit, having to wait almost a full minute for Kim to let go of Shangela before she can hug her too. Shangela is bouncing up and down even through the hug and her curls tickle Trixie’s nose, making her giggle. This is wonderful news, Trixie decides; just because her own love life is a flaming pile of nothing doesn’t mean she can’t get happy for her friends. She loves love, after all.
“Finally,” Kim comments when Trixie lets go of the hug and they stand next to the table awkwardly for a couple of seconds, not sure if the moment is over and they can go back to sitting down yet. “Do you know how many hints Juju has given me, basically telling me to let you know she’s waiting? I mean, yeah, you know. I’ve told you.”

“You’ve told me,” Shangela grins. She looks ecstatic and lets herself fall back into the couch, half landing in Chi Chi’s lap. The couch gives a concerning squeaking noise and Chi Chi pulls a worried face for a second before going back to smiling at Shangela. Trixie feels Shangela’s happiness rolling off her, enveloping Trixie in a warm hug. “So.” Shangela reaches under the only pillow on the couch to produce a notebook. “You’re my trusted group of advisors now. You’re my best friends—” she smiles at Kim and Chi Chi and hesitates a bit before giving Trixie the same warm smile – “and we are going to brainstorm some proposal ideas. Who’s in?”

♥♥♥

The group spend the next two hours going over every proposal idea in the books. Kim and Trixie have their phones out, browsing website after website of “romantic, innovative, and truly unique” proposal ideas, while Shangela and Chi Chi freestyle their ideas. The bowl of chips has been emptied and refilled at least two times, and Trixie has gotten her favourite mug out of the sink and made all of them hot cocoa. The mug is black and covered in crooked yellow stars and on one of her earlier stays at the house Jinkx had told Trixie that Katya made the mug in pottery class back in High School.

“Idea number 48: Re-enact the scene of their favourite romantic movie,” Trixie reads off a website that so far hasn’t gotten them anywhere. It’s covered in ads of women in perfectly straight pastel dresses with perfectly straight blonde hair smiling down at a perfectly straight white man kneeling in front of them, preferably in a meadow or on a boat. “If it’s Pretty Woman, go for the ending of the movie: Rent a white limo and climb through the sunroof with flowers in your hand to proclaim your love as you arrive at her place.” She can hear the exasperation in her voice, an exasperation that definitely wasn’t there through ideas number one to ten.

“Well, what’s Juju’s favourite movie? Maybe we can work with that?” Trixie asks, wanting to at least give the idea a chance, especially since she’s already dismissed ideas one through forty-seven. “Shangie?”

Shangela shrugs. “Girl, don’t ask me, Juju never even watches movies. She always falls asleep all the time and then complains about every movie being the same, which like, how would she even know?”

“I’ll ask her,” Trixie decides, more because she wants to do something, pull up literally anything but another proposal page on her phone, and less because she thinks this will lead anywhere.

“Way to be obvious,” Chi Chi drawls. “Hey, ask her in the group.”

Trixie nods and pulls up the Love Shack Baby group chat. The last two weeks she’d had the chat silenced, because it constantly distracted her with messages like “whoever is eating my sushi from the fridge: stop” or “anybody on campus right now? I need to borrow five dollars” or “if emotions looked like cats, what would boredom’s fur look like?” Now that she opens it again she is greeted with several hundred messages she has never gotten. She doesn’t waste time backreading, instead types:
What’s everybody’s favourite movie? Asking for science.

The first one to answer is none other than Katya. “Witches of Eastwick!” she writes, followed by a second text saying “No! Requiem for a Dream!!”

This message is immediately followed by a string of thumbs up emoticons by Laganja, who doesn’t offer her own favourite movie.

The next one to answer is Chi Chi, who writes “Pretty Woman”, followed by a princess emoji. Trixie makes sure to roll her eyes at him over the table while she half listens to Kim reading more proposal ideas of one of the websites.

Now that Trixie has the group chat open, she scrolls a little, seeing if there’s anything important she’s missed. There isn’t. There’s a boring exchange between Katya, Shangela, and Laganja concerning rehearsal times. There’s a picture series sent by Chi Chi that documents his trip to the vet with Milk. There’s Bob giving an open invitation for everyone to join him for dinner last Sunday. Then, posted in italics only this morning, there’s something that grabs Trixie’s attention after all: Violet has left the conversation.

Trixie draws in a breath to interrupt Kim and ask the others about Violet’s absence when, just in that moment, Juju finally texts her answer: Pacific Rim.

♥♥♥

Half an hour later they are still not further along than before. Ever since Juju’s text, Chi Chi doesn’t let go of an idea involving giant robots they will pilot, and somehow attack Juju sitting in a white limo with her favourite flowers in her hands. He’s more useless than ever, and Trixie tries to make up for it by seriously wracking her brain for ideas. She feels responsible for the movie mess.

“Ask a baker to make a custom cake with the proposal written in frosting. Then, have the cake displayed in the storefront and take your partner window-shopping. Bring the cake home to share and celebrate afterward!” Kim interrupts Chi Chi, reading off her phone loudly. Trixie remembers skimming over this idea a couple of minutes ago. Apparently, Kim is on the same website she is.

“I’m not gonna share my proposal cake,” Shangela says indignantly. “I’m gonna eat the whole thing myself, do you know how expensive those dumb cakes are? I’ll eat every piece of it. Or, wait! Even better, I’m gonna cover Juju in it and eat it off her.”

Kim sighs. “Oh god, would you please shut up forever.”

“How about one of those treasure hunts?” Chi Chi suggests after a moment of silence. “They’re cute, right?”

“Yeah, I’ve thought about that. That could be really cool. I just don’t really know what to do on the actual treasure hunt?” Shangela replies, frowning. Then her face lights up with an idea. “Hey, so you guys know I DJ, right?” she asks.

“You had one gig at one club one time, sure,” Kim says, looking scared of what’s next.

“It was a great gig! Anyway, how about I make a remix that’s sorta, I don’t know, sorta my proposal, a remix of me proposing, and then playing it at the club? I’m sure Adore could set this up for me.”

“Shangie,” Kim says, giving Shangela her nicest smile. “I love you, and you’re going to propose like that over my dead body.”
“How about those sky-scraper thingies?” Trixie suggests. She knows her brother proposed to Brenda like this, even if she’s only ever seen pictures of his proposal. She doesn’t know if she likes the idea, but Brenda had looked touched in their pictures. Come to think of it, the proposal pictures that Brad had sent her looked exactly like the couples in the ads on the websites Trixie doesn’t want to spend another minute browsing. Brenda had said yes, so Brad’s sky-writing proposal must have been at least a little bit successful.

Shangela shakes her head. “Juju never wears her damn glasses. I can already see us standing there, me pointing out the plane to her, and her squinting up and seeing nothing. Next.”

The next suggestion comes from Kim’s phone again, from a different website this time. “This says to get a bunch of glow-in-the-dark stickers and write with them on the ceiling and then lie there and turn the lights off.”

“Hmm,” Shangela says, tilting her head to the side. “I don’t hate that.” She scribbles the idea down in her note book, her second entry so far. The first one is Chi Chi’s treasure hunting idea that’s accompanied by a big question mark.

“Hey, Trixie?” Shangela says suddenly, grinning at her. “How would you like for Pearl to propose to you?”

Trixie scoffs. “You know what? You can fuck all the way off.”

♥♥♥

About half an hour later, Trixie gets more and more agitated that she’s the only one who hasn’t contributed a note-book worthy idea yet. Seeing as she hadn’t necessarily been invited to Shangela’s brainstorming group, she feels she really wants to hold up her end of the deal. She zones out of the conversation, Chi Chi’s ideas getting more and more ridiculous, and starts to really try to think of something. She mentally goes through the proposals she’s seen in movies but doesn’t come up with a whole lot. That’s what she gets for barely ever making it through a movie. She’s half watching Chi Chi do an act-out of an improvised Pacific-Rim inspired proposal with the help of the coat rack he dragged into the kitchen when she faintly remembers a movie about a teacher who involves his class to help him with his proposal. She can’t recall any of the details, but when Shangela turns away from Chi Chi and starts pitching her proposal-remix-club idea to Kim for the third time, she decides to speak up.

“Hey, do you think we could involve the kids in this?”

Kim’s eyes light up and she nods immediately. “Yes. Yes! Why haven’t we thought of this?”

Shangela looks decidedly less excited than Kim. “What do you mean, involve the kids?”

“I don’t know, there’s tons of suggestions of involving friends and family, like, have everybody hold up one letter of your proposal, or everybody gets a balloon with one letter, or whatever. We could do something like this with the kids. I mean, think about it. They are so cute! It would be so cute!” For a split second Trixie imagines getting proposed to with the help of her kids, all of them grinning at her and holding up balloons. She sits up on her heels, her knees digging into the soft sofa.

“Juju loves them,” Shangela agrees slowly, and cocks her head, thinking Trixie’s idea over. “So we could give them balloons or something? Hang on, no, I got it. I think.” She holds her hands up, indicating all of them to be quiet while she figures out if she’s got it or not. Then she grins. “We are going to do a dance number! That’s something I can do, right?”
Trixie thinks about how long they took to teach the kids some basic moves for their holiday musical, and how many of them had messed up during the recital. It had been so very cute. She nods.

“Yes. That’s something you can do!”

She only hopes Juju will appreciate the effort a proposal involving their kids will inevitably be. Shangela will invite Trixie to see the proposal, won’t she? Trixie can’t wait.

♥♥♥

After a short and fruitless discussion about the specifics of Shangela’s dance proposal, Chi Chi talks them into watching Pretty Woman, and they settle into the living room with some leftover pizza from the fridge. The opening titles have barely left the screen when Trixie starts feeling restless. Now that Shangela doesn’t need her help anymore, she can’t help her mind circling back to what she read in the group chat earlier: Violet has left the conversation.

“Is Katya home?” Trixie asks and avoids looking at Kim’s face while she waits for Shangela to react. Shangela nods distractedly, watching the screen.

Trixie isn’t sure if she can just stand up and head towards the stairs to pay a visit to Katya’s room, but after watching another ten minutes of the movie and not taking in any of it, she pushes the pizza box from her lap into Kim’s and leaves the room without saying a word. She can basically feel Kim’s eye roll through the room, following her up the stairs.

Having reached the door to Katya’s room she hesitates for a second, trying not to focus on the mix of emotions pooling in her belly. She hasn’t had a real conversation with Katya since the time Katya let her in on her struggles, opened a door for Trixie to see into all of her, only to then disappear to New York again. Rationally, Trixie knows that she disappeared on Katya before Katya disappeared on her, being too busy with studying to give her the attention she wants to give her, but she can’t help but feel bad about Katya leaving without even letting her know.

Katya’s door is slightly ajar, the orange light of the lava lamp creeping into the hallway. She can’t hear any noise coming from inside the room. She shakes her head, chasing away her doubts, and knocks on the door lightly before pushing it open far enough to stick her head inside.

Katya is in a headstand on her bed, leaned against the wall, her legs sprawled out. She is wearing black leggings and a faded yellow shirt of a gymnastics team. The shirt is only tucked into her leggings on her left side; the right side of the shirt is falling down into her face and exposing her stomach that looks more toned than Trixie thought it would, but maybe this comes with the position Katya is currently in.

Next to her on the bed is Sasha, back against the headboard and looking at Trixie hesitantly.

“Hi, uh,” Trixie says. She hovers in the doorway for a moment, feeling awkward. Katya doesn’t say anything, and her face is hard to read half-covered and upside down. Sasha doesn’t speak either, even though she looks like she wants to. “Can I come in?”

She notices Sasha shooting Katya a questioning look and Katya giving something like a nod. Her face is red. She must have been in her headstand for a while.

Katya’s bed is a little crowded. Not only are Katya and Sasha both in it, there’s also a notebook, some crumpled up pieces of paper, Sasha’s dog pillow, and, for some reason, a small plastic saxophone. Trixie decides to take the only chair they have in the room out of the corner behind the
door, places it in front of Katya’s bed, and sits down. When nobody starts the conversation for a couple of seconds she grabs the saxophone and fiddles with the keys nervously.

“How was the proposal planning?” Katya asks, without looking at Trixie. Something is off, something is very off, Trixie thinks, and doesn’t know how to respond. If Katya and Sasha are home, why weren’t they helping with the planning? She doesn’t know about Sasha’s relationship to Shangela and Juju, but, especially after their conversation two weeks ago, knows how close Katya and Juju are. Katya is always full of ideas, surely she could have been helpful?

“Are you okay?” Trixie asks, a little surprised at how much of her concern is bleeding into her voice. When Katya doesn’t give any indication that she’s heard her, Trixie looks at Sasha, feeling helpless. “Do you, uh, should I go?”

“No! Don’t go. I’m sorry.” Katya lets herself slowly slide off the wall, until she’s lying on her bed. She rubs her face. “Please stay. Tell me about the proposal.”

Trixie does. The whole time Katya stares at the ceiling, while Sasha just looks more concerned than anything else.

“So, uh, what are you guys up to?” Trixie asks, trying to keep her voice light after a complete non-reaction to her claim that she basically came up with Shangela’s proposal, even though Shangela hadn’t even intended for her to be there.

“Figuring out the train-wreck that is my life,” Katya replies, and grins. Her grin seems cold, and is gone in a second. “Hey, why is it all we ever talk is crises? I swear I’m fun. Sasha, tell her how much fun I am.”

“So much fun,” Sasha says, and gives Katya an exaggerated thumps up. “Not at all a train-wreck.”

Trixie thinks for a moment. She wants to ask Katya if this is about her addiction and the travelling but hesitates because Sasha is in the room. She fiddles with the saxophone, before accidentally dropping it. Sasha knows more about this than she does, she has been Katya’s support before she even knew Trixie.

“Are we talking about the, dru-, uh, the travelling?” Trixie asks carefully, kicking the saxophone under the bed to make sure she won’t step on it once she gets up.

Katya laughs. “No travelling! Definitely no travelling for me! I guess the world will have to do without my talents. Sasha, do you think they can do without my talents?” On the last word her voice gets high and breathy and she bows to an imaginary audience on the ceiling while lying down.

Trixie can feel her heartbeat speed up by the second. Afraid of drawing the wrong conclusions and getting her hopes up over nothing she asks, “You’re not going to go travelling with Violet?” She wants to bite her tongue. That came out way too excited. Sasha is raising an eyebrow at her, then looks away, a small smile tugging at her lips.

“Nope,” Katya says.

“Any why’s that?” Trixie leans forward in her chair, not able to stop herself. Katya doesn’t seem to take in her reaction either way.

“Because I can’t go. I told you.”

“And you’re not going to do the audition?”
“No. The audition doesn’t change anything. You said that.”

Trixie feels a wave of relief wash over her. Katya is staying. She doesn’t have to say goodbye to her.

“I’m so happy you’re staying,” she says, quietly; and it comes out sounding suspiciously like a confession, directed towards Katya’s cheek while Katya is still not facing her.

Katya nods shortly. All of a sudden, she sits up, finally looks right at Trixie, and words start spilling out of her mouth at a rapid speed.

“I don’t have a plan B! I mean, I just pretended I’d go travelling, and I never thought of a plan B. I’m done with college, what am I going do? Find a job with my major? Hahaha.” She laughs, shakes her head and looks like she’s about to start crying, “I would have had to start looking for a job forever ago if I wanted one! But did I? No. So what am I going to do now? Maybe I should take more classes. Maybe I should do zoology, or become a dentist. A masseuse? A masseuse who does sexual favours? A hooker? Who knows, not me!”

“We can start looking for a job tomorrow, Katya,” Sasha says, with all the patience in the world, “You’re not alone in this, okay? And even if you don’t immediately find something, you know Bob has your back, and so do all of us. Also, you can graduate first, it’s okay. And get a job after.”

Katya sniffs and nods. Then she shakes her head. “I’m not going to do anything tomorrow, you know that, right?”

Sasha nods. “Right.”

They stay silent for a while, Trixie thinking about something to say, something to do. She feels useless, wants desperately to say something to make Katya feel better, but can’t think about anything but Katya telling her her not travelling would be the end of her and Violet. She needs to know. *Violet has left the conversation.* The question is scratching at the back of her throat, and she swallows it down, again and again, trying to think of something more helpful to say, something to chase away the tears of frustration that she can see hovering on the brim of Katya’s eyes.

“Do you think I’d make a good dentist?” Katya goes on and distractedly starts braiding her hair where it hangs over her left shoulder. “I could just smile at everyone when they come in and they see my teeth and think: she’s legit. And then they don’t even care if I fuck them all the way up. I’d just smile and fuck them all the way up.”

“I’d let you do that,” Trixie says, jokingly, and her heart tries to flutter out of her mouth.

“You don’t want to be a dentist,” Sasha follows, her tone serious. “We’ve talked about that.”

“But I have to do something. What about a hooker?”

Sasha frowns. “Don’t joke about that.”

“What about you and Violet?” The words escape Trixie’s mouth even though she tried her hardest to keep them locked away behind her teeth. Trixie bites her lip. Not only was this insensitive, it also came out sounding suspiciously over-eager. Immediately, she stretches her legs on the bed and sits back in her chair a little to feign relaxation. “I mean, was she, uh, was she okay with that?” She checks her fingernails, frowning at them for a second. A picture of nonchalance. Or so she hopes.

“I broke up with Violet.” Katya says this without any noticeable emotion in her tone at all. She nods slightly, then sighs. “Broke up with her two days ago.”
Trixie stares at her. She feels herself opening her mouth, as if to say something, but nothing but hot air comes out and she shuts it again. Katya broke up with Violet.

“So now Violet is miserable, I’m miserable, I don’t have a plan for my life, and I’m losing my friends and my girlfriend at about the same time. Fun.”

The tears on the brim of Katya’s eyes well over and run down Katya’s cheeks, only one on each side, almost perfectly synchronized. Katya wipes the left one away with the back of her hand; the right one drips down her chin onto her gymnastics shirt, leaving a dark stain near her clavicle. When she can’t think of anything to say, Trixie gets up and scoots up next to Katya on the bed, leaning against the wall and Katya’s shoulder. Sasha mirrors her movement on Katya’s other side, so that Katya is secured in their middle. Katya is cold against Trixie’s side. Why is Katya’s and Sasha’s room always so much colder than the rest of the rooms? Katya isn’t even wearing socks and when she sprawls out her legs in front of her and her freezing left foot touches Trixie’s legs, Trixie flinches a little.

They sit there in silence for a while, Trixie’s head spinning, Katya seemingly circling through all her emotions within fifteen seconds again and again, and Sasha looking lost in thought. Katya’s foot against Trixie’s leg has gotten considerably warmer, and Trixie can’t help but notice that Katya leans against her shoulder, not Sasha’s. Trixie wants to know how the breakup happened. Katya was in New York, so it must have happened over there. Did Katya go to New York with a plan to break up with Violet in mind? Did it happen suddenly and in a fight? Were they already fighting when Trixie asked her to hang out and Katya needed a full day to reply? Would it have helped Katya cope if she had sent her the message about Lucía asking about her? Would it have helped Katya if she had continued sending her random thoughts and jokes? If Katya broke up with Violet two days ago, why hasn’t she reached out to Trixie yet?

“I need a plan,” Katya says, suddenly disrupting the deafening silence and all but bouncing off the bed.

“Now?” Sasha asks, tilting her head.

“The time is now! The day is here! Isn’t that what they say in the musical?”

“What musical?” Trixie asks, relieved Katya seems to have found something to latch on to momentarily.

“I don’t know, what’s your favourite musical?” Katya opens her closet, produces a big drawing pad and flops down on the chair in front of the bed, hovering over the pad. She seems to notice something out of the corner of her eyes and reaches down and under the bed, producing the saxophone. She throws it over into Trixie’s lap.

“Uhh. Flashdance?” Trixie shrugs.

“Yeah, that one, probably. Who knows! Who has time for musicals that aren’t Chicago! Okay, planning time!” Katya reaches over to her nightstand and comes up with three red glittery markers, of which she hands one to each Sasha and Trixie. “We are going to make a plan for me!”

“A plan?” Sasha asks, and her head seems to be stuck in a tilted position, her brows furrowed, touching in the middle of her forehead.

“Yes! That’s why I got the glitter markers, of course. So number 1: Find a job.” She writes this down on the piece of paper, in big red letters. “This is important. What’s number two?”
Trixie feels a little overwhelmed. She’s trying to stay in the moment, to give Katya what she needs, but it’s hard to ignore the swirl of conflicting emotions pooling in her stomach. There’s cheery excitement over Katya’s break up begging to be felt, gnawing on her insides impatiently. There’s concern about Katya’s current state of mind. Also, she is hungry. Moreover, she’s trying to come up with ways to make Katya feel better. Maybe they should take a walk? Watch a movie? Go for dinner, please? Maybe she should leave and let Sasha comfort Katya? Sasha is probably so much better at this than she’ll ever be. Katya seemed okay when she walked into the room. But then

Katya seems okay now, filling in a big exclamation point behind the word job. When neither Trixie nor Sasha say anything, Katya comes up with number two herself: “Number two, be good at hobbies.”

Trixie giggles, despite herself. “Who’s good at hobbies?” she grins, and decides to settle into the calmer, more lively mood Katya is now emanating.

“I’m just going to try out all the hobbies and see if something sticks. Hobbies are good. I’m good at hobbies once I’ve tried, umm, 27 of them. Aren’t hobbies good, Sasha?”

Sasha nods and grins in slight exasperation before reaching out to brush a stray strand of hair out of Katya’s face. It looks so casual. Trixie wishes she could trust herself to touch Katya like this and not blush all the way down to her cleavage.

“Maybe meet new people?” Sasha suggests and gestures to Katya’s drawing pad. “That’s what Chi Chi did after his break up and it seemed to help?”

“How many?” Katya asks.

Trixie can’t help but smile. This conversation is ridiculous. “How about one for the beginning?” she suggests, trying her best to stay serious. Katya looks wild with one part of her hair in a sloppy braid that’s quickly unravelling at the edges and part of her hair in open messy waves.

Katya nods. “Meet 1 new people” she puts as point three on her list. “I hope it’s Carrie Fisher,” she says, “fingers crossed.”

♥♥♥

They are done with Katya’s list half an hour later, and Katya puts it up on her wall, right above her headboard. It says:

- Find a job!
- Be good at hobbies
- Meet 1 new people (Carrie Fisher?)
- Find a purpose (they had tried to talk Katya out of adding this point for at least ten minutes but to no avail)
- Be happy for at least 24 hours straight
- Graduate (Sasha had thrown that in almost like an afterthought)

“What happens when you’ve done all six things?” Trixie asks, watching Katya glue one side of the poster to the wall.

“Then,” Katya says, turning to her and smiling slightly “I’m…” she trails off for a moment and furrows her brows, seemingly weighing each of her next words carefully, “then I’m a person who has completed this list and can go on to other things.”
Trixie nods. Sounds like a plan.
Chapter Notes

“Okay, no, so you – yes, you – you go over here and you three follow her and then you do the jump, and then you skip back. And then you four do the same thing but over there. Okay? Or wait, maybe don’t jump, maybe turn around twice, can you do that real quick? – Yes, nice, so turn around twice and then skip back. And maybe try smiling? It’s a beautiful day, the sun is shining, smile smile smile!”

Trixie watches in amusement as Shangela tries to make the kids memorize her proposal dance routine – while, or so it seems, making up said routine on the spot simultaneously. When Shangela asked Latrice a couple of hours ago if she could rally up the kids for her proposal, Latrice didn’t have an issue with that. After all, Shangela has dance class with the kids two times a week either way. Latrice had grinned her wide grin Trixie likes so much, and then pulled Shangela into a hug that lifted her up in the air a little before patting her back heavily enough for Shangela’s knees to visibly buckle.

After her shift, faced with the option to either go home and study or stay and watch Shangela try to make the kids memorize more than two moves in a row, Trixie chose the latter, taking the things she needed to study with her. Now she is sitting on a big green pillow in Shangela’s make-shift dance studio right next to Latrice’s office, with her back to the wall, sipping tea out of Betty’s mug – that Trixie takes for herself any chance she gets – her study materials lying next to her unopened.

Even though Shangela is smiling just as much as she’s encouraging the kids to smile she is obviously struggling. From watching her, Trixie gathers that the main problem Shangela’s currently facing is the fact that she hasn’t settled on a song to do the proposal to. Instead, she has a variety of songs in mind and is futilely trying to come up with a routine generic enough that it could fit any of those songs. It’s a lost cause and Shangela knows it.

“Ms. Mattel, what do you think, should we turn around, or do the jump?” Shangela asks her advice, after trying out both options one more time. To punctuate her words, she first spins around once then jumps in the air, as if Trixie hasn’t just seen her do these exact moves thirty times in a row now. The noise in the room has picked up considerably in the past few minutes and even though most of the kids still seem happy enough to indulge Shangela, Trixie knows that with instructions as vague as hers, this rehearsal isn’t going to be running smoothly much longer. Two of the kids have already sat down and Dan just pulled a race car he isn’t supposed to take out of the common room out of the waistband of his pants. Shangela needs her help.

“I think you should all wear flower crowns!” Trixie grins at Shangela, “that would be adorable!”

“What’s a flower crown?” Kameko asks, still doing Shangela’s jump in a loop and more than a little out of breath.
“It’s flowers and leaves woven together on your head. It’s so pretty!” Trixie tells him, and most of the kids agree they want to wear one for sure now, asking Trixie questions and stopping to pay attention to Shangela. Trixie can already picture them with flowers on their heads. She is getting more excited about this proposal by the minute. What else could she do to help?

Five minutes later they are taking a break from all their hard work. They have about nothing done yet but Shangela needs a moment to go over her routine in her head again before they can go on, so the kids get a bunch of the big green pillows out of a corner of the room, and flop down in various places on the floor. As always, only few of them decide to talk amongst themselves, most of them flocking towards Shangela or Trixie.

“What are we doing this dance for, Ms. Mattel?” Lucía asks Trixie, pulling her pillow up right in front of Trixie and sitting down on her knees. She is followed by another couple of kids, all fighting for a spot next to Trixie.

“What did Ms. Wadley tell you earlier? Come on, she told you guys about four times. I was there!” Trixie points to the exact place she was standing when Shangela first told the kids about the proposal and gives an over-exaggerated shrug.

“She said she was getting married, stupid face!” Suzie tells Lucía. There isn’t a spot left next to Trixie for Suzie, which is why Suzie decides to stand, leaning against Trixie a little. Trixie puts her left arm around her, hugging her to her side. Even though she’s sitting on the floor and Suzie’s face is about the same level as hers now, hugging the kids always makes Trixie feel tall in the best of ways.

“You’re right, she is getting married,” Trixie agrees. Shangela is on the other side of the room, going through some dance moves with her eyes closed, here and there bumping against a kid that decided to sit down right where she’s dancing. She’s quietly singing a song to herself, upbeat and unfamiliar to Trixie.

“And we are dancing at the wedding!” Suzie adds excitedly and jumps up once. “I love weddings, did you know, Tri – Ms. Mattel, did you know that I was a flower girl once?”

“Oh, you were?”

“Yes, I wore a flower crown. Like you said earlier.”

“I’m sure that was so beautiful! But also, you’re not dancing at the wedding. It’s for the proposal, like Ms. Wadley told you.”

She notices some questioning faces at that. “Do you know what a proposal is?” she asks. Kameko comes up from behind her, takes her free arm and loops it around his shoulders, so that she’s now hugging him to her other side. “Do you know what a proposal is?” she repeats to him. He shakes his head.

“A proposal is when two people – in this case Ms. Wadley and her girlfriend who you saw at our holiday musical – want to get married and one person asks the other person first. Asks them if they want to be married to them.”

Lucía frowns. “Why does there have to be dancing?”

“Yeah, can’t you just ask while you’re sitting?” Suzie follows up.

Trixie laughs. “Yes, yes, you can just ask while you’re sitting. But some people want to make it a very special important moment, and Ms. Wadley’s girlfriend is one of those people. And Ms.
Wadley loves dancing with all of you, and she loves you, so that’s why she wanted you guys to be there with her."

“Was their dancing at your po – pro – at when you asked to marry?” Kameko asks, drawing little circles on Trixie’s knee with his thumb.

“She can’t dance,” Suzie interjects importantly.

Trixie gives Suzie her best offended-look. “I dance beautifully,” she says, and for a split second remembers Katya laughing happily watching her pull out her tap dance moves way back when she first moved here. “I didn’t ask anyone to marry me yet, and nobody asked me.”

The kids scrunch up their noses almost in unison. “Why not?” Lucía asks.

Kids and their questions, Trixie thinks, how long does Shangela intend this break to be? “I’m only 23?” she says, and it comes out sounding more like a question than a reason.

“My mom married my dad when she was 21,” Suzie informs her and nods importantly. “21 is younger than 23.”

“It’s two younger,” Lucía adds and holds two fingers up annoyingly close to Trixie’s face. Is it too late to pretend she needs to be studying and send the kids away to bother Shangela instead?

“Oh wow.” She grabs Lucía’s hand and directs it back towards her side, “Do you guys have any pets? I know you have a bird, Lucía, right?”

“You should wear one of the big white dresses,” Lucía answers with glistening eyes, “for when you ask someone. I want to wear one of the big white dresses!” She twirls around for a moment, her red skirt flying through the air around her knees. “I have a Barbie with a wedding dress and she looks like you. But her dress won’t fit you, you are too big.” Trixie can’t help but smile dreamily at the notion of herself in a big white dress and takes a second to decide whether to continue being huffy about the way the conversation is going, or to let herself go full on wedding dream fantasies. She dismisses both options.

“Are you calling me fat?” she laughs instead, and bops Lucía’s nose.

“Well,” Lucía says, earnestly “You were the only one getting a second helping at lunch earlier. But it’s okay. They sell the dresses in big sizes too. I think.”

Trixie snorts. “Well I’m so glad.”

“When I get married,” Kameko chimes in, “we are going to have a cake out of hamburgers. I saw that on the TV. So many hamburgers.”

“What if your wife or husband is a vegetarian?” Trixie asks, glad she came here after her admittedly stressful shift to spend some more time with the kids. The kids are always the most lovely after-hours.

Kameko cocks his head. “What wife or husband?”

“My auntie, when she married her husband she did not wear a white dress. It was blue, and my grandma says that’s not okay, but I don’t know why. It was so pretty,” Suzie informs them.

Trixie nods. “Traditionally, brides wear white to the wedding. Well, uh, no, that’s not true. But where we live and for the past couple of years, Brides wear white to the wedding. So maybe your
“I’m not going to wear white, I think,” Suzie answers earnestly, and scratches her nose. There’s a big stripe of orange marker over her nose that Trixie had tried to rub off earlier, but that didn’t come all the way off. “Because then when I eat the hamburger cake I’d have to be too careful.”

Kameko jumps up excitedly. “You’re also having hamburger cake?”

“Maybe she’s your wife,” Trixie says, and waggles her eyebrows.

The kids screech. They run over to Shangela immediately to tell her about the nonsense Trixie has been saying and leave Trixie to wondering if Shangela and Juju will have bridesmaids, and if they’d want the bridesmaids to wear flower crowns.

♥♥♥

Katya’s Instagram is on fire. And so is she, judging by its contents. When Trixie had first found out about Katya’s break up she had half thought she’d spend the next couple of weeks comforting Katya in her room, making her feel better, being her source of comfort and laughter. Trixie wanted to paint Katya’s nails and bake her cookies – or have Kim bake cookies and bring them over to Katya’s – and take midnight walks talking about movies, or art, or Katya’s new options in life. Katya, however, has different plans.

It’s 2pm on a Saturday. Trixie is just done with another tedious study session, and she scrolls through Katya’s Instagram for what feels like the millionth time this week.

On Monday, Katya went to soccer with Chi Chi. Chi Chi didn’t have a game, instead, he took Katya to watch him practise. Katya uploaded no less than fourteen short videos of herself shouting comments at Chi Chi and his teammates, who more than once stop in their tracks to shoot her confused looks. In video five she captured Chi Chi scoring a goal and herself shouting “yes bitch, work” at the top of her lungs in the rather small gym. She is wearing a plain white shirt that she glued a printed out picture of Chi Chi’s face onto with sticky tape.

On Tuesday, Katya uploaded a bunch of pictures of herself and Jinkx, taken in the Love Shack’s kitchen. From what Trixie can puzzle together from the pictures and the comments underneath them, Jinkx was teaching Katya how to make candles. Katya didn’t bother to post a picture of the end result. Instead, there’s a picture of Jinkx with wax on their fingers, a picture of Katya’s ear that she tagged Jinkx in, and a picture of an online instruction for making candles that Katya made unreadable by putting a bunch of cryptic emojis over it. The last picture of the day is Katya and Jinkx smiling into the camera and Trixie likes to think the candles turned out well.

On Wednesday, Katya is out with the people from her dance class. She only uploaded one video, it’s of Laganja putting on green lipstick before they went out; but she was tagged in a bunch of pictures by Laganja and a girl called Gia Trixie never heard of before. They were out dancing in a club Trixie doesn’t know. When Trixie first saw the pictures, she was half sad she wasn’t asked to come, and half relieved nobody offered her the chance to throw her tight exam phase sleeping schedule out of the window. She knows she would have jumped at the chance and regretted it. One of Gia’s videos shows Katya doing the splits in the middle of an overcrowded dance floor and Trixie watches the video seven times in a row before Kim comes to her rescue by snatching the phone out of Trixie’s hand and wordlessly placing it on top of the highest shelf in the room.

By Thursday, Trixie starts wondering where she comes in in Katya’s after breakup life. Apparently not today, today Katya spends lying around in bed with Adore, Adore playing the guitar, and Katya singing obviously improvised off-tune melodies that in no way go with what Adore is doing. She’s
laughing a lot in the videos, and Trixie’s heart feels warm when she watches them. Still, she hopes that singing will not become one of Katya’s new hobbies – and lets Katya know in a comment on one of her videos.

On Friday, Katya uploads a series of excruciatingly boring stories of herself, Shangela, and Juju at Walmart. Trixie can’t figure out what exactly they are doing there; they seem to be in every part of the store at least once. Katya posts various selfies of the three of them, some of them showing them holding knives, rolling pins, or a lawn chair. The pictures are cute; Katya, however, decided to make this story as boring as possible by filling it with close ups and super zooms of price tags of random objects. Trixie studiously watches every single story, getting more and more frustrated with every price tag she sees. How does Katya have followers still? She has way more than Trixie has, and Trixie’s Instagram is a delight.

When on Saturday morning she again isn’t greeted by a message of Katya asking her to do something, anything, together, she decides that apparently, she needs to be the one to text Katya first. She should probably have done that sooner, she thinks, what with Katya being heartbroken, but she can’t deny that her not being too involved in Katya’s after-break up activities might not be the worst thing. Kim must be proud of her.

Trixie

Hey, are you doing okay?

Thanks for giving me the price of three different kinds of gardening gloves from Walmart, that was very helpful for my life

Does shopping at Walmart qualify as a hobby, I need to know

After she hits send, she keeps lying on her bed, staring at her phone, half because she’s waiting for Katya’s answer, half because she doesn’t know what else to do. If she’s honest with herself, she hopes Katya isn’t too busy for her today, because she has nothing else going on.

It’s almost forty-five minutes later, and Trixie has gone to playing Christmas songs on her guitar – because those are the kind of songs that annoy Kim the most – when Katya answers.

Katya

Doing not so great

Not so great at all

Any plans today?

Trixie feels a wave of sadness hit her. So Katya isn’t doing great after all. Why is Instagram always lying to her? Now this is Trixie’s moment, Trixie’s chance to help Katya feel better. She keeps pulling her guitar strings absent-mindedly while trying to come up with an idea to pitch to Katya, going back to singing the lyrics she wrote about Kim to the tune of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer. Her song is pretty hilarious, maybe it would cheer Katya up? She takes her phone to invite Katya to come over and make music together, but then chickens out. The thought of Katya curled up on her bed while Trixie sings is a little much for her. Instead, she turns to Kim for ideas.

“Kim? What completely non-platonic i-want-to-make-you-feel-good-because-you’re-sad-and-i-care-about-you-and-I’m-a-good person thing could I do with Katya today?”
Kim, who has spent the last thirty minutes on her nails and is still gluing more glitter on, grins at her and rolls her eyes. “Maybe you should invite her over and you two do the washing up together because obviously you can’t handle it on your own?”

“Come on, be helpful for once. Just once.”

“How about you go to the milkshake bar and talk about your gay feelings, you useless lesbian.” Kim smiles, and scratches her knee. A bunch of glitter comes off her nails, and she tries to rub it off her tights with her knuckles. It only spreads, coating her knee in an iridescent coat of glitter. “Don’t you remember we have plans today? Buying the stuff for Shangie’s proposal?”

Oh. Trixie forgot about that. Is that something she could take Katya to? Katya spent hours in a Walmart yesterday. Beggars can’t be choosers. Trixie nods at Kim and texts back Katya.

♥♥♥

When Trixie and Kim arrive at the Love Shack two hours later, Katya is outside on the swing set. She’s swinging dangerously high, but stops pumping her legs when she sees them. When Trixie automatically takes off towards her instead of towards the front door, she hears Kim sigh quietly. She looks like she’s about to say something, doesn’t, and heads inside.

Right before Kim and Trixie left, Trixie grabbed the fingernail necklace she had made Katya for Christmas out of her night stand. She doesn’t know if she’s going to give it to her today, but feels the necklace might be a way to make Katya feel a bit better. Her gift is sitting in her backpack now, waiting for her to be brave. It wouldn’t go with Katya’s outfit at all, but she can picture her wearing it anyway. Katya is wearing a bright red sweater that somebody – herself? – made an amateurish attempt to sew a half human half cat face to. The face has big yellow teeth, and yellow wool hangs off the sweater where the hair would be. It is truly ugly. Katya’s hair is in two long braids over her shoulders, and she looks cute, despite the abomination that is her sweater.

When Trixie is close enough, she tries to pull Katya into a hug, and Katya, who is still swinging a little, gets pushed into Trixie’s arms with more force than Trixie expected. Trixie stumbles back a little and Katya laughs in her arms.

“Hi,” Katya says, her face buried in Trixie’s shoulder. “How are you?”

“I’m good,” Trixie replies, revelling in how long Katya lets the hug go on. Katya is warm in her arms, even though she’s not wearing a jacket, and she smells slightly different today, but Trixie can’t put her finger on what it is. “Don’t you want to put on a jacket, Katya? How are you?”

“I’m great!” Katya says into Trixie’s shoulder. Then she lets go of the hug and pushes herself off the ground just a little, starting to swing slightly. “I had a revelation an hour ago. Or five hours ago. Between one and five hours ago. Ask me what it is?”

“What is it?” Trixie sits down on the other swing, cursing the way the strings cut into her outer thighs.

“It’s a woman,” Katya says, and Trixie’s heart skips a beat. A woman? Surely this can’t be happening?

“A woman?”

“Yes. And she has something to say, bitch!” Katya laughs, wheezes, and swings a little higher, before digging her boots into the grass and stopping all of a sudden to pull her phone out of her bra. Trixie watches cautiously as Katya looks for something on her phone, then jumps off the swing
and comes over to Trixie, stopping right behind her, propping one arm on her shoulder, and holding her phone in front of Trixie’s face with her other arm. Katya’s braid brushes against Trixie’s cheek.

Her phone shows a woman in a black bob and with enormous earrings talking into the camera:

"I am Jasmine Masters, and I have something to say. Let me tell you something about eating other people spaghetti."

As soon as the woman on the screen finishes that sentence Katya starts cackling hysterically, right next to Trixie’s ear. Her arm with the phone is shaking. Trixie barely understands the part of the video that follows. Something about “period juice” women put into their men’s spaghetti to keep them from leaving them? She must have misheard that part. Katya is still laughing loudly, and Trixie starts laughing as well, always glad to be swept up in Katya’s happiness. The video is over after only a minute and Katya laughs so hard she is leaning her whole body weight against Trixie’s back; Trixie has to dig her feet into the grass to not topple forwards and have both of them fall on their face.

“Do you love her? I learned so much this past hour.” Katya giggles when she puts her phone away.

Trixie shakes her head slightly and grins up to Katya. It’s good to hear Katya laugh, she thinks, especially after her texts this morning.

“Was that a drag queen?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What else did you learn?”

Katya’s arm is still around Trixie’s shoulder, and Trixie leans her head back a little, into Katya’s chest. The ugly sweater is so soft. Definitely more comfortable than the tight blouse Trixie has tucked into her even tighter pencil skirt.

“I learned that one day we’re all going to die,” Katya says, suddenly very seriously. “You need to watch her videos, Trixie, okay, you need to.”

Trixie nods, despite knowing that she fully never will. Well, maybe one or two, but only if they are all this short.

“Did you not know we are all going to die?” she asks, conversationally. Milk the cat is chasing something she can’t make out through the garden and out of the corner of her eye she can see Shangela, Kim, and Chi Chi leave the house and make towards them, announcing the end of their moment together.

“I knew. But I didn’t know. You know? I know death is real, but not like, real real,” Katya says, and then she lets go of Trixie and skips towards the others.

“Katya, wait! Did women really used to do that? Put their, uh, blood into spaghetti?”

Katya turns around, grins, and shrugs. “I trust a woman,” she says.

♥♥♥

“Okay, so this is the plan for today,” Shangela announces when they’re heading downtown. “We need to get us some flower crowns because Trixie brought them up for some ungodly reason and now the kids won’t shut up about them. If they are expensive, feel free to pitch in, Darling.”
Shangela pointedly rolls her eyes at Trixie before she goes on. “I also want to see if we can try to find fairy wings, maybe for rent, because I can’t buy all of them fairy wings of course. But I want to.”

“Damn, what kind of proposal is this gonna be?” Chi Chi asks, turning around from where he walks a little in front of them. He walks backwards for a moment. “It’s a little extra, yeah?”

“I love it.” Trixie smiles, feeling all warm at the idea of her friend rallying up a bunch of kids in flower crowns and fairy wings just to propose to her other friend. “I love love.”

Katya, who’s walking right next to her, smiles at her. She hasn’t put on a jacket.

♥♥♥

The store Shangela leads them to is a store she has found online and none of them have ever been to. It’s on a busy street downtown and has big front windows filled with wigs and all sorts of colourful costumes. It’s called Dorothy’s Boutique. When they enter, a rustic doorbell announces their presence, but Trixie doesn’t see anybody working there, or any other costumers. The store is rather big, and exceptionally crowded. One wall is stuffed with wigs in all cuts and colours, and Katya immediately takes off there, inspecting an ash blonde wig that looks like a broom in two rubber bands.

There’s shelves with colourful shoes, tights, and dresses, there are hats with flowers glued to them, plastic swords and instruments, animal- and skeleton masks, and stacks and stacks of boxes with contents unknown to Trixie. They navigate the store, carefully trying to avoid bumping into stuff in the narrow aisles, but Trixie knocks over a stack of shoeboxes with her butt anyway.

It doesn’t take long for them to find the flower crowns. The store sells a lot of them, and Shangela considers all of her options, discussing with Kim which one would fit the vibe of her proposal and Juju’s personality the best. Kim manages to look at least seventy percent interested. Trixie wanders off, doesn’t mean to walk over to Katya, but ends up close to her anyway. Katya is wearing a dark green wig that goes down to her waist and that makes her eyes shine beautifully.

“You like that?” Katya asks, smiling, and spinning around for Trixie to admire her. Her braids are clearly visible under the wig. She looks like a witchy mermaid that tried and failed to work human clothes for the first time.

“A lot,” Trixie says, and her stomach feels warm. She considers putting on a wig herself, sort of wants to wear the wig right in front of her that’s the same model Katya is wearing but in a bright pink, but stops herself because she doesn’t want to mess up her hair. She spent way too much time on her curls today to destroy them now.

Katya hums and pulls off the wig, walking past Trixie down the shelf to find a new one to try on.

“Hey, Katya?” Trixie asks, feeling determined but suddenly rather timid. The light in the store is bright and unyielding. “Can I ask you something?”

“Is it about Jasmine? Then yes. Is it not about Jasmine? Also yes, but I hope it’s about Jasmine.”

“How are you feeling?” Trixie tries to convey how serious she is in her tone. She bits her lip as she watches Katya put on a pink bob. The combination of the wig and Katya’s awful sweater almost makes Trixie’s eyes water.

“I mean, how are, umm, are you okay? Okay-ish? Or not?”
Katya sighs dramatically. “Can the answer be ‘eh’?” she asks, giving Trixie a small smile. Trixie nods. “Good. That’s the answer then.”

“Care to elaborate?” Trixie doesn’t want to push Katya, but also feels way too out of sync with Katya’s emotions lately. She really wants to understand.

“Always,” Katya answers. “I don’t know, I woke up the morning after the break-up and felt sort of fine? Okay, maybe not fine exactly, but relieved for sure. The pressure is off. And things really weren’t working all too well for me anymore. Things have been pretty bad for a while, actually. And I don’t think I would have liked going travelling even besides the, uh, awful drug stuff. Would you like to travel that much? I like being here, I think. I’m so glad I’m still here to be honest. I need to be here right now. I wasn’t ready to be anywhere else.”

“Yeah, I get that,” Trixie answers.

“I guess I’m still waiting for it to really hit me,” Katya goes on, trying and failing to put the pink bob into a low ponytail. “It feels so much less…grand than I thought it would. Life just goes on, sort of. It’s weird.” She frowns. “I was so scared I wasn’t going to be able to handle this but, I don’t know, everything feels way less stressful now. I’m thinking I’m going to be fine?”

Trixie nods and badly wants to hug Katya again, or, even better, make her laugh. Katya, in the meantime, has moved on to watching herself in a grimy purple mirror hanging on the wall opposite the wig shelf. She is blowing her own reflection a kiss, Trixie’s heart flutters, and then Katya goes on:

“It’s just all so sad. It really is. I really wanted for this to work out, I thought I was willing to do anything. But I guess not. And I also don’t want to be left by myself right now, but I’m lucky, because everybody’s here and everybody’s doing stuff with me, and I’m going to learn 37 new hobbies, so I’m okay. I think.”

“27.”

“Huh?”

“You’re learning 27 new hobbies.”

“Oh right. Whatever, I’m already at—” Katya trails off, her eyes following a large woman in a green faux fur coat entering the store, making the bell interrupt Katya’s words. The woman seems rather frantic, looking around the store, and rushes past them towards the cash register.

“Trish!” she yells, waits for a beat, and then turns towards Katya and Trixie. “Hey, you girls don’t happen to have seen a woman, uh, short blonde hair, white lace dress, hoop earrings, a little, uh, loopy, about your size?” She frowns before adding, “and your stature?” and points to Katya. They shake their heads. The woman, short grey hair herself, hurries past them again, this time in the direction of two changing cubicles Trixie hadn’t even noticed in the crammed store before. She yanks back the curtain on the left cubicle. Inside, there’s a woman half sitting on a plastic stool, half leaned against the wall behind her. Her legs are spread wide open and sprawled on the floor in front of her, her arms loosely at her sides, and her mouth is hanging open where she seems to take a nap on the stool.

“Trish!” the large woman says, sounding defeated, and snapping her fingers in front of her.

Trish begins to stir slowly, and after a couple of second opens one eye. “Wha?” she asks without getting up from her position. She’s wearing a white lace dress that’s so short Trixie can see her
panties underneath.

“You told me I could leave you with the store! Get up!” She holds her hand out for Trish to take, and for a second Trixie thinks she’s going to yank her up forcefully, but then she slowly and carefully pulls her up to her feet, steadying her even once she’s standing.

“Ah. But you did leave me with the store. See?” Trish gestures around and grins a little.

“There’s costumers! You need to deal with them! Also, they could have stolen things in the meantime – no offence!” she hurries to add in the direction of Trixie and Katya. Katya grins and shrugs. Trixie mentally gives a mournful wave of goodbye to the conversation about Katya’s state of mind. Katya was giving her all the information she had wanted to know all week, who knows when there was going to be another opportunity like this?

“They aren’t going to steal anything, are you? Girls?” Trish looks Trixie and Katya over critically. “Look at their faces.”

“I’ve stolen heaps,” Katya informs her.

“Ah.” Trish scratches her head. “Well. It’s all about, what are you gonna do to get by? Right? Like today, I’m sleeping in this chair.”

“Oh god, this isn’t working. This isn’t working!” The larger woman sounds exhausted. “Trish, I need to be able to rely on you. You know I can’t take care of the store right now, and you promised. Oh god. Just, okay, I’ll deal with the costumers, and you please go back and handle the deliveries. Okay?”

Trish shrugs, and then heads for the back of the store, but not before placing a hand on the large woman’s shoulder and breathing in and out slowly twice, gesturing for her to do after her to calm down. The larger woman sighs and leaves towards the counter.

Trixie and Katya spent another fifteen minutes trying on various wigs and masks – or, rather, Katya tries them on, and Trixie watches her fondly, giving biting remarks whenever Katya asks her what she looks like, and snapping pictures for Katya’s Instagram. When Katya has put on a big crown made of sea shells and star fish, Trixie makes sure to get in the picture with her. It’s a beautiful picture, Katya grinning wide and pointing to her headdress, and Trixie rolling her eyes in her direction just slightly. She sends it to herself from Katya’s phone.

Chi Chi keeps checking in with them, and puts on a couple of masks himself, but Shangela and Kim stay hidden in the back of the store. When they finally head towards them, they are both carrying arms full of clutter.

“Oh wow,” Trixie comments when she sees them coming up behind a big shelf of tights and socks, “I trusted you to prevent this, Kim.”

Kim shrugs and grins. In her arms, there are mainly fairy wings, but also cans of spray paint, and a string of paper cupcakes.

“I’m going to try and see if I can rent most of this stuff,” Shangela says to justify her haul. “Also, what do you think? These flower crowns,” she uses her nose to point in the direction of flower crowns that are mainly made of plastic roses and that are dangling near her elbows, “or these?” She points at yellow crowns in Kim’s arms, made mostly with sunflowers and little plastic fruit. “Sunflowers are Juju’s favourites.”

“Sunflowers it is,” Trixie decides, and relieves Shangela of the rose crowns. She heads towards the
back of the store to put them back where they got them from, and when she returns to the group, they’re already at the counter. The large woman is in the middle of an apology: “– because I have to take care of my dad, so I can’t be here full time right now, and my cousin does okay when she works here with me, so I thought maybe I could give her more responsibilities, but, oh well, it’s a problem,” she rambles, while putting Shangela’s stuff in canvas bags Shangela had brought with her in her backpack.

“Really, no problem at all,” Shangela reassures her.

“Can I ask you something?” Katya chimes in. She has her elbows leaned on the counter and Trixie is just waiting for her to knock over the display of nose piercings that’s standing right next to her shoulder. “It’s super inappropriate.”

The large woman gives her a once over, then laughs. “Go ahead.”

“Is she an addict? Trish, I mean.”

The woman sobers up a bit, and continues ringing up Shangela’s stuff. Trixie clocks a second piece of cupcakes on a string. Are these for the proposal even? “Yeah, she is,” the woman sighs after a beat of silence. “She’s trying to be sober recently. She’s giving her best, which is, uh, not much? I’m really trying to be helpful, but I’m a little swamped to be honest. I think I need to start thinking about getting more help in the store.”

Katya nods. When they leave the store a couple of minutes later, she turns around again to shout over to the woman: “All the best for Trish!”
hello friends, i hope you have fun with this! i want to thank katyaapetrovna for beta-reading and always being there for me, you're the best kind of support i could have wished for and i can't believe we're gonna see each other in london only two fucking days from now. wild. thanks for being wonderful!

“Okay, imagine me doing this,” Shangela executes a fast and rather choppy series of dance moves, “and then the kids behind me twirl twice and walk backwards four steps, and, uh. Trix, you watched us do it, I’m sure you know all the moves by now. Can you just show them what the kids are going to do real quick?”

“Nah,” Trixie grins and shrugs unapologetically. She’s settled deep into her favourite couch in the Love Shack’s kitchen – the orange one with the faded paisley pattern – sipping tea, and watching Shangela demonstrate her proposal plans to Katya, Kim, and Chi Chi. Katya is sat next to her on the couch, one by one pulling the clutter they just got at Dorothy’s out of Shangela’s bag, inspecting each item thoughtfully. On her head, there’s a stack of three of the sunflower crowns, the price tag of one dangling in front of her left eye. When she gets to the fairy wings, she rips into one of the plastic bags, and wiggles her arms into the too-small pair before getting up and forcing Shangela into a second pair.

“I’ll do the kids’ part,” she announces, bouncing on her heels and looking at Shangela expectantly. “Just tell me what I need to do.”

Trixie spends the next half hour watching Shangela and Katya – mostly Katya, if she’s honest – gleefully, Shangela giving Katya instructions and Katya executing the moves to her best abilities. Katya isn’t the best at following Shangela’s instructions, Trixie notes, and for a moment she wonders if Katya would ever have stood a chance at the auditions for Violet’s group. She is able to execute each move perfectly, but has trouble memorizing even Shangela’s simple routine.

Chi Chi makes them grilled cheese and they eat while Shangela and Katya go on, and Trixie feels like she could watch Katya fool around in the kitchen forever. Just when she finishes that thought, Katya jumps onto Shangela’s back unprompted and with a little too much vigour and knee-action, and Shangela flops down onto the couch with a groan, claiming she’s done dancing for the day and possibly forever.

Kim gets up from the couch to go home only a couple of minutes after, claiming she has plans when Shangela asks her for a massage because Katya broke her back, and when she asks Trixie if she wants to join her, Trixie looks over at Katya, weighing her options.

Katya smiles at her as she struggles out of the fairy wings. “Stay.”

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Following Katya up the stairs, she realizes she’s never been in Katya’s room in the daylight. It looks different when it’s not bathed in the orange light of the lava lamp, lighter and less
mysterious. The window on Sasha’s side of the room is slightly ajar, and the air in the room is cold. Spread all over Katya’s bed and most of the floor space are colourful dresses, shirts, blouses and accessories Trixie recognizes as belonging to Katya, even if most of them are unfamiliar to her. The clothes aren’t crumpled up, instead it appears somebody purposefully spread them out to get a good look at each individual item. Trixie raises a questioning eyebrow at Katya.

“I had to get a good look at everything earlier,” Katya explains, and swipes four problem pattern dresses off her bed to the floor before sitting down on a fifth one. It’s the yellow one made out of the rough awkward knit, and it must make for a comfortable place to sit if nothing else.

“Why?” Trixie sits on Sasha’s bed. Sasha’s bed is neat.

“Because I wanted to be extra pretty for going shopping today,” Katya responds, nodding very seriously.

Trixie gives her ugly cat sweater and leggings a pointed once over, has already opened her mouth to fire off an impromptu insult, but then remembers she has a mission, and that mission is finally – finally – giving Katya her necklace. She doesn’t have a good reason to put it off any longer, and certainly doesn’t want to take it home with her again to have it sit in her nightstand, as a constant grim reminder of both her infatuation and her reluctance to act on her feelings towards Katya. She can positively feel the necklace burn holes into the backpack she discarded in front of Katya’s bed, and she needs to get rid of it now.

“I made you something,” Trixie starts, nervous excitement coursing through her. Katya must be able to feel Trixie’s emotions rolling off her, she thinks, they must be vibrating through the whole room.

“Oh?” Katya smiles, cocking her head curiously, her eyes slightly narrowed as she takes in what Trixie can only assume is the nerves clearly visible on her face.

“It’s so dumb.”

“I love it already,” Katya assures her and sits up so she’s on her knees now, bouncing up and down slightly.

Trixie decides that it’s no use downplaying her efforts any further and collects the necklace out of her bag. It’s still in the little cardboard box she put it in right before New Year’s. That was so long ago. Her heart beats fast as she hands the box over to Katya. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea. Maybe this is the most hideous necklace anyone has ever seen. Maybe Katya doesn’t need another hideous piece of jewellery.

“I love gifts,” Kata whispers as she pushes the lid of the box. Her mouth drops open. “Oh my god, Trixie,” she gasps, taking the necklace out of the box carefully, using both hands, “this is the best thing I have ever seen.”

Trixie feels herself blush furiously. “It’s so dumb,” she repeats, and tries to hide her face in her blouse by pulling the fabric up to her nose. The blouse is entirely too tight, and instead Trixie ends up looking like she’s trying to re-arrange her cleavage or press her nose into her own breasts.

Katya shakes her head vigorously; then she leans forward to pull Trixie into a tight hug that’s made awkward by their position. Katya almost loses her balance and falls into Trixie fully. Almost. She smells like daisies, and only a little bit like cigarettes, and Trixie hold onto her as long as Katya can hold her position.
“Why did you make this?” Katya asks, almost reverently, as she puts on the necklace. It takes her quite a while to get the clasp closed and a nail painted like the Russian flag immediately gets tangled in the cat’s fringe hair. Katya never looks up to where her fingers are fumbling with the clasp, instead has her eyes on Trixie’s, warm, green, and curious.

“Uh,” Trixie answers. She decides to go with what feels like the truth in that moment. “Because I thought it would make you happy.”

“It does.” Katya smiles. “It really really does.”

Trixie half expects, half hopes for Katya to make a joke and chase away the tension she feels building up between them, a tension that seems to be seeping out of her own skin and fill the space between them slowly. She misses the right moment to respond and they end up starting at each other in silence, and when Trixie can’t hold Katya’s eyes any longer, her eyes drop to Katya’s lips. Katya is wearing a different shade of lipstick today, this one is more purple then red, and she must have picked it with the sole intention to not match her sweater. Trixie wants to kiss it off her lips. She swallows and with some effort untangles her eyes from Katya’s face, letting them drift through the room in order to come up with something else to say, something else to do.

Leaning against the wall behind the door and next to her easel are four canvases showing the inkbloths Trixie has seen Katya do before. The bright-coloured canvasses look inviting and promise an escape out of her current situation.

“What are you painting there?” she asks, and rises up from Katya’s bed, trying to get a better look and, moreover, trying to avoid Katya being hit in the face with the heat Trixie is sure has started radiating off her body since their staring contest. The canvas she has the best view on is covered in mostly yellow paint and she can sort of see an underwater scene in it.

“Oh!” Katya says and claps her hands. It’s obvious she likes that Trixie asked. Trixie takes a mental note. “Do you know Rorschach?”

Trixie shakes her head and kneels in front of the yellow canvas.

“He inspired this. So basically, you can see different pictures and patterns in the paintings, depending on your personality. Like in this yellow one you can see fish and algae, or you can see a person walking away from you, or you can see something resembling a jungle scene. Depends. What do you see? It’s rigged now because I told you.” Katya lies down on her back and puts her head into her neck to watch Trixie on the floor.

Trixie squints at the picture. The underwater scene she can see right away. After a moment, she can see a close-up shape of a person turned away from her as well, but she doesn’t think she would have been able to see it without Katya telling her. The jungle scene escapes her.

“Let’s do another one,” Trixie suggests, grinning at Katya’s excited laugh when she says it. She pulls up the green canvas from behind the yellow one and takes a long hard look. “Okay, so I see…” suddenly she’s alarmed. “Uh, so this tells you something about my personality?” she asks, just to make sure.

Katya laughs and props her feet on the wall over her bed.

“Nah, not really. I mean, the original Rorschach pictures do, but even there it’s debated. Mine don’t do anything much. L’art pour l’art, I suppose.” She lets the French words roll over her tongue indulgently and expertly, and gives Trixie a challenging grin. “Why? You see something dirty?”
Trixie does. “I mean, this one’s fully a vagina, right?”

Katya shrugs her shoulders in an over exaggerated manner, a motion that looks all the more silly since she’s still lying on the bed, squinting over her own forehead to look at Trixie. “Maybe I lied,” Katya responds, teasingly, “maybe they do tell me something about your personality.”

“Which is what?” Trixie asks, distracted already. She thinks she can see an alley of trees in the picture now, branching off towards the edges of the canvas.

Katya grins. “You’re hungry for some pussy.”

♥♥♥

February 11th marks the day that begins a heated discussion about Valentine’s Day in the Love Shack Baby group chat. The topic of the discussion: Should they or shouldn’t they host a valentine’s party at the house. Trixie barely cares, is too wrapped up in her exam preparation to join in on the discussion much, but sometimes checks in to see what everybody’s thinking and to distract herself for a moment. These are the messages she gets while Kim quizzes her on developmental speech delay:

**Sasha:** Also I’m tired of cleaning up after everyone

**Shangela:** But we have to!

**Juju:** @Sasha why do you hate love?

**Chi Chi:** Has anyone seen my phone? (this is Adore)

**Laganja:** I’ll help clean everything

**Kim:** @Adore, it’s probably in the bathroom again

**Jinkx:** @Laganja you say that every time

**Sasha:** @Adore downstairs bathroom

**Jinkx:** bathroom

**Trixie:** Do any of you have exams, I wonder

**Chi Chi:** thanks!

**Yara:** Shoutout from Alexis, she says the party has to happen

**Laganja:** I didn’t mean it last time, but I do this time

**Shangela:** @Yara I miss you two

**Bob:** Are you sure I can’t leave the group chat?

**Shangela:** No Bob you need to stay

**Chi Chi:** @Laganja you full of shit
Chi Chi: *Can it be a costume party*

Bob: *Can you at least watch out with the furniture this time*

Laganja: *I feel v attacked*

Juju: *Stay, Bob! We’ll shut up under one condition: Just tell everyone we need to have a party*

Yara: *@Bob, same though*

Juju: *@Bob also been meaning to tell u we broke the coat rack but wasn’t our fault*

Katya: *Costume party! Latex frog?*

Bob has left the conversation

Adore: *Why does my phone smell like tacos?*

Shangela added Bob to the conversation

Three days later, Trixie and Kim are on their way to the Love Shack once again. To the dismay of Shangela and Juju, the group have settled on not having a Valentine’s Day party after all, mostly because late on February 13th they realized that nobody had organized anything at all. Instead, Kim came up with the idea to just have a movie night together, and she and Trixie spent the morning trying out Kim’s newest cupcake recipe to have something to bring to the party.

Shangela and Juju hadn’t been all too thrilled with the movie night idea and told anyone they were going to head out and do something amazing and romantic, with Juju dropping hints she wants to go ride a hot-air balloon, but when Trixie and Kim get to the house, the two of them are sat in the living room in their pyjamas. Showing up in your pyjamas is a must, Adore had ordered, and had sent Trixie reeling. Trixie sleeps in old-fashioned night gowns only and hadn’t been sure if she could actually show up at the house like this, but then decided to fully commit and give a full bed time fantasy. She loves a good night gown after all. Now she’s wearing a light blue one, all complete with little bows and lace, exposing a little more of her skin than she’d usually show outside of her apartment. For her walk over she wears a long, warm coat and her cowboy boots, trying to make up for the lack of pantyhose in February, but as soon as they are standing in the hallway, she gets a pair of dainty bedroom slippers out of her bag. Her neighbour gave them to her two years ago, as a hand me down, claiming that nobody but Trixie would probably ever wear them. They have a little clear plastic heel and a fluffy white pompon on top, and her feet are just a little bit too big for them, her toes hanging slightly over the edge of the shoe.

She feels rather self-conscious (and very cold) in her outfit but relaxes when she follows Kim into the living room and sees that neither Adore nor Chi Chi are wearing pants, and Juju’s in a night gown as well, hers black and silky and much more revealing than Trixie’s. Trixie appreciates whoever remembered to turn up the heating in the living room, but pulls a blanket off the sofa and wraps it around her naked shoulders anyway.

The sofa is big, but not big enough to fit all of them, and the group have apparently decided they can’t be bothered to drag in any of the sofas from the kitchen. Instead, they have gathered enough blankets and pillows to transform the floor space into what Juju calls a fortress of comfort, but which Trixie knows cannot compete with the worn leather sofa. She makes sure to throw herself onto the sofa before anybody else has settled in, securing herself a spot. When Katya walks in right after and immediately decides to sit down on the cushion next to her, Trixie feels elated and a little
smug. Katya is wearing the exact same outfit she wore to Dorothy’s a couple of days ago, her ugly red cat sweater and her leggings.

“What?” she huffs when she sees Trixie’s raised eyebrows, “The key to a good outfit is that it can transition from day to night.”

All morning, the group chat had been wild with arguments about which movie they were going to watch. The discussion was full of everyone talking over each other, sending distracting memes and insults, and Laganja still trying to push a party, and instead of a decision they ended up with a plan: everybody writes their favourite movie on a post it note, and then somebody draws one of the notes from out of a hat to have fate decide who gets their way.

Trixie knows most of the movies that go into the hat. She knows Katya put in a movie called Contact – despite claiming her favourite movies were The Witches of Eastwick and Requiem for a Dream only a couple days ago. Trixie remembers those titles well, has written them into her planner to watch soon, but never feels in the mood to focus on a movie. She knows she will put in Legally Blonde, Shangela announced she will put in Whip It, and of course she saw Juju throw in not only one but two post it notes with Pacific Rim. Trixie initially hopes Katya’s movie will win, but from everyone’s eyerolls that follow her announcing Contact she isn’t sure that it’s a movie she wants to suffer through.

Jinkx is collecting Sasha’s post it note on the other side of the room, and Trixie shrugs of her warm blanket to get up and throw Legally Blonde into the mix. When she walks back to her space next to Katya, she notices Katya’s eyes on her. They roam from Trixie’s arms over her cleavage and face and down to her thighs. Her mouth opens slightly, but it is only when Trixie is settled in next to her again that she actually speaks.

“Is this what you sleep in?” Katya asks, and she makes the question barely more than a whisper in the direction of Trixie’s shoulders. Trixie’s shoulders are rather broad and painted with freckles, and she snuggles into the blanket again, hiding them away, and waiting for Katya to give a biting comment at her grandma nighty. It doesn’t come and Trixie nods, answering Katya’s question.

Katya looks like she’s about to ask another question, then scratches the nape of her neck and focusses her eyes on Jinkx. She says nothing else.

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When all the post it notes are in the hat – a top hat that Trixie is sure Jinkx has casually worn at least once – Jinkx holds the hat in front of Trixie.

“You’re the fairy of fate,” they decide.

“Oh wow. That’s a lot of responsibility.” Trixie sighs, rummages in the hat for a moment before settling on one of the crumbled up pieces of paper, and gets up from her space next to Katya once more to announce the winner dramatically. The blanket drops off her shoulders onto the floor.

“Okay, so we are watching…Bee Movie.”

Trixie doesn’t have the presence of mind to take in everybody’s reaction to her pick, because as soon as she announces the movie’s title, Katya starts to laugh her silent wheezing laugh, flailing her hands and leaning forward where she sits on the sofa. Leaning forward, her head is now close to the exposed back of Trixie’s thigh, close enough that Trixie can feel Katya’s warm breath dancing on her skin. She wants to take a step forward to diffuse the situation but is frozen in place. She doesn’t check, but she is almost sure there are now goosebumps covering her skin. She swallows hard and tries to focus on anything but the proximity of Katya’s face to her thighs. It’s a
good thing her thighs can’t blush. Thighs can’t blush, can they? Sadly, her face can, and she remains standing for a moment, her back turned to Katya.

“Who the fuck put that in?” Juju whines and gives Shangela a look that lets her know they could be in a hot air balloon now.

Nobody owns up to it.

Trixie looks around, sees only innocuous faces, then shrugs. “Well, the hat has spoken. We must watch,” she decides.

“Maybe Netflix doesn’t have it?” Sasha asks, sounding hopeful.

Netflix has it.

They watch it.

The first couple of minutes seem nice enough, introducing them to the hive life of bees and Trixie tries to remember what makes this movie so meme-worthy, but can’t. Kim gets two boxes of the cupcakes they baked earlier out of her bag, and Trixie misses a scene or three when everyone compliments them on their baking, taking half the credit when she knows Kim did almost everything on her own.

Katya finishes her cupcake quickly, and she’s settled deep into the sofa next to Trixie when she starts sucking the remaining frosting off her fingers. Her head is slightly tilted to her side, and the top of her hair brushes against Trixie’s naked upper arm where she has dropped down the blanket a little. Katya’s hair tickles her, but she doesn’t pull her arm away.

“I don’t want to say I know who put in Bee Movie,” Katya remarks casually, interrupting a scene of a bee having an entirely un-bee-like conversation with a bewildered human woman, “but Trixie here smells like honey.”

Suddenly all eyes in the room are on Trixie, and she feels a blush creep up her face.

“I always smell like honey,” she tries to defend herself. “I didn’t put in fucking Bee Movie.”

Katya frowns at her, feigning disbelief. “I never noticed you smelling like honey before.”

Trixie shrugs, relieved to see that at least Adore and Chi Chi have lost interest in this exchange already and have returned their eyes on the screen. “Maybe you just never paid attention before.”

A smile spreads over Katya’s face slowly, then she mimics Trixie’s shrug. “Maybe.” She scoots a little closer, and all of a sudden but buries her nose in Trixie’s neck, taking a comically large whiff of Trixie’s skin. “I like honey,” she says, before focussing on the movie again, now fully resting the weight of her head against Trixie’s arm. Out of the corner of her eye, Trixie can see Sasha grin at Jinkx over her cupcake, a grin accompanied by a subtle role of her eyes in Trixie’s direction. She must hold Trixie responsible for the choice of movie as well. Trixie returns her eyes to the screen, hoping the movie isn’t too terrible now that the group seems to have decided to blame her for how they chose to spend Valentine’s.

Trixie has a hard time following the movie. Chi Chi has pulled out his Gameboy again, and refuses to mute his game, Shangela and Juju are whispering and giggling constantly, she is almost sure Sasha and Jinkx are sending each other texts even though they are sat in the same room, and Katya exists right next to her. Luckily, the movie isn’t worthwhile, she decides half an hour in, except for the scenes featuring the woman’s – the love interest’s?! – fiancé.
“Wake me up when the fiancé pops up again,” she tells Katya, pretending to fall asleep with her head dropped on top of hers. “I love him.”

Juju giggles. “You’re making yoghurt night too difficult!” she yells across the room, imitating the husband.

Shangela stares at Juju, slightly horrified, and sighs. “Oh my god, does that mean you’re going to quote this movie at me for weeks on end?”

Juju nods, gleeful.

“Hey Trixie,” Kim asks after a while, causing Trixie to instinctively life her head away from Katya’s, an action she immediately regrets. “Did you know Chi Chi has never had honey before?”

Trixie stares at Chi Chi, putting on an expression of shock and horror that she feels is entirely justified. She can barely get through a single breakfast without honey. Chi Chi shrugs and doesn’t even look up from the screen between his hands.

“You like honey so much?” Katya asks, frowning at the screen. She’s sinking even deeper into the couch now, her face about the height of Trixie’s belly, her feet almost touching Adore on the floor in front of them.

Kim reacts before Trixie can. She sits up straighter in her arm chair, and puts on an affected voice that Trixie used to do all the time – as a joke – years ago, but can’t have slipped into more than three or five times since she moved here: “Does she like honey? Oh honey, she loves honey! Honey!”

Katya wheezes, and hits Trixie’s arm multiple times, as if she’s expecting her to join in.

“I don’t sound like that,” Trixie claims, putting on a fake pout, and feels less than sure about this fact when she sees most of the people in the room grinning at her, and Jinkx giving her an apologetic nod. Trixie buries her face in her blanket and watches half of the next scene through the light red fabric. Now that Trixie is just a blob in a blanket, she seems to be all the more inviting to Katya, who snuggles up to her even more closely. Trixie tries her best to sit still and be a comfortable cushion to Katya – who, in fact, is the opposite of comfortable, shifting around constantly and more than once meeting Trixie’s hips with a sharp elbow or a knee.

“Hang on,” Adore says, yanking Trixie out of her fantasies of Katya joining her under the blanket. Adore sounds drowsy, like they just woke up from a dream. “Is she fucking the bee?” Before anybody answers, Adore rolls over on their belly and buries their face in their arms. “I’m too stoned for this,” they decide, and when Trixie unburies herself from her blanket again, Adore is fast asleep on the carpet in front of her.

♥♥♥

They are well into the movie when Trixie notices Katya rubbing her legs a little. “Are you cold?” she asks, suddenly mortified because all this time she has let Katya sit next to her without a blanket while she was fully wrapped in one. Maybe that’s why Katya’s been snuggling up against her. She was cold.

Katya nods, distractedly, her eyes glued to the screen. “I think I love the fiancé too,” she says, quietly, to Trixie only. “Like, ‘I got issues!’, same.”

“I got issues!” Juju yells back at her across the room.
Trixie unwraps herself from the blanket, takes a second to get the fabric out from under her butt, then offers half the blanket to Katya. Katya grins, takes the fabric and then moves in even closer to Trixie. Her cold thighs are now touching Trixie’s under the blanket. Trixie is glad Katya is wearing long leggings, and she doesn’t have to deal with Katya’s naked thigh against hers. She tries her best to focus on what’s going on on the screen. Incredibly enough, it’s a court hearing featuring the bee. She can feel Katya’s body moving softly with her breathing. It’s almost dark outside, and the living room is lit only by the flickering TV. If she moved her hand only two inches, she could hold Katya’s hand. Even though she knows there is no way she could psyche herself up enough to close the distance between their hands, she removes the two rather chunky rings on her left hand and puts them on her right, making her hand more comfortable to hold, hypothetically.

Towards the end of the movie, Trixie only takes in just enough of the movie to join the others in throwing in funny commentary every other minute. Katya’s body against hers is thrilling and giving her just the right amount of giddy energy she needs to be the funniest person in the room, making Katya – and, she thinks but barely checks, the others as well – shake with laughter with almost every word out of her mouth. She is pleased with herself. By the end of the movie, she is buzzing with glee, ready to talk the others into having an impromptu dance party in the living room, but one look at Kim’s apologetic face pulls her back into reality. Earlier that day Trixie made Kim swear she would make sure to get Trixie home right after the movie ends, since Trixie has to get up and take her first ever college exam early the next morning. She sighs and lets her head drop back into the couch, pulling the blanket over herself once more. Maybe if Kim doesn’t see her, she will forget about Trixie’s existence and go home without her. Maybe Trixie can stay on this couch forever, alone under her blanket that smells faintly of honey by now.

“What are we doing,” Katya whispers, and suddenly Trixie isn’t alone under the blanket any longer. Katya’s face is right next to hers, in the semi-dark and tinted red by the blanket.

“I am hiding,” Trixie informs her, and giggles a little when Katya responds with a serious nod and pulls up her knees, so she is fully covered by the blanket.

“I’m hiding with you,” Katya says, “they’ll never find us.” Katya rearranges her legs, so her feet are propped on the couch on Trixie’s other side, her legs thrown over Trixie’s. She leans against Trixie’s side where she has already spent most of tonight, and closes her eyes, almost as if she was trying to fall asleep against Trixie. Cocooned in the blanket, Trixie senses Katya’s flowery scent intermingling with her own body milk, and she closes her eyes and just breathes for a long moment. She feels at peace and fully relaxed until Katya rearranges her position slightly, and suddenly she can feel Katya’s breath against her cleavage. Katya’s face is dangerously close to her mostly exposed breasts, and she wishes she had worn anything but a nightgown today.

“Fun time’s over,” Kim announces dryly when she yanks off the blanket only seconds later, “time for exams.”

Trixie shakes off the blanket reluctantly, wrapping it around Katya’s skinny frame before she gets up with a long and dramatic sigh and follows Kim into the hallway. Katya trails behind her, wrapped in the blanket, almost tripping over Adore who’s still asleep on the floor. She hugs Trixie goodbye by wrapping their blanket around them one last time and for a moment Trixie wonders again if she can’t just stay here for the night.

“Who says you need to be in love to have a great valentine’s day?” Jinkx asks when Trixie and Kim are already standing out on the doorstep, the cold wind biting into Trixie’s thighs and reminding her of her ridiculous choice to leave her apartment in a nightgown in February. The night is dark around them, with the porch light providing only a dim flickering light, and Trixie
hovers on the porch for a moment, doesn’t want to step into the drizzling rain outside, even though Jinkx let her burrow their umbrella.

Jinkx is hugging Katya to their side, and when the cold air sweeps into the house, Katya snakes a piece of her blanket around Jinkx’ middle.

Trixie lets her eyes linger on Katya for a long moment.

Standing on the doorstep, freezing, and looking at Katya in her cat sweater, Trixie admits something to herself for the very first time: She is in love. She is in love with Katya. Deeply so.

♥♥♥

Once she’s back in her room, lying in her bed with her whole body under her blanket to warm herself up, her heart is still pounding fast, and she feels there is no way she is going to fall asleep now. She has to be up in a couple of hours to face her first ever college exam in the morning and her mind runs from worrying about the exam to thinking about Katya laughing, thinking about Katya’s breath on her skin, thinking about her revelation in the hallway less than an hour ago.

She’s in love with Katya. Is she in love with Katya? Can she be in love with Katya? Is she allowed to be? What even is love?

“Hey Kim?” she whispers into the darkness, knowing Kim is awake still from the pattern of her breathing.

“Hmm,” comes Kim’s answer from the other side of the room.

“I need to say something,” Trixie says, louder now, and knots her hands together over her stomach.

“What?”

“I think I’m in love with Katya.” Saying this feels like taking a risk, though she doesn’t know what she’s risking.

“Okay.”

“What do you mean okay?” Trixie really needs Kim to have a bigger reaction than that. Her being in love with Katya is anything but just ‘okay’.

“What do you want me to say?” Kim asks, and Trixie thinks she can sense a grin in Kim’s voice. She’s enjoying this, Trixie realises. She has probably seen this conversation coming before Trixie knew she needed to have it.

“Do you think I’m in love with Katya?”

She can hear rustling of the covers, Kim is turning from her back to her side to face Trixie in the darkness. “Does that matter?”

“Of course it matters if I’m in love with Katya or not!” Trixie almost sits up in her bed now but stops herself. She really should fall asleep quite soon. “It matters quite a lot.”

Kim laughs quietly. “You’re cute, Trixie,” she says, her voice muffled by the pillow. “I mean, does it matter if I think you’re in love? That’s for you to know and decide.”

“I decide I’m in love with Katya then.”
“Great. I like Katya.”

“I like Katya too, oh god! So much!” Trixie all but gushes and really has to try hard to not get up, turn on the lights and talk Kim into having a midnight snack with her while she talks about her feelings. “But what does that mean now?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, what happens now?”

“Oh. I assume more of you looking at her like she’s put the stars in the sky, more of you acting like an idiot, and then either you getting together, or you getting your heart broken, or both.”

Trixie sighs dramatically. “Kim!” She throws one of her spare pillows, deciding at the last second that she can’t aim it at Kim in the dark because she doesn’t want to topple the orchid or the glass of water always standing on Kim’s nightstand, and the pillow ends up lying on the floor in front of Kim’s bed. “Stop being you for a minute and talk to me about how cute Katya is?”

“Super cute,” Kim answers drily. “Makes me feel all the things. How about we go to sleep now, and you tell me all about your feelings tomorrow? I have things to do too tomorrow, believe it or not.”

“Hmpf,” Trixie agrees. She knows Kim has a meeting with her favourite professor tomorrow, who she hopes can give her some advice on what she could do about her major, and Trixie really does need to get some sleep, no matter how much she is or isn’t in love with Katya. She turns over so she’s facing the wall, hugging her pillow to her chest. She feels calmer now, glad to have spoken her feelings out loud. Before she falls asleep, another thought strikes her, and she asks Kim, in a whisper:

“Hey, Kim? Were you the one who put in Bee Movie?”

Kim doesn’t answer for a full minute, and Trixie is almost certain she’s fallen asleep already. Trixie is just about to lose herself in a fantasy of herself hugging Katya to her side on the couch while watching that Bee win – or lose? – their court case when Kim’s answer comes:

“You can’t prove that.”

Kim starts lightly snoring just minutes after, and Trixie can’t sleep. She did enough studying, she knows that, and trusts herself to do okay tomorrow, but still her mind is racing with technical terms and theories and an hour after Kim has fallen asleep she is still lying awake. She turns to her other side for what must be the twentieth time now, hugs her favourite pillow to her chest and buries her face in another one. She needs to relax. She needs to think about something nice. She needs to think about Katya. She thinks about Katya lying there with her, her back flush against Trixie’s chest. Trixie has one arm under Katya’s neck and Katya’s weight is heavy on that arm, but she doesn’t mind, just as she doesn’t mind Katya’s baby hairs tickling her nose. Her other arm hugs Katya close around her middle and rises and falls slowly with Katya’s breathing. Trixie buries her face deeper in Katya’s hair and breathes in the daisies, breathes in and out, in and out, and after a while follows Katya into blissful sleep.

Chapter End Notes
if you like this or have any thoughts on it at all, please consider letting me know by commenting, all i ever do after updating is refresh the comments page and hope :’}
Trixie wakes up early the next morning, too early, and after only a couple hours of sleep. She feels tired and beat but knows as soon as she turns around to her other side that she isn’t going to fall back asleep. Her stomach is fluttering with apprehension and doubt about today’s exam and she spends half an hour lying there, in the dark, going through everything they might expect her to know today. She knows a lot, she realizes, has by now even absorbed the parts of her notes that she deemed barely relevant, but that doesn’t stop her insides from twisting nervously.

Failing to calm herself without relying on the calming colours of her phone screen and the familiar feeling of the plastic case in her hand, she pulls the phone out from under her pillow. She is relieved there are some messages in the Love Shack Baby group chat to take her mind of her exam.

**Jinkx:** *Good luck to Chi Chi, Sasha and Trixie with their exams tomorrow morning!*

**Chi Chi:** *Someone make sure I get up on time tm please*

**Katya:** *When do you want to be woken up*

**Katya:** *it’s not like I ever sleep anyway*

**Chi Chi:** *7!*

**Katya:** *am or pm*

**Katya:** *will do*

**Katya:** *I’ll wake you up with a song*

**Katya:** *pick one*

**Chi Chi:** *no*

**Katya:** *The ravioli song it is*

**Adore:** *The walls are thin and if you wake me up with the ravioli song again I’ll straight up*
Adore: I’m from Azusa, I’ll stab a bitch

Adore: Also your singing is abysmal

Katya: Unfortunately that hurts all of my feelings!

Katya: and don’t worry I’ll whisper it into his ear

Chi Chi: nevermind I just set three alarms stay out of my room I’m locking the door

Katya: is anyone up for a walk rn

There was a long break between Chi Chi’s last message and Katya’s; Katya sent her last message at 3 am and Trixie feels uneasy at the thought of Katya being awake and unable to sleep and nobody being there for her. At the same time, she’s glad she wasn’t on her phone last night when Katya sent that message, or she knows she wouldn’t have been able to sleep. Would she have tried to find a way to distract Katya? Would she even have offered to take a walk with her? She’s glad she doesn’t know the answer to those questions.

Now that she’s awake and in need of a distraction, she decides to text Katya and see if she’s doing okay.

Trixie

I hope you’re asleep bc you should be, but I also hope you’re not asleep so you can talk to me

To Trixie’s relief, Katya answers immediately.

Katya

Complex feelings

Trixie

Complex woman

Katya

I love that

What do you want to talk about

Trixie

Developmental speech delay

Katya

Ok!

Uh

…who would play it in a movie?
Trixie

I’m scared I’m not going to find the right room for my exam and then I’ll run around campus for an hour like a crazy person and never get there and fail by default.

And maybe once I give up trying to find that room I don’t even find my way back home bc I’m so lost at that point.

And then I’m bound to wander around campus forever, not ever taking a single exam, not ever going home.

And then all my plants are going to die bc Kim won’t water them and I don’t even understand why, she’s so good with the rest of the household shit.

She even bought the nicest silver watering can and it’s just standing in the hallway collecting dust.

They’ll all die, Katya.

Katya

Isn’t the exam in your usual room?

Trixie

Yes

But you never know.

Maybe they changed the room.

Maybe the building got removed over night because of a rodent infestation.

Or what if it is there but I’m not going to make it there because I trip and fall into a hole in the ground.

Trixie is catastrophizing, and knows it. Overplaying her anxieties and making them sound ridiculous in the process has always helped her in situations like this and she isn’t holding back now, not when Katya never seems to hold back with her. She can already feel herself feeling slightly better, turning her real anxieties into a source of entertainment for herself, and maybe, hopefully, Katya as well.

Katya

Do you want me to take you to your exam?

I’m up anyway.

I can bring you breakfast and we’ll go together and in case of surprising building removals, I’ll make sure you get home safe at least, and if you fall into the hole I will either drag you out or at least visit you there sometimes and show you collages of your withering plants.

Trixie’s heart skips a beat and she nuzzles her face into her pillow. God yes, she wants Katya to take her to her exams. She can’t believe Katya offered. Katya seems to have some experience with calming anxious people down.

Trixie
No it’s okay but thank you! I’m going to be a big girl and do it myself

I’m getting up now and I’ll take the longest hottest shower and then I’ll do the thing

Katya

Yes you will!

I believe in you

Look at the sunrise

[pic]

Remember the sun is going to rise tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that no matter what happens today

Well, except you’ll never see it again in case you fall into that hole in the ground after all

That would be a shame

Trixie

Omg! Are you outside?

Katya

Yes

Taking a walk

Walking is good

Trixie

Is it a hobby?

Katya

I decided everything can be a hobby

So yes

Texting you is a hobby too

Hobby number 21

Or 24

Trixie turns her phone screen black after that but spends another couple of seconds looking at the dead screen anyway. She can see the faint outline of her face staring at her from the screen. She’s tempted to switch the screen on again, to continue this conversation that she feels she could easily get sucked into and that’s flowing so easily between them. Texting her is one of Katya’s hobbies. Katya is such a good texter too. She switches the screen back on and off two more times but refrains from sending another text. She has to get ready now. It’s show time.
It’s not show time. Trixie is over half an hour early to her exam, since she planned in a lot of time in case of emergency, like sudden building-removals. The building is still there, muddy white and bleak against the grey morning sky outside, looking like it has always been there and will always be there. Trixie sees some people she recognizes from her lecture lurking outside, giving her confidence that she is indeed in the right place. It’s a dreary day, it’s drizzling slightly, and the wind makes Trixie shiver, so she decides to wait in the building for the remaining half hour.

There are a couple of students scattered in the hallways, all of them waiting for different exams, most of them radiating off nervous energy, and Trixie flops down on the ground leaning against the wall, taking out her phone. She’s been itching to talk to Katya this whole time and is almost proud of herself to not have texted her in way over an hour. Talk about self-control.

Trixie

*What do I do for the next thirty minutes that’s not freaking out over the exam*

Katya

*Have you tried meditation?*

Trixie

*I’m not going to meditate in the hallway in front of my lecture hall, Katya*

Katya

*Fair*

*Jasmine is telling me to try meditation*

*Idk maybe I should try it?*

Trixie

*Jasmine?*

Katya

*Jasmine!!*

*Jushmine!*

*Don’t eat other people spaghetti*

Trixie

*Ah yeah I just remembered*

*A guy just walked by in fleece pyjamas*

*Like wow and here I thought I wasn’t put together*

Katya
It be like that sometimes
You’re always very put together, so beautiful
I’m not sure I can do mediation
But I’ll try
For Jasmine

Trixie
Now?

Katya
No I’m going to wait till you’re in your exam
Wouldn’t want for any holes to swallow you up and nobody there to notice

Trixie
You’re not leaving me alone right now? :’)

Katya
I’m not!

Trixie
That’s so nice

Katya
I am!

But also
I don’t want to be alone right now I guess
It hasn’t been a good night

Trixie
Oh
Is it because of Bee Movie
I know who put it in do you want me to tell you

Katya
I know it’s Kim, it has to be

Trixie
How did you know
Katya

I know things

Trixie

Do you wanna talk about what’s up with you?

Guy with the pyjamas just came back with four donuts and is now sitting next to me eating them, I’m thinking he’s making good choices, I wish I had donuts

Katya

You deserve all the donuts

I failed my relationship? That’s not a good thing to know

I don’t think I like donuts

So sticky

Trixie

Relationships ending doesn’t mean you failed

You’re allowed to fail, too

But I don’t think you did

It was so tough with the distance and all

Katya

Can I tell you a secret?

Trixie

Yes!

Fuck sorry they’re letting us into the room early and I’m not allowed to have my phone in there sorry sorry ttyl don’t forget the secret!!

♥♥♥

The lecture hall is big, windowless and lit by a bright unnatural light that emanates a high-frequency whirring sound. Trixie can’t hear it now, not over the sound of everybody shuffling in to take a seat, but she knows she will be hearing it later once all of them are quietly working, always faint enough that she can’t be sure it’s truly there, always present enough to demand her attention. She makes sure to take a seat near the exit; in case she is done before the others she wants to be able to leave without the nightmare of having to squeeze herself through the rows of students still working. She knows that if faced with the decision to do that or to stay put for the rest of the exam, she would choose the latter option, an option that would inevitably lead to her freaking herself out about all her answers and trying to make improvements that end up doing the opposite of improving.

She put her phone into her bag the moment she walked into the room and now that she’s sitting in
her seat and has another fifteen minutes ahead of her before the exam starts, she doesn’t want to be without it. Under her table, she gets the phone out of her bag one more time with nervous fingers. She knows she’s not allowed her phone in here; in their last lecture they were told that them seeing a student with a phone out could lead to that student being disqualified from taking the exam altogether. Trixie is nothing if not a fearless risk-taker. Or at least that’s what she occasionally likes to pretend.

Katya

*You’ll do great!*  

*Also a wise, beautiful woman once said: you’re allowed to fail*  

*But seriously, don’t fail*  

*Shangie passed this class, it would be so embarrassing*  

*But also if you fail I’ll still like you*

*Nothing you’ll write on that stupid piece of paper today will change the fact that I like you and that the sun will continue to go up and down and you’re okay!*

One of her professor’s assistants is walking past the rows of students, telling them which items to clear off their too-small desks. Who in the world thought these tables provide enough space to write an exam on them? Trixie’s desk is filled with her pencil case, different coloured highlighters, an apple and gummy bears as snacks, a thermos of herbal tea, and the little tacky figurine of an angel that her mom gave her as a good luck charm when she got her driver’s licence. Trixie had never felt any particular connection to that angel but had randomly remembered it sitting in the top drawer of her night stand this morning and stuffed it into her coat pockets upon leaving. Couldn’t hurt. Now her desk is full, and she doesn’t know where to fit her exam, least of all how to comfortably write for two hours on it.

The assistant gives Trixie a pointed look, raising an eyebrow and shaking her head slightly. Trixie bites her lip and gives her a little apologetic nod before slipping the phone back into her bag. She spends the next fifteen minutes with her head in her arms, once again racing through every possible and impossible exam question through her mind. She wishes she could text instead.

♥♥♥

Trixie is used to doing well at what she tackles. She learned how to play the guitar and how to sing, and she does it well. She learned how to sew, and she does it well. She’s learning how to be a good teacher and carer and doing it well. She is fully aware of her shortcomings – her awful sense of direction, her scatterbrain, her mouth running before consulting her brain and leading to her coming off even more insensitive than she is – but the things she tackles, she succeeds in.

Coming out of the exam, she feels she did okay. She was able to answer all of the questions but knows most of her answers weren’t perfect. She feels a little confused by the feeling of having done okay, she isn’t used to mediocrity, and is unsure if it is a feeling she can grow to be comfortable with. At the same time, she can’t help but embrace the wave of relief that washes over her as soon as the door of the lecture hall falls close behind her, separating her from the large group of students who are still furiously scribbling down their knowledge and best guesses. Before she gets stuck in a useless loop of going over every exam questions again, she gets her phone out of her bag again, finally.
Trixie

What’s the secret?

Katya

How did it go?

Trixie

It went ok!

I even remembered to put my name on top of every page, so what could possibly go wrong

Triksy

I wanna feel relieved but also there is another five exams coming up, send help please

Katya

I love Triksy

I can’t believe I’m done with exams

It’s surreal

Congrats on getting through the first one, that was probably as anxiety-inducing as it’s gonna get

Trixie

Thank you!

Also what’s the secret, I love secrets

Katya

Okay but don’t tell anyone

This movie, Contact

I’ve never seen it

I’ve been pretending it’s my favorite movie for so long now

And it is, kind of

Like, aesthetically

Dead dad on the beach, hello

But I’ve never seen it and at this point I’m too scared to admit that

What would people think

I really wanted to watch it on Valentine’s and finally get it over with

Trixie
Katya

That’s not the secret you really wanted to tell me, is it?

Katya

It’s not.

Trixie

Oh wow

What else about you is a lie?

Katya

The whole thing, honestly

The whole entire thing

♥♥♥

Trixie is still standing in front of her lecture hall, leaned against the wall for support and in order to
not stand too much in the way of the other students. She looks up from her phone for the first time
in a while and shakes her head lightly to bring herself back into reality. She can’t spend all day on
her phone texting Katya, can she? She’s trying to think of the things she needs to do today,
thoughts she wasn’t able to focus on before getting the first exam over with. She’s all out of
groceries. She would leech off Kim, but Kim is lately mostly buying things Trixie doesn’t like to
eat and she’s pretty sure that’s Kim’s more or less subtle way of getting Trixie to stop stealing her
stuff without telling her to stop to her face. She’ll have to go grocery shopping. Also, and she
thinks about this with a feeling of dread, she definitely needs to at least go over her notes for
tomorrow’s exam again. She wants nothing more than a day to treat herself for doing okay today,
but alas, this isn’t granted to her, won’t be granted to her all week.

With a sigh she pushes herself off the wall and starts walking to the grocery store, slowly, her
phone still in hand.

Trixie

How was meditation?

Katya

Hard!

I really want to get into it

Meditation is going to make me work for it and I’m ready, bitch

I thought it was all about getting your mind to stop going, but it isn’t, it’s about slowing it down a
bit, maybe

I could use that

My mind is fast af, always running away from me somewhere in the distance
Trixie

*Did you go home to meditate or did you do it on your walk?*

Katya

*I did it there*

*With the sunrise! It was warm! Ish!*

Trixie tucks her phone into her coat pocket for a moment. She’s in the middle of a busy street, the wind biting into her fingers where she still holds onto her cold phone, and closes her eyes for a second, stuck between wanting to imagine Katya meditating in the light of the rising sun and wanting to shake the picture at the same time. Trixie likes texting, has always liked it. There is something comforting about having a never-ending conversation going, constantly ready for her to return to it, just waiting for her in her coat pockets. A conversation that can be anything, from her sharing her daily life, to her distracting herself from it. She hasn’t done a lot of texting lately but is now reminded of all the texting she did back when she was with Courtney; conversations that seemingly never ended and that for months brightened up dreary days of working the hotel’s front desk. Of course, constant texting also distracts her in a negative way, makes her lose track of the things going on right in front of her, and frustrates people like her mom or her boss, and, right now, strangers in the street that just want to go about their daily life and now have to walk around Trixie where she’s barely moving in the middle of the street. She forces herself to walk on, slowly, squinting up from her display at least every couple of seconds.

Trixie

*Sounds amazing*

*Maybe I should try it*

Katya

*What are you doing now?*

Trixie

*I’m headed to the grocery store*

*Why, do you want to hang out?*

Katya

*Nah, I have stuff to do today*

*I need to get started on my last painting, I need to hand them in in two weeks*

*And then I’m DONE*

Trixie

*And you’re staying in Boston, right?*
When Katya’s answer doesn’t come immediately, Trixie stashes her phone away once more and hurries to the store, eager to get out of the cold air and to make up for the time she’s lost by being glued to her phone.

Once she’s reached the store, Katya still hasn’t answered her. Maybe she isn’t staying in Boston after all? Trixie swallows around a lump in her throat and makes her way over to the shopping cards. She’s probably not going to buy much, since everything she buys she has to carry home on a thirty-minute walk, but she hates carrying everything in her arms at the store and always gets a card, even if she knows she’s just going to buy three or five things. She likes idly strolling through the store, taking her time, her elbows propped up on the shopping card, her fingers drumming to the beat of the music coming through her headphones, and generally being in everybody’s way.

The air in the store is warm, too warm, and Trixie shrugs off her coat and throws it into her shopping card next to her backpack. Her dress doesn’t have any pockets, of course it doesn’t. Faced with the choice of leaving her phone in her coat pockets in the card or carrying it around in her hand the whole time, Trixie chooses the latter option. Katya has replied.

**Katya**

*Yes, I want to stay*

*I think I know where I want to work*

*Stay tuned*

**Trixie**

*Another secret?*

**Katya**

*I don’t wanna Jinkx it*

*Jinkx loves when I do that, they’re the best*

*They probably originated it, in a different life*

**Trixie**

*Are they your favorite person?*

**Katya**

*Huh?*

**Trixie**

*Back when I first met you you told me about five people that they are your favorite person*

**Katya**

*Hahaha*

*And I meant it!*

*Jinkx, yes, fully.*
Trixie

You said it about Sasha, Bob

Laganja

Katya

Do you want to be my favorite person? It’s not hard I’ve been told

Trixie

Yes please

What do I need to do?

Why are they out of skittles

I deserve them

Katya

You do!

Trixie

What am I going to make for dinner today?

Katya

Don’t ask me

I don’t even like food

Trixie

WHO ARE YOU

Katya

So I have a question about Pearl

Trixie

God, why

Ok go

Katya

Are things, uh, over?

Did they ever start?

What’s going on
Trixie

There are zero things going on

Katya

Okay, sorry, I didn’t mean to bother you

Trixie

You’re not, sorry

I guess I’m just annoyed with myself for starting this mess, I knew it wasn’t gonna go anywhere

I always think I’m gonna make better choices and then I…don’t

Katya

Why’s that?

Trixie’s hands automatically open her keyboard to reply, but then she hesitates, and finally slips her phone into her bra and tries to focus on the here and now, the grocery store. She manages to focus for almost five minutes, five minutes in which she gets all the ingredients she needs to make pizza for both her and Kim today. She even makes sure to get the too-expensive sea food Kim likes to put on her side of the pizza; Kim hasn’t had the easiest past couple of days what with her being faced with the decision to bomb her exams or not go at all. Some delicious pizza would probably do her good. Once Trixie’s gotten everything she needs, she makes her way to the store’s small beauty department.

She itches to tell Katya the truth about her and Pearl – well, not the small part Katya plays here, of course, but the part that is about Trixie needing romance, and something big and exciting, and not a casual fling, and how everything about her interaction screamed fling to her even though she’s aware that that was at least fifty percent her doing, and that maybe things with Pearl could have been different if she had given her a chance.

Feeling rather dauntless, she decides to go for it. If Katya is going to be her friend, there is no reason for her not to know what Trixie looks for in a relationship. Somehow, she feels like this is even crucial information for Katya to have. She questions that feeling for only a second, a second that makes her hide her face in a pack of pads she just picked up to consider if she wants her pads to smell like jasmine instead of natural cotton for once. Of course this isn’t crucial information for Katya. Why would it be?

Trixie

I think Pearl wanted something casual

Or maybe that’s not what she wanted, but at least it’s what I thought she wanted

And I don’t want that

I want ROMANCE

I deserve it

Katya
I love that

What’s ROMANCE?

Like, taking you star gazing on a lake and letting a lantern with your name carved into it fly into the sky?

Trixie can’t help but get lost in the idea of this for a moment, even though she’s sure Katya is teasing her. She can see the little waves their boat draws into the lake, the stars and the lanterns reflecting in the water, and in Katya’s green eyes, green eyes that look at her like she’s the most beautiful thing in the world. She almost walks into a stack of paper towels that are on sale. She picks a pack of them up. You can never have enough paper towels.

Trixie

Yes, and then there’s a second boat following us that has a string orchestra on it and that plays music she wrote just for me and that’s just about how her life is cotton candy just because I’m in it, and then there’s also shooting stars that she made happen just by sheer force of her love for me, and it’s not only one lantern but 27 and every lantern contains a handwritten love letter to me by her, each sealed with tears cried of happiness.

No, I think ROMANCE to me means that I want there to be love and commitment, and I want to be all in, and I want the other person to be all in as well

But some stargazing never hurts

Katya

You deserve all of that

I guess Pearl is okay, but from what Violet told me she isn’t exactly a romantic

Trixie’s smile that has been pulling on her lips for the past couple of minutes slides off her face at the mention of Violet’s name. Katya hasn’t mentioned Violet all week, and more than once Trixie had been tempted to ask but refrained. Before she can send a reply, Katya goes on.

Katya

But then Violet isn’t a romantic either, so maybe that’s why

Trixie

Are you a romantic?

Katya

I don’t know!

Stay tuned

I might be ready to get real about the secret now

The one I wanted to share earlier and that definitely wasn’t about Contact

Also if you tell anyone about Contact I’ll never take you stargazing
Trixie

I’m all ears

Or eyes

She’s standing in front of the store’s two rather small perfume shelves now, her favourite part of the store. She knows the perfumes are disgustingly overpriced, but something about the neat flasks with the prettily coloured liquids inside always pulls her in, and she spends a couple of minutes with her phone tucked away, sampling her favourite scents. There’s a scent called Daisy that she has seen countless times but doesn’t remember ever sampling before. Katya smells like daisies, or at least that’s what Trixie always associates with her scent, regardless of the fact that she doesn’t know what daisies smell like. She throws the white paper sampling strips in a silver trash can on the bottom of the shelf and picks up the bottle, spraying the scent on the inside of her wrist. It smells like Katya. She grins happily, feels like she has solved a riddle she doesn’t know she’s been trying to solve, and gets out her phone to ask Katya to confirm her findings.

Katya

It’s less of a secret and more of a whole bunch of stuff I haven’t admitted to anyone

Okay I need you to ask me again

About what the secret is

Trixie

Okay

What’s the secret, Katya?

Katya

I think I hated the open relationship

I mean I didn’t at first

And I think open relationships aren’t bad, hypothetically speaking

But I hated it

Trixie

God

I would never be in one

I would die

Katya

I did die

Trixie

I don’t even like them hypothetically speaking
Katya

No, they could be so great
Such a great concept
But this one wasn’t
And maybe I’m not made for it
It was lonely as fuck
And made me so anxious, you have no idea

Trixie

Did you ever try to, uh, close the relationship?

Katya

That’s part 2 of the secret! Part 2/38
I did
Last summer, a little while before you came here

Trixie

And what happened?
Did she cheat on you?
I’m going to kill her

Trixie switches her screen off for a moment and considers the display of perfumes in front of her, not taking any of it in anymore. How could anyone ever cheat on Katya? Is it too late to go to New York just to retroactively yell at Violet? All of a sudden, she is hit by the smell of a bunch of different perfumes fighting for attention on her skin, her clothes, and her hair. The resulting mixture of scents is nasty and overwhelming. She pushes her cart away from the perfumes, and switches on her screen once more.

Katya

Trixie!
She didn’t cheat on me
I fucked the whole thing up
Told her I can’t be committed right now about three weeks in
Fucked a guy at the gas station, can you believe
He bought me pringles for my troubles

Trixie
Relatable.

Katya

Ha

Trixie

Why couldn’t you be committed to her?

Trixie puts her phone down for a moment, more than a little nervous about Katya’s answer. She hasn’t thought a lot about the fact that Katya being in an open relationship could mean that’s what Katya does, and Katya doesn’t do monogamy. Trixie hasn’t thought about this because it didn’t matter, Katya wasn’t exactly a realistic option for her and even if she was, Violet had seemed like the tangible obstacle in their way, while monogamy had seemed like an irrelevant and completely elusive second-rate obstacle. What if Katya now tells her she’s not interested in monogamy at all? Trixie would have to really force herself out of the quick sand that is her crush by now, force herself out by the roots of her hair, and she’s not sure she could do it. But of course she could. She would just have to.

Katya

I wanted to

But she wasn’t here and we weren’t used to it, it messed our dynamics up so much. It was a whole new relationship, and all of a sudden we didn’t feel compatible anymore. She just wasn’t here

I don’t know, relationships are complicated

Trixie

So you’d say that hypothetically you could be in a monogamous relationship?

This question feels more than risky to Trixie. Is she being too obvious? Trixie has always been a quick and thoughtless texter, typing away her words at a speed that her brain can barely keep up with, just firing her every thought into the world collected in her phone and wishing for the best. Her heart is beating fast inside her chest as she’s strolling through the pet food isle for the third time, unsure of why she is in that isle in the first place.

Katya

I think so?

But also I’ve never tried it, not for real

I used to hate the idea of giving up sex with other people but like

I’ve come to the realization that sex is grossly overrated

It’s just sex

It just is

It’s not what’s important
This is lame, I’m sorry

I don’t miss Violet as much as I thought I would

I miss her, but it’s, like

Manageable? I thought it would be so much worse

If I had known this I would have broken up with her sooner, I think

Did you decide what you’re going to cook?

Trixie

Were you thinking about breaking up with her earlier?

Katya

Kind of

I thought about it first last summer when I got too overwhelmed with missing her and had trouble getting anything done anymore

Then I thought about it when I realized I couldn’t commit to her

I thought about it the first time she fucked Valentina and I got way more jealous than I should have

I thought about it when I realized that travelling with her wasn’t an option, or at least not a healthy one

So I guess the answer is yes, a bunch of times

Trixie

Why did you never do it?

Katya

I just really wanted us to work, I really did

And then also

This is also a secret

Sometimes

Sometimes I hoped she would be the one to do the breaking up

I know she thought about it a lot also

I didn’t want this to be in my hands I think

Because I’m a coward

And she had a million and one reasons to break up with me, but she just never did

Trixie
She must have really loved you

Katya
Yes
And I her
And that’s the tragedy of it
God
I want pringles
As sad as all of this is I gotta say it’s nice to know that I’m capable of it
Love, I mean
What a big feeling
I wasn’t sure I could do it

Trixie
Do you still love her?

Katya
You’re going HARD today
It’s okay though, I need to talk about this stuff, I think
It’s not a yes or no question
I don’t love her the way I used to love her, and wonderfully enough I don’t feel like texting her all the time and I don’t feel like crawling back to her and I don’t fantasize about kissing her
But I can, like
Access the love I used to have for her for sure
It doesn’t hit me in the face while I’m going through the motions, but if I consciously think about it, I can remember loving her, and can sort of re-create that feeling? Not fully though. And I’m not indulging it. And I fully think it’s the best that we are broken up, I can’t see any way back to her to be honest

Trixie is a little floored with how open and honest Katya is with her. Now that she thinks about it, Katya has always been open with her to a fault, has never hidden anything from her, even back when they barely knew each other. Still, she didn’t expect to get all of her questions concerning Violet and Katya answered by simply asking them.

She’s at the checkout now, standing in a line that’s much too long considering they have four cash registers open. Why does the rest of the world always decide to go shopping the exact moment Trixie goes shopping? Does nobody have anything better to do?

In order to not fully drown in her conversation with Katya – Katya she realised she was in love with
just last night, a feeling she can’t help but scrutinise – she focusses on the groceries she put on the belt. In moments of boredom she likes to imagine what picture of Trixie the person at the checkout puzzles together for themselves based solely on Trixie’s shopping. Of course, the person at the cash register never cares at all, and neither would she if she had to sit there for hours on end, tortured by that unnecessary beeping sound. Based on today’s shopping, Trixie thinks, one could come to pretty accurate assumptions about her life. She got two bottles of nail polish, a white one for herself – she already owns one almost like this one but this one comes in much prettier packaging – and a dark purple one for Kim because she thinks Kim might like it and she still always uses Kim’s products too much. She got milk and honey shampoo, make up wipes, paper towels, pads, napkins with a daisy print that she doesn’t know what she wants them for, a lavender scented candle, the ingredients to make pizza, white chocolate, grapes, and oranges, and she knows she’s going to struggle to carry all of these things home.

Once she’s paid, she squeezes as many items as possible into her too-small backpack and makes her way home, both arms full of groceries. What was Katya’s last message again? Did Trixie reply? When she realizes she can’t wait till she’s home to check her phone she puts down her groceries as soon as she passes a bench and fishes her phone out of her pocket with a slight eye roll. She should be able to wait. She hasn’t replied to Katya’s last message, but that hasn’t stopped Katya from sending more.

Katya

I’m scared I’ll never have a functioning relationship

I really want to, I think

Maybe I shouldn’t right now

Trixie

Katya!

If you want to find somebody to be exclusive with you and be there for you and give you all the attention in the world, you will find them

Trixie wants to add: Look around, somebody like this is already here, hello I’m here, please let me shower you in love and attention. She doesn’t, and she’s almost proud of herself for noticing no trace of flirting in her messages even though her stomach flutters a tiny little bit every time Katya’s name pops up on her screen.

Katya

Maybe

If this is what I want, I don’t know

God, I’m sorry, I’m a mess today

I feel weird

Sasha isn’t home, she has a date

How DARE she

Trixie
It’s okay, I’m here

Do you want me to come over? I just bought everything I need to make pizza

I could come over and make it and then not let you have any of it because you said you don’t like food and honestly wtf

Does that count for pizza too?

Katya

No it’s okay, I’m painting

And you need to study, probably, right?

But thank you! It’s so nice talking to you

I like chocolate pizza!

Trixie

I’m going to pretend you didn’t say that about pizza

On my way home now and I’ll try to study for at least half an hour when I’m there, fingers crossed

Not going to reply for a couple minutes, need to get my groceries home

Katya

I just don’t like cheese, ugh

The whole way home, Trixie can’t stop mulling over the implications of the conversation they are having. The thought of actually being Katya’s girlfriend had always been so abstract to her, abstract enough that she hadn’t thought about any specifics, nothing beyond the point of wanting to kiss and fuck Katya, to hold her hand and hold her close at night, and, if she’s honest, doing a lot of stargazing with her. Now that she’s talking about relationships with Katya in a rather abstract way, her mind starts running away from her, conjuring what a relationship with Katya could actually be like. Would she be up for it?

Once she’s home she sees a couple of new messages on her screen. She opens the newest one first; it’s her mom asking her if her exam went okay. With her coat and boots still on and she sends her a quick reassuring reply including a picture of the angel figurine she snaps right there in the hallway. Then she returns to her conversation with Katya.

Katya

Sorry I realize this sounds all pretty dramatic but it’s really not

I’m barely able to take myself seriously to be honest, it’s like I’m standing next to myself, constantly asking myself: at about what time are you going to get over yourself, bitch?

It’s all ok

I feel like I got this, mostly

My mom called me this morning and asked me if I’m using again
Because everybody thinks I will start again now

But I won’t, not today, and probably not tomorrow and the day after and for sure not next week!

As always when the conversation turns towards drugs, Trixie feels slightly out of the loop. She will have to do a lot of learning if she wants to be more present and relevant in Katya’s life, and she’s up for that, she thinks. Still, while she’s thinking of a reply, she checks on her other messages, all in the Love Shack Baby group chat, a conversation that started eleven minutes ago and is still going as she backreads it. Every time a new message comes through, the previous messages get pushed just a tiny bit further down, making for a less than comfortable read.

Adore: Who’s in the bathroom

Adore: Come oooooon, all my makeup is in there

Juu: Chill

Adore: Are you in there?

Adore: wtf open

Juu: Nope, not me

Juu: Katya, obviously

Juu: I’m not the one blasting fucking Lana del Rey in there, who do you think I am

Juu: I’m a COOL person

Chi Chi: Do we still need to be extra nice to Katya? Bc she’s been in there for like an hour now and I have stuff to do in there

Laganja: Guys!!!!

Sasha: Let the girl have her bath and listen to Lana

Juu: omg Sasha how is the date <3 <3 <333

Adore: Who wants to share their makeup with me today

Laganja: @Chi Chi what do you have to do in the bathroom :’D

Sasha: Juju could you please stop sending me messages, you’ve sent like twenty since I got here and he’s starting to think there’s something wrong with me

Jinkx: @Katya I love you and you can stay in the tub for as long as you want but would you mind turning the music down a little, I’m trying to get something done

Laganja: Date??? Oo

Juu: @Sasha sorry for being excited…

Gia: @Laganja… where are you I’m waiting at the corner
Adore: I can’t believe that bitch turned down the music but has been ignoring me and my reasonable request for forever

Adore: @Katya I’m sorry your life is garbage or whatever but bitch!

When Adore keeps typing – hopefully to say something a little nicer and more placate – Trixie closes the window of the group chat and returns to her messages with Katya.

Trixie

Are you okay? What are you doing?

Katya

Yes!

I’m painting

Trixie

Are you sure? Shh I’m in that group chat too you know

Katya

Damn it

I’m painting in my mind

I’m going to paint

I’m PLANNING

I’m going to start in a minute

Trixie

So Lana, huh?

Katya

Lana gets me

Trixie

I can’t believe you blew off the opportunity for pizza with me, your funny gorgeous friend, just to lie in the bath tab and listen to Lana

You’re in the tub, I assume?

Katya

Yeah

There’s bubbles
Sorry, I’m not a people person today

We can hang out tomorrow, if you want to!

Trixie

I’m not sure I’m up for it tomorrow, to be honest

Or the rest of the week

I’m so STRESSED why can’t the exams be more spread out?

Tomorrow is the worst one

Katya

I believe in you!

Also no worries, I’ve got enough stuff to do myself

But if you feel like you want to do something just hit me up any time

Or we can just text

I remember my first week of exams, I barely survived, God

So I’m here for you, ok?

Also the offer from this morning still stands, I can take you to your exams any day

Trixie

Thank you so much

You’re the nicest

And Katya?

You deserve all the romance you want

All of it

Chapter End Notes

jesus it took me longer to format this chapter for ao3 than to write it. i kept telling myself “I’M NEVER WRITING A TEXTING CHAPTER AGAIN” but i just now remembered chapter 19 is texting again. the things i do for love!

please leave me a comment with your thoughts, i’ll love you forever and send you imaginary daisies <3 have a nice day/night/life!
hello friends, i hope your weekend is going better than mine! if not, i hope this makes it a little brighter! ♥

Trixie’s first week of exams is a blur. Everyday day is either an exam day, the last day to study for an exam, or, at worst, both. Even though most of her exams go well enough, she is in a bad mood most of the week, feeling overwhelmed and frustrated with just about every aspect of her life.

Katya keeps texting her, all but coaching her through her week. Trixie feels bad about the kind of replies she’s offering Katya, feeling like she doesn’t hold up her end of the deal to keep a witty, entertaining, helpful conversation going. Katya is usually the one to text her first and when a conversation gets dropped it’s usually Katya who was the last one to reply. In some unkind moments, Trixie feels smug about the fact that Katya keeps texting her still, is that invested in keeping a conversation going, but most of the time she can’t help but feeling like she’s being a bad conversationalist and an overall let-down. Then again, Katya’s messages that week are pretty much the only thing that bring a smile to her face, and she finds herself continuously checking her phone and being disappointed the few times she doesn’t see Katya’s name on the screen.

When she re-reads bits and pieces of their conversation at 8pm on Friday night – she’s in bed already, looking forward to finally getting more than just a handful of hours of sleep – she is struck by the thought that her texts this week have been nothing but whiney and self-centred. Katya, however, hasn’t stopped being a delight all week, had told Trixie she’s going to be okay, had sent Trixie stupid pictures and videos to distract her, and told her random stories of what was going on in the house now that Trixie wasn’t coming over for a while.

Trixie had half hoped she would have a chance to hang out with Katya tonight, now that the weekend is here and she only has two more exams next week, both of them in classes she feels comparatively comfortable with. A couple of hours earlier, however, she had decided to not even ask Katya what she has going on tonight, and instead to just go to bed.

She is scrolling through their messages, feeling rather touched by the way Katya had taken care of her all week and thinking about texting her – she doesn’t have anything to say, necessarily, but texting Katya before she goes to sleep has become something of a habit this past week and it’s a habit she doesn’t want to let go of now – when she sees Katya typing.

Katya

I remember you said you maybe want to do something this weekend

Do you maybe want to come over tomorrow?

We could try meditating, I feel like you could use that maybe
Or I could

Or we can do literally anything else, just let me know

Trixie closes the window for a moment and hides her face in her pillow. She’s still not quite used to the fact that Katya apparently seeks her out now, wants to spend time with her, is here for her. When did that happen? She feels like in this new dynamic she’s more likely than before to fuck up, to prove herself as a disappointment to Katya.

Trixie

Okay!

I literally can’t think of anything to do because my brain leaked out of my skull and has been missing since Monday, but I’m up for whatever

Katya

Nice

I’ll keep a look out for your brain

Just please try and get enough sleep and then come over whenever you want, I’m here

Also: Proud of you for making it through the week, you’re a warrior

Before she can think of an answer, Trixie falls asleep with her phone in her hand.

♥♥♥

When Trixie wakes up the next morning, she feels better than she has all week. She has gotten an almost acceptable amount of sleep, her room is warm and cosy, and she can take a break from studying for a day with a semi-good conscience. A blessing.

She spends almost two hours lying in bed, dozing, half-listening to Kim eating breakfast and typing away on her laptop; then she takes a long hot shower before treating herself to about half the bath products she owns. She does a face mask, a face scrub, a hair mask, a peeling on her hands and feet, covers her whole body in her favourite honey and milk scented body butter, and spends more time than usual on her hair and makeup to make herself feel beautiful after a whole week of running around looking like hot garbage. Not wanting to put herself through any kind of unnecessary discomfort today, Trixie puts on her light green yoga pants – to match her carefully applied light green sparkling eyeshadow – and her softest white sweater and, after eating a leftover piece of the cake Kim had made her to help her through the week, she makes her way to Katya’s.

When she gets to the house the front door is wide open, as it is most of the time, even, for some reason, in colder months. The kitchen is empty save for Chi Chi, who has fallen asleep with his head on the kitchen table, his books and notes spread all over the table and the sofa next to him. Trixie makes sure to take her shoes off quietly to not wake him up and treads the stair case as lightly as possible. It squeaks loudly regardless, and she can only hope she didn’t wake Chi Chi.

Once she’s upstairs she realizes she hasn’t told Katya she’s coming over; of course, Katya said she could come over anytime, but now she thinks she maybe should have texted her to confirm. Well, it’s too late now. The door to Katya and Sasha’s room is shut, and, in that state looks rather impenetrable to Trixie, who considers it for a moment, standing in the hallway in the unusually quiet house. She can’t even hear the music that seems to always come from where Adore lives in
the attic.

When she finally knocks, it’s Sasha’s voice that’s answering her. Sasha flashes her a grin from where she sits at her desk, but turns back to her laptop immediately, aware that she’s not the one Trixie is here to see. The room is mostly dark, only lit by Sasha’s screen, a few small cracks in the closed blinds, and the light seeping in from the hallway where Trixie stands in the open door.

“You’re early,” she hears Katya’s voice coming from her bed, where Katya must be buried under her blankets somewhere.

“Oh,” Trixie mouths quietly. She hasn’t looked at the time in a while. How early is she? Is Katya still asleep? She looks around the room uncomfortably. She should have texted first.

When Sasha catches sight of Trixie’s face, she waves her hand dismissively. “Don’t worry, she’s up,” she says, loud enough to give Trixie the implied permission to be loud herself. Then she turns back to her laptop again, leaving Trixie to her own devices. She takes a couple of careful steps towards Katya’s bed, letting the door fall close and turning the room considerably darker, before sitting down on the edge of Katya’s bed.

“What are you up to?” she asks, carefully poking what she can only hope is Katya’s stomach, not parts she shouldn’t be poking.

“I’m painting,” Katya claims. An arm snakes out of the blankets and gestures vaguely towards her easel.

Trixie grins. “Are you sure?”

Katya makes a noise she cannot decipher, then, finally, she pulls the blankets off her face. She is wearing black eyeshadow and mascara, so has either been up already, or went to bed with it on, and she smiles at Trixie softly enough for Trixie’s heart to do backflips.

“You smell so nice,” Katya says, a comment that comes as a surprise for Trixie, especially because Katya delivers it so seriously. “I love honey.” Trixie feels a blush tinting her face and wants nothing more than to pull up Katya’s blankets to her face, hiding her burning cheeks. She clears her throat awkwardly. It’s a good thing the room is dark, so Katya shouldn’t be able to tell.

Katya grins at her.

“What are you really up to?” Trixie asks, still not sure whether she should be here or not. She can hear a car alarm go off in the distance and shakes her head impatiently, trying not get caught up in the grading sound.

“Milk is upset about Juju leaving, so I’m comforting him,” Katya explains and nods in mock-seriousness before pulling the blanket away a little further and revealing a fat white cat lying snuggled against her side, apparently asleep. “He’s a big baby about it. He doesn’t understand that humans grow and need to move away sometimes in order to grow into different directions.”

“Ohh, kitty,” Trixie exclaims breathlessly before she can stop herself. She rarely ever sees Milk snuggle with anyone, usually he’s in the garden and takes off as soon as he sees her. She takes the opportunity to lace her fingers through his soft white fur carefully, doesn’t want to startle him into running off again. Katya is wearing a fluffy light grey sweater with gigantic black polka dots on it, a sweater that looks almost as soft as Milk’s fur. She probably didn’t sleep in that, Trixie thinks, she was probably up already and only laid back down a while ago.

“Sorry,” Katya says, as if she’d been reading her mind, “I’m getting up in a second, I’m just so
goddamn tired."

“Didn’t sleep well?” Trixie asks, and tries to make out potential black rings under Katya’s eyes. With her messy makeup and the little light in the room it is hard to tell.

Katya shakes her head. “I can’t interest you in a nap by any chance?” she asks, tiredness clearly audible in her voice. “Sorry, no, I’m up, we’ll do something fun, we could – “

“A nap sounds great,” Trixie interrupts her quickly and swallows hard where her heart seems to be lodged in her throat. She is in absolutely no need for a nap, after a good night’s sleep and a morning of pampering herself feels more refreshed and revived than she has all week, but is more than willing to lie down next to Katya. Or she is in theory. In practise, she keeps stroking the fur around Milk’s neck, trying to figure out how she is supposed to lay down next to Katya without crawling out of her skin.

Katya looks at her expectantly and Trixie slowly pulls up her feet onto the mattress, scoots down a little and eventually lets herself fall down on her back. Katya’s mattress is soft and warm and as soon as she’s lying down, Milk stirs and starts getting restless. Katya grabs him by his middle and pulls him on top of her stomach where his claws get stuck in her fuzzy sweater.

“Congrats on making it through the first week of exams,” Katya says into Milk’s head, and Trixie thinks she’s talking to the cat for a second.

“Thanks for helping me through,” Trixie finally answers, tilting her head to the side to look at Katya. She is lying on her back just as Katya is; normally, Trixie doesn’t like lying on her back, but she feels oddly immobile and frozen on Katya’s mattress. Sasha is still in the room with them and Katya doesn’t look like she is falling asleep anytime soon, even though she’s suppressing a long yawn.

“You’re welcome,” Katya says, and struggles to hold onto Milk when he decides he has had enough and frees himself from her to jump to the floor, not without somehow stepping directly onto both of Trixie’s nipples first. She flinches. “I like talking to you, it’s one of my better hobbies,” Katya adds. Now that Milk is gone, she turns to her side, facing Trixie.

“I like talking to you too,” Trixie says quietly, and feels some of her tension fall off her when she sees Sasha close her laptop and leave the room wordlessly, closing the door behind her and Milk. Now that her typing has stopped Trixie notices the car alarm has stopped as well, and all she can hear is Katya’s breathing.

When Katya doesn’t respond for a long moment, Trixie lets her eyes fall shut and tries to relax into Katya’s mattress. The sound of Katya’s breathing is joined by a faint clatter coming from the kitchen, and she feels herself relax slowly. Katya is snuggled into a black velvety blanket covered in stars, and there are at least two other blankets on the bed, but they are stuck behind or underneath Katya, and the air in the room is nowhere near warm enough for Trixie to nap without a blanket.

“Katya,” she whispers, unsure if Katya is asleep or not. Is Katya a person who falls asleep easily? Probably not. “I need a blanket.”

Katya mumbles something unintelligible, then closes the distance between the two of them and half-heartedly throws part of her own blanket over Trixie. It covers half of Trixie’s side, the other half still exposed to the cold room. Katya’s forehead is softly touching her shoulder now and she feels her warm breath ghost against her skin. Trixie’s arm is lodged between the both of them and she considers re-arranging them entirely but then decides to deal with what she has been given. She
has never been this close to Katya. This feels like a never-ending, warm, wonderful hug, even though both of Katya’s arms are folded against her side.

“Good night, Katya,” she whispers into Katya’s hair, and can just barely stop herself from kissing the top of Katya’s head. She will just lie here as still as she possibly can if that means Katya gets the sleep she deserves.

♥♥♥

“Trixie.” Trixie can hear the sound of her own name, barely more than a whisper, ghosting near her ear and pulling her from out of the swirly shadows of dreams back into reality. Reality is warm and comfortable, reality is Katya lying next to her, reality is Katya on her back and Trixie on her side with one leg and one arm thrown over Katya, holding her close. In the back of her mind there’s a voice telling her that this is not an okay position for them to be in, that she should probably let go, but her head is heavy with sleep and if she keeps her eyes closed she can probably chase that thought away and fall back into the comfortable darkness.

“Hey, Trixie.” Katya’s voice sounds soft and impossibly close to her ear. “You can’t sleep all day.” Trixie grunts, indignantly. Of course she can. She wants to tell Katya just that but upon opening her mouth realizes she’s too tired and mumbles something that’s a mystery to herself into Katya’s neck.

Katya giggles, her chest vibrating under Trixie’s arms and Trixie opens her eyes just a crack to look at her. Katya’s eyes are on hers, in the semi-darkness of the room her pupils are blown open wide and make her eyes look almost black with a tiny sliver of light grey around them. “Hi,” Katya says and smiles, “You’ve been asleep for almost three hours.”

“What? No,” Trixie replies, and can feel herself getting dragged away from sleep past the point of no return now. “It’s your nap, you were supposed to sleep.”

Katya laughs. “I slept a little too,” she says and re-arranges her legs slightly. Trixie feels a wave of embarrassment crash into her when she realizes she has Katya basically pinned into the mattress, maybe has had her there for hours now. She pulls her treacherous limbs off Katya as fast as she can, biting her lip. Why did she fall asleep, why did she make herself vulnerable like that?

“How long?” Trixie asks and tries to not let her embarrassment bleed into her voice.

“Oh, Oh no, I’m sorry, why didn’t you wake me up earlier?” Trixie feels a little mortified at the thought of having been asleep next to an awake Katya for almost three hours. What has Katya been doing this whole time? Did Trixie drool? She doesn’t usually drool, but sometimes does when she takes naps and she can never figure out why. She steals a glance at the mattress underneath her face. It’s dry. A blessed day.

“Did some thinking,” Katya says with a shrug. Then she smiles at Trixie. “You’re really cute when you’re sleeping.”

“I’m even cuter when I’m awake,” Trixie counters, trying to chase away the embarrassment she can feel in her bones. She scoots away from Katya as far as she can, only stops when she feels the open room on her side.

“Prove it,” Katya grins, obviously unfazed by any awkwardness. She pushes the blanket of herself
– and partly off Trixie in the process – and climbs over Trixie to stand in front of her bed. She is wearing red gym shorts under her fuzzy sweater, a thoroughly confusing combination of items. Maybe she hadn’t been up after all earlier? Katya pads towards the window with naked feet, and opens the window, the blinds clattering against the glass.

Katya opening the window leads to a dramatic shift in atmosphere and Trixie buries her face in the mattress for another moment, not quite ready to face the light and the chilly air sweeping into the room. Katya stays with her face towards the window for a long moment, stretching, making her joints crack more than once. A gush of wind blows through her hair and makes Trixie shudder under her blanket. Trixie can hear a bird singing outside, a sound she hasn’t heard in the last couple of months and that she never misses over the winter until she hears it again and is struck by a feeling of confusion over how she went this long without noticing its absence.

Katya kicks Sasha’s chair under her desk and picks up a couple of stray things from the rug, including the little plastic saxophone and her deck of tarot cards. Watching Katya, who seems completely relaxed, Trixie starts to relax a little. Her clothes are warm and comfortable, she can smell the honey body butter on herself, and being in Katya’s space starts to feel rather natural to her. She is a little bit nervous, sure, how could she not be when she’s here with Katya and they’re going to try meditation of all things, but she’s mostly just grateful for doing something that’s not studying on her own for once.

While Katya connects her phone to a speaker and skips through a couple of calm meditation songs that all sound the exact same to Trixie, Trixie lets her eyes wander through the room and gets stuck on Katya’s after break-up plan that’s still glued to the wall over her headboard. Katya has checked some of the points with a red glitter pen; now the list looks like this:

- Find a job ✓
- Be good at hobbies ((✓ ?))
- Meet 1 new people ✓
- Find a purpose ✓
- Be happy for at least 24 hours straight
- Graduate

Trixie can’t quite believe how many checks there are. How can she be this out of the loop with Katya’s life after non-stop texting her all week? She must have been even more self-involved than she thought.

“Hey Katya?” she asks, and walks over to her, taking her phone out of her hand to make her stop skipping through song after song of the same harmonious tranquil bullshit. “You found a job?”

Katya looks at her in surprise for a second, as if she doesn’t know what Trixie is talking about, then her face lights up and all of a sudden she’s cupping Trixie’s elbows with her palms, shaking them slightly.

“I did!” she declares, her smile lighting up the room. “Guess what it is?”

Her hands are unusually warm through the fabric of Trixie’s sweater, and Trixie is disappointed when Katya drops them to her sides again and takes a slight step back while she’s still looking at Trixie expectantly.

“I, uh.” Trixie hasn’t exactly put a lot of thought into what Katya might do with her life now that she’s staying in Boston, has only ever thought about how much she wants Katya to stay. “I don’t really know what you do with a degree in visual arts?” she says carefully, “did you find a job at a gallery?”
Katya snorts. “I wish. But there’s a tragic shortage of wonderful galleries looking for a scorching hot mess with a degree in visual arts and now idea what to do with it. No, I’m starting at Dorothy’s next week.”

Trixie takes a second to catch on. “Oh, the costume shop?” She can certainly imagine Katya in that space, crammed and kooky as it is.

“Yes! I love it there, I’m so happy they said yes. I went over there two days ago, because I couldn’t really stop thinking about it, and about Trish, of course.”

“Trish!” Trixie had all but forgotten about Trish. “You’re going to be working with her?”

Katya nods. “Yeah. It’s going to be a chaotic mess nightmare, mama. I love it.”

“So you’re happy with that job?” Trixie asks. She desperately needs Katya to say yes.

“Yes,” Katya says, “I love it there. I mean, it’s not ideal of course, and it doesn’t exactly put my degree to good use, but, you know,” she trails of for a moment, frowning, “It’s perfect for now, I think. I think for now I need to take little steps, and I need to stay in Boston, and not freak myself out too much, and I really love that shop, and Trish is just about the best person I’ve ever met. Maybe she’s my favourite now, no longer, uh, who was it before? You! Right, it’s you. Anyway, I think I’m going to take her to some meetings, you know, for the addiction stuff, because she’s never been, and I haven’t gone in forever, but maybe it could help. And if it doesn’t, maybe it helps her. And if it doesn’t help either of us, there’s still the donuts. Although I don’t technically like donuts, but oh well. I love Trish and the shop, is what I’m saying. Are you ready for meditation? I am. Okay, so have you ever meditated before?”

Trixie shakes her head no.

“Good, that’s great. Okay. What we’ll do is, we’ll try it for just two minutes. Two minutes is good for the start, and then when you do it more often, you can increase the time a little; I can do four minutes now, but not more, to be honest. At four minutes one second I want to start screaming. But maybe soon. Soon! But start small first. Okay, so you’re wearing comfortable stuff, that’s good. The stuff you usually wear never looks too comfortable. Is it? But it looks so, so good.”

Before Trixie has a chance to answer, she goes on:

“Just sit down anywhere, doesn’t matter much where or how. Should be halfway comfortable, but doesn’t matter too much, it’s only two minutes.”

Katya sits down on the floor, cross-legged, so Trixie sits down opposite her, mirroring her position. She has never seen Katya in teacher mode before, and she enjoys it a lot. She is ready to listen and to be taught things.

Once they are sitting on the floor, Katya’s speaking changes; her voice is quieter than Trixie is used to and a little deeper, nothing like the rushed stream of sounds she spilled out just seconds before. Katya’s eyes are closed, and Trixie closes hers as well, but they keep fluttering open inadvertently and taking in Katya in front of her. Katya’s hair is messier than usual, and looks as if even if she had already been up to day she certainly hasn’t brushed her hair yet. Trixie wonders if she could stroke her fingers through Katya’s hair without getting caught in tangles. She’ll never know.

Whatever it is, try to acknowledge the feeling and work with it.”

Trixie complies. Her left big toe itches a little. The skin of her elbows is uncomfortably dry and rubbing against the fabric of her sweater; before this morning she hadn’t put lotion on her elbows for days and it shows. Otherwise she’s fine, warm, comfortable, relaxed. Not tired and rushing for the first time in days. She wonders if Katya wants her to say any of that aloud and listens carefully into the silence for a sign of Katya waiting for her to act.

“Good,” Katya says, as if she was following Trixie’s thoughts all along, “now turn your attention to your breath. Breathe in through your nose, and try to breathe into your stomach, not into your upper chest. Try it.” She gives Trixie a moment in which Trixie breathes in and out. She already knows how to do this quite well, knows this from her high school theatre coach, who did breathing exercises with them every week before rehearsals. “When you breathe out, let the breath out through your mouth. Try to get all the air out before you breathe in again. Focus on the way the air enters your body, travels your body, and leaves again. Count to one as you take in your first breath, and then two as you breathe out. Do this until you reach ten, then start over at one.”

Trixie does. She manages to focus on four of these breaths before her mind starts to wander. Two minutes of meditation, Katya said. What are they going to do after this? Trixie feels like she could take another nap, or run a marathon, depending on whatever Katya feels like doing. She’s happy Katya found a job, a job, moreover, that she is excited about. Hang on, what else did Katya cross off her list? There were so many checkmarks. Did she also check the ridiculous find a purpose thing? She wants to open her eyes and check, but tries to keep them closed and focus back on her breathing. Did she check be happy for 24 hours in a row? Would she have to be awake for 24 hours in a row to achieve that?

“Your mind wanders, and that’s okay,” Katya says, again giving Trixie the impression she can see into her mind without any hindrance. God, the things Katya would be able to see in her mind. As if on cue, a picture of Katya kissing Trixie on the swings outside flashes before her eyes, and she tries to shove it back down into the depths of her brain. “When you notice your mind wander, try to stir back to focusing on your breath, start with one again. It’s okay to lose focus, you will get better if you practise for a while.”

One, two, three. Two minutes must be over by now, Trixie thinks. Katya’s breathing is so slow. She focusses on the sound of Katya taking in air, holding it for a moment, and releasing it. Something about Katya’s breathing makes Trixie believe she recognizes that sound as specifically Katya’s breathing, but she isn’t sure this is true. She tries to find something in the sound that makes it distinctly Katya, but there isn’t anything. Her own breathing is faster than Katya’s, and she tries to align herself with her, going slower and slower. Now that they are breathing in unison, she can barely hear Katya’s breath over the sound of her own. Now that they are breathing in unison, she notices herself getting calmer and calmer, feels like she’s connecting with the floorboards underneath her.

“Okay, that’s it,” Katya says, and Trixie can almost hear her opening her eyes. When Trixie opens her own eyes, Katya is smiling and looking at her excitedly. “So, what do you think?”

Trixie purses her lips, thinking for a second, and Katya immediately goes to scraping her chipped red nail polish off her index finger. The nail polish looks like she applied it over a week ago, her second index finger is already completely free of polish.

“That was nice,” Trixie says, “but I thought it would be, uh, more? Like, more difficult and more something else.”

“It can be,” Katya answers and smiles at her, a smile that keeps Trixie from feeling too stupid about
her response. When Katya smiles this much, the skin around her eyes crinkles. “Once you’re a little more familiar with it, you can for example do a body scan, where you focus on each part of your body one by one. Or you can do things like train your thoughts to go in a certain direction. I don’t know, I’m still figuring everything out, but I like it for now, I do. It helps me.”

Trixie smiles and scoots a little closer to Katya, trying to make it look like she’s just rearranging her position to get more comfortable. Now her knees are almost touching Katya’s bare ones. Katya’s knees are angular and there’s a faded yellow bruise on the left one.

“Helps you how?” Trixie replies, because she wants to know as much about Katya’s current state of mind as possible.

Katya frowns and cocks her head, thinking for a moment. “I guess it, uh. Let me think. I guess it helps me be where my feet are? If that makes any sense. My mind is always running away from me, and this helps me sort of centre and focus on where I am and who I am right now. It’s maybe like I’m catching up with my mind. Catching up with, uh, things. I like that.”

Trixie nods. She understands. Before she can say anything more, Katya’s door is thrown open and Juju all but storms into the room, wearing a short dress trimmed with yellow feathers and her hair in what is too messy to still count as a messy bun.

“How do I look?” she asks, without a word of greeting.

When neither Trixie nor Katya answer immediately, she spins around once, her naked feet making a squeaking noise on the hardwood floor. She looks a little crazy, Trixie thinks, but she appreciates the yellow feathers. They make for quite an entrance if nothing else.

“Why?” Katya asks, her head cocked to the side.

Juju huffs and lets herself drop onto Sasha’s bed. She opens her mouth to answer, but then reaches over to disconnect Katya’s phone from the speakers. The sound of tender guitar strings over what could either be ocean waves or wind blowing through a forest stops.

“I’m trying to pick an outfit for Monday,” she says, and throws Katya’s phone onto her bed where it almost bounces off and is lying dangerously close to the edge now. “Shangie has some plans for me and I don’t know what they are, but I think they might be important maybe and I need to look excellent.”

“Oh,” Katya replies, and Trixie can see how she’s hiding a grin.

“So?” Juju asks, getting up once more and gesturing up and down her body. “What does this outfit say about me?”

“Uh.” Katya thinks for a moment. “I’m the birdwoman of Alcatraz?”

Trixie giggles and Juju looks at Katya like she’s growing a third eye on her forehead. “I guess that’s what I get for asking you, Jesus,” she mumbles, “why is nobody else home?”

“Sasha’s downstairs, and Chi Chi too, I think,” Katya offers helpfully, “also I didn’t say it’s a bad thing, I love looking like a birdwoman.”

“You don’t say,” Juju deadpans, and stomps out of the door. “I’ll be back,” she yells over her shoulder, and Trixie hears a door on the other end of the hall fall shut.

Trixie’s still giggling. “Oh god, poor Juju, she’s all nervous and doesn’t even know what’s
happening,” she says after a moment. Suddenly she feels unsure of whether putting Juju through this is fair, and if a quiet proposal in private wouldn’t be the kinder option.

“Oh, don’t worry about her.” Katya shakes her head and grins. “She’s been pestering everybody with how long Shangie’s keeping her waiting for the proposal. She wants this, if she had her way it would be in front of a million goddamn people.”

Trixie nods. Sounds like Juju, she thinks.

“How about,” Katya says, raising her eyebrows suggestively and dropping her back against the bedframe behind her to sit more comfortably, “how about we have some fun with her?”

Trixie nods again. She’s up for some fun.

The next time Juju enters the room she is in a pair of low cut jean shorts that almost but not quite cover her butt cheeks, and a tank top that leaves way too much of her stomach uncovered. She looks at Katya with a challenging expression on her face, her arms crossed over her chest. Trixie can’t think of a single place or activity this outfit would be appropriate for.

Trixie is waiting for Katya to give a biting remark, but instead, Katya puts Trixie on the spot: “What do you think, what does this outfit say about her?”

Trixie’s mind is racing. This is a chance to make Katya laugh, and she’s not going to let it go to waste.

“I’m the big gulp you get behind the 7-Eleven.”

Trixie doesn’t take in Juju’s response, only takes in Katya’s. Katya stares at her in shock for a split second before she bends forward, wheezing without a sound and flailing her arms. Trixie hasn’t seen her like this in far too long. Her stomach feels warm. If Katya bent down just a little bit further, she would touch Trixie’s knees with her face.

Juju leaves the room, not without giving Trixie the finger. When Katya takes another moment to collect herself and Trixie looks around the room, trying not to get too caught up in thinking about scooting just a little bit closer to Katya, her eyes find Katya’s after break-up plan again. There’s a check mark after Find a Purpose.

“Hey Katya,” she says, and can’t stop herself from touching her palm to Katya’s knee, as if she needed to touch her to get her attention, “you found your purpose?”

That sobers up Katya immediately, and Trixie regrets asking. She wants to make Katya laugh again.

“I think so, yes,” Katya says, her laugh gone, but her eyes warm on Trixie’s, and Trixie can see tears brimming in her eyes from laughing so hard. She leans in closer to Trixie and drops her voice a little. “I think my purpose for now isn’t to entertain or inspire crowds with my art, uh, I used to think it was. Maybe it will be one day. I think my purpose right now is to take care of myself and to maybe be a source of entertainment and inspiration to people around me and myself. Sorry, that sounds super cheesy. It’s a private purpose, maybe. Not meant for telling people.”

Trixie nods. Her palm is still on Katya’s knee and her answer is delayed by the fact that she notices Katya’s eyes travel down to where their skin touches. Katya’s ears are flushed red, and so are her cheeks, from laughing, probably.

“Thanks for telling me anyway,” Trixie says, and tightens her touch on Katya just a little. “It
means a lot that you’re so open with me.”

Katya bites her lip. Her eyes are still on Trixie’s hand on her knee, and Trixie can’t quite put a finger on what causes the sudden tension in the room. She’s not sure if she is relieved or disappointed when Juju crashes into the scene once more, causing Katya to fall back against the bedframe and Trixie to cross her arms over her chest.

Before Juju can even say anything, Katya gestures to her from top to bottom and says: “I’m Jesus Christ’s mother’s lawyer and I mean business!”

Juju leaves the room without a comment, slamming the door shut.

As soon as Juju has left the room, the tension sweeps right back in, and, not knowing how to act, Trixie diffuses it by distracting Katya.

“Is your art project almost ready by the way? When are you handing it in?”

“Huh?” Katya looks at her face and shakes her head lightly, then bites her lip once more. She’s not wearing her usual bright red shade of lipstick, if she was, Trixie is sure there would be bits of it sticking to her front teeth by now. “Sorry, come again?”

Trixie frowns. Usually she’s the one who has trouble listening. “Your final project for college. What do you still need to do?”

“Oh,” Katya nods, “right. I’m pretty much done, I have six paintings now, I just don’t like the second one and I want to replace it, so I want to make another one. But I don’t need to. But I want to, maybe. I’m all ready to go. Finished the last one last night.”

Katya’s paintings stand leaned against the wall behind her, and the only one Trixie is able to get a good look at is the one with the vagina, of course. She is debating whether or not to get up to get a better look – she is interested in what Katya does and remembers how pleased Katya was when Trixie showed interest in her art, but isn’t too keen on getting up from where they’re sitting together on the floor, closer than Trixie is used to – when Juju comes in again, tearing her out of her thoughts.

Juju is in a hot pink dress with ruffles around her elbows, the skin of her cleavage is covered in red blotches where she’s scratched it around an uncomfortably big necklace with a milky white crystal that is caught where her breasts are pushed together tightly. As they get a look at her, she drags her hand over her face and one of her fake lashes gets caught in a ring on her finger. She notices immediately and puts the lash back on her eyelid lackadaisically; now it’s dangling from the corner of her eye as if was the night of Juju’s birthday party by the wading pool.

Katya opens her mouth, but Trixie beats her to it: “You auditioned for the role of strawberry shortcake, didn’t get the part, and cried all your makeup off.”

Juju fills her cheeks with air and blows it out slowly, and dramatically. She crosses Katya’s room, almost tripping over Trixie’s legs that take up a considerable part of the floor space and lets herself flop on Sasha’s desk chair.

“That was a test,” she claims, “that’s the worst dress I have, I just wanted to see if you would tell me the truth.” She fumbles with her necklace, doesn’t get the clasp open, and lets her hands drop to her sides, now fiddling with the hem of her dress. “Do you know if Shangie’s plans include any sports activities? God, I hope not.”

After considering Juju for a second, Katya gets up from her spot on the floor and climbs onto her
bed, reaching for the backrest of Juju’s chair to drag it over to her. She hugs Juju from behind, the backrest between them. Where Trixie sits alone on the floor now the air feels a little bit colder.

“Hey Juju, you know there’s nothing I love more than making fun of you, but if this is making you anxious in a bad way you know you can tell Shangie and she’ll tell you what’s up, right? You don’t have to stress out about this.”

Juju sighs, stops fiddling with her dress for a moment, before smiling. “Nah, it’s all good. You know I love this shit. Also, I put on this dress because I thought Trixie—” she gives Trixie a smug look, eyebrows raised and eyelash dangling— “would be into it, you know it’s right up her ally with the ruffles and shit. And I thought it would maybe get her to focus on me for a second. You know all she ever stares at is you.”

Something about the way Trixie is comfortably leaned against Sasha’s bed, relaxed and smelling nice, and Juju is a hot mess from top to bottom makes it possible for Trixie to swallow around the awkwardness of Juju’s comment and instead smile at her brightly, batting her eyelashes. Juju grins at her and lets her head fall against the backrest, relaxing into Katya’s touch.

“By the way, congrats on getting that job, aaah!” Juju squeals suddenly. “I’m sorry I was so busy the last couple days, getting everything ready for the move is the worst. So it’s at a costume shop? How did you even find that?”

“It’s a mystery!” Katya replies, pulling her shoulders up slowly, and Trixie can tell that Juju is fully aware of things going on that involve everyone but her.

Juju huffs. “Anyway, I just wanted to tell you, I’m – no shut up, I’m going to say this,” she interrupts herself when Katya grins at her obnoxiously, keening her on, “I just wanted to say that I’m proud of you for doing what you’re doing and I think you’re doing the right thing, and I know Shangie and I leaving right now is not ideal but, uh, I feel like we’re leaving you in good hands, probably.” She considers Trixie with an awkward smile, obviously moving outside her comfort zone for the moment. “I’m sorry for pestering you this whole time but I just really felt like you were making a mistake and I guess I uh, wanted to protect you? I don’t know if you could tell what I was doing this whole time or if you just thought I was being a total cunt, but I swear I had good intentions, I swear. And I think that costume job is a good fit for you.” She gets up awkwardly and makes towards the door. “And you look really nice today even though I know you stole those shorts from me. You can keep them. I’m taking some of your stuff too though. And I think you’re good at art and you’re a good strong person and you’re hot and I love you and shut up, I’m going to find my outfit now.”

On the last couple of sentences, she is already backing out of the room and on her last sentence Trixie can hear the door to her and Shangela’s room shut.

“I love her so much,” Katya says and lets herself fall down against her bed, lying close to the edge and twisting her head so she can hold Trixie’s eyes. “I can’t believe they’re leaving. I’m going to visit them as soon as I can, I love LA. I think. I’ve never been. Did I mention I went through a crisis this week because I basically wanted to pack up my stuff and follow them there? But I’m not. Following them, I mean.

“I’ve always wanted to move there,” Trixie says, watching Katya closely, shutting her mind to the thought of Katya almost ditching Boston, and her. Katya is drawing her arms above her head, stretching her whole body, rolling her toes. Her knuckles crack. “I haven’t been either but six-year-old me made a promise to myself when I got my first Barbie.”

Katya raises her eyebrows in question.
“Barbie’s from there. Or, even better, she’s from Wisconsin originally and then moved there. So,” she lets the sentence trail off, feeling rather silly for mentioning this. She knows her identifying with a kid’s toy isn’t necessarily the most alluring part of her personality. Katya, however, smiles at her warmly and nods.

“I can see you in LA,” she says.

Trixie smiles. “And I you,” she replies, “I can already see your pasty white skin sizzling in the sun.”

The rest of the day Trixie spends at the house with Katya, Juju, Sasha and Chi Chi, quizzing Chi Chi, de-cluttering Juju’s impressively trashy wardrobe, putting things in boxes to give to charity, and cooking mediocre pasta for everyone. She doesn’t know if it is her pampering herself this morning, her record-length nap, the meditation, or Katya’s constant presence at her side, but she feels better than ever and puts off going home to sleep until she almost passes out on the couch in Juju’s room.

♥♥♥

Trixie’s next and second to last exam is on Monday, February 26th. Since there aren’t many rooms that hold all the students taking the exam – at least not when they’re arranged so as to leave a space between them – the exam takes place in a room three of her other exams already took place last week. She’s arriving with only five minutes to spare and a most of her fellow students have already picked a seat and unpacked their pens and comfort food. Walking through the room to find a corner seat, unpacking her things and getting as comfortable as she is going to get feels oddly familiar and she is struck by the feeling of how much less anxious she is this time around. It’s the exam on her favourite seminar and instead of feeling extra worried about failing at something she’s supposed to be good at, she feels rather confident she is going to do well.

Her phone is in her coat pocket that she left to the side of the room, not wanting to be tempted to take it out again this close to her exam. As she has done every morning before an exam without fail Katya texted her wishing her good luck and followed up these words with a string of flower emojis, and Trixie had woken up to that message with a smile on her face.

♥♥♥

As she expected, Trixie’s exam goes well. Of all the exams she has taken so far, this is the one she’s most confident she’s achieved a good grade in, and she leaves the lecture hall smiling and with a slight skip in her step. Only one more to go and she’s free.

Straight from the exam, Trixie has to rush to Smiles for Miles for her shift. She’s excited about today’s shift; not only is working with the kids always a treat when she’s in a good mood, but today is the day Shangela is going to propose. They are going to rehearse Shangela’s routine with the kids one last time today and then, towards the end of the shift, Chi Chi will bring Juju and everyone else who can make time to the day care to watch. As usual when she has something like an exam to fret about, Trixie hadn’t been able to think past the exam, so had barely been able to look forward to today’s events. Now that her exam is over, and she feels the wind on her skin when she walks to the day care, she feels herself getting giddy with excitement. Even though she isn’t the biggest fan of public proposals, she can’t help but get swept up in the frivolousness.

The universe seems to be in favour of Shangela’s and Juju’s relationship, because today is the warmest and nicest day in a long time. The sun is shining, some scattered birds are chirping hidden in the trees, and the first tulips in the flowerbeds have started blossoming. Shangela spends most of her shift re-organizing her proposal so that it happens outside instead of in the dance studio as
planned. Trixie likes the day care’s garden with its seesaw and sandbox and is looking forward to the weather getting better again and being able to spend time with the kids outside. She loves watching them playing outside, they are much happier and more agreeable when they aren’t locked indoors all day.

Outside, the kids play relatively autonomously, not seeking constant stimulation by Trixie, Shangela or whoever else is working. After Trixie has unlocked the small shed in the garden that is filled with outdoor toys and has consoled Suzie, who wasn’t fast enough to snatch the sand mould she wanted, she helps Shangela set up the stereo at the garden table where they often sit and watch the kids. Latrice joins them outside, spreading a tablecloth over the table. It’s waxed - anything else would be irresponsible with all the kids running around - bright red and covered in a busy floral print in a slightly darker red than the background. It’s a little tacky and suits the situation perfectly, Trixie thinks. In a quiet moment, she heads inside to the small kitchen where she remembers having seen a bunch of tea lights hidden in the back of a drawer. She grabs them and a lighter and sets them up outside where the little flames fight for recognition in the bright daylight.

Shangela is a nervous wreck. She’s busy running from here to there, at first sight looking like she’s making preparations, but when Trixie observes her for a moment, it becomes clear that Shangela isn’t doing anything much at all. Instead, she’s moving her lips silently, apparently going over what she wants to say later again and again. Trixie wonders if she knows the words to her proposal by heart. She can only imagine the courage it’s taking Shangela to go through with this; Trixie would lose her mind. Of course, Trixie thinks, she can also not quite imagine herself proposing to anyone, ever. What she can – and, ever since Shangela and the kids have brought this topic up for her – likes to imagine, is being proposed to. She wants it to happen on a beach someday, an empty beach in the sun, with the salty water still clinging to her skin and her hair drying rapidly in the sun.

“Hey Shangie, you wanna go over your lines?” Trixie suggests when she notices Shangela bouncing up and down on her feet and worrying her lip between her teeth. She puts her hand on Shangela’s shoulder, gives her a squeeze that she hopes is reassuring and leads her a step away from the kids to a spot half hidden behind the corner of the day care. “You can try them out on me if you want to?”

Shangela nods, seemingly unsure. She is wearing dark grey slacks and a simple white tank top and her afro moves in the wind in a way Trixie finds enchanting.

Okay, so.” Shangela takes a deep breath. Her hands are shaking slightly, and Trixie takes them in hers, anchoring them between the two of them.

“When I first met you almost four years ago I didn’t know you would change my life forever. I was having kind of a normal boring day, went shopping for some new pants with Chi Chi, and when I asked you which pants looked better on me you stared at my ass shamelessly and got flirty enough for Chi Chi to leave the store saying he was getting coffee, and then never come back. That weekend, we went on our first date. It was…” she trails off, frowning. “Maybe I shouldn’t be saying all that stuff? It’s not like she doesn’t know this already? I guess I saw in some movies that they always sorta recount their story together and I thought that was nice but maybe it’s lame? Maybe I should just get to the point? Maybe I should—”

“Shhhhh, you’re doing great, keep going,” Trixie reassures her and strokes her knuckles with her thumb. She’s never heard the story of how Shangela and Juju met and has to stop herself from bouncing up and down on her heels in excitement.

“Okay so, uh. Store, Chi Chi, pants, ass, coffee,” she nods to herself, “You talked me into going roller blading on our first date, and I thought that was about the worst date idea ever, but you
persisted, and I went, and you wore neon yellow and I fell on my ass a whooping four times before you took me home with you.” She nods to herself, as if mentally putting a check mark behind that part of their story.

Trixie wants to go roller blading now. Would Katya go with her? Katya seems to be up for pretty much anything these days, and Trixie does still have her roller girl fantasy outfit from Juju’s birthday party. Come to think of it, Juju wore neon yellow to that party too. Was that the outfit she had worn on their first date?

“Around the time I met you, I was fully set on moving to LA. I had finished school, had finished my gap year of working and trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life and settled on: I don’t know exactly what it is that I’m going to do, but it includes LA. I had just started looking for jobs there, dreaming of getting on a plane as soon as I could. Then I met you, and my dreams turned from taking the plane to becoming good enough at roller blading to finally impress you, and holding your hand at the movies, and some other stuff too, probably. And before long, I barely thought about LA anymore, put it on the back burner and Chi Chi introduced us to Bob and we moved in and went to classes and I can’t believe it’s been four years and we graduated, and I still feel like you’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me and now we are actually headed to LA.”

This is a long story, Trixie catches herself thinking when Shangela takes a long breath. Maybe it would benefit from cutting a few words. What does Shangela intend the kids to do for the duration of all of this? They do their dance, Shangela talks, and they do what? She’s pretty sure Shangela won’t be able to talk for such a long stretch of time without getting interrupted. Trixie would have to keep an eye on the kids and shut them down if necessary.

“And I’m just so glad I stayed here and did what felt right to me in that moment. Destiny brought us together and destiny is taking us to the new chapter in our lives now. It would be an honour if our new chapter included you becoming my wife. Will you marry me?”

Trixie doesn’t believe in destiny but can’t help but feel her hands start to tingle with the weight of Shangela’s words and her eyes on her. She wonders if anyone will ever feel this way about her. She wonders if she will ever feel this way about anybody. She hopes so, aches for it. After a long look at Trixie’s face, Shangela breaks out into a grin. “Well,” she says, “if Juju reacts the way you do, I’m good to go.”

Naturally, Trixie wants to reach for a biting remark, but she’s aware her cheeks are flushed and there are tears prickling at the bottom corner of her eyes ever since Shangela said those last couple sentences into her face, holding her hands. Instead, she presses Shangela’s hands a little tighter before letting go and smiling at her.

“This will be amazing,” she says, and for the next twenty minutes before Juju and the others arrive, Shangela seems just a bit calmer.

♥♥♥

Juju arrives on the bike Katya once took to the milkshake bar to meet Trixie. The wheels of the bike are just as deflated as they were then, and Juju looks more than a little winded. Trixie snorts at Juju’s choice to wear a pretty yellow dress with sunflower earrings, but then add heat blemishes on her cleavage and neck to the picture by choosing to take the bike.

With Juju, there’s everybody else from the house, most of them on bikes as well. Katya is on Chi Chi’s handlebar and Adore trails next to them on a skateboard. While they are leaving their bikes in front of the day care’s small gate, Bob and a man Trixie hasn’t seen before trail up behind the group. The man is tall and muscular, pushes a light green stroller in front of him, and must be
Bob’s husband.

Trixie is watching them approach out of the corners of her eyes; she’s kneeling on the sandy grounds, putting the last two children into their fairy wings and flower crowns. One of the kids is out sick, a change in circumstances that doesn’t put too much of a strain on the routine but allowed Trixie to snatch the left-over flower crown and put it on her own head. It’s too small for her and she has to clip it into her hair to keep it from falling off at every step, but she feels beautiful in it.

Once she’s fixed the last pair of fairy wings, she trails off to the group, feeling a little awkward. She isn’t quite sure how this is going to play out, where she’s supposed to stand, and how Shangela plans to manage the transition from greeting everyone to proposing. More than glad she isn’t in Shangela’s shoes, Trixie hugs everyone; they all seem rather wired. She makes sure to hug Katya last, an excuse to keep standing next to her after. Under her ever-open coat, Katya is wearing an oversize red glitter shirt with the word bonjour written on it in large white print. Katya countered how busy the shirt with Trixie’s fake nail necklace that is equally busy where it’s hanging from her neck, making Trixie grin in delight. Apparently, Katya decided the shirt is long enough to justify wearing it without pants – it barely is, Trixie thinks, and she’s happy Katya came to that conclusion either way – instead, she paired the shirt with simple black tights and knee-high boots that Trixie has never seen on her and that make her legs look better than any legs Trixie has ever seen.

“You look like this is your proposal,” Katya comments once Trixie reluctantly gets her nose out of Katya’s hair and her arms off Katya’s waist.

Trixie looks down on herself. She’s wearing a light blue dress and a soft woollen jacket, nothing out of the ordinary for her. Katya is probably referring to her looking all flushed and giddy about what is going to happen.

“My proposal is happening on a beach,” Trixie informs her cheerily. “I’m going to be wearing nothing but a bikini and the sand stuck to my legs, and there is going to be nobody there but me. Well, and maybe the other person, probably, yes. It’s going to be amazing.”

Katya grins. “I can see that,” she says, her voice soft. The wind blows a curl of her hair into her eyes and before Trixie can stop herself, she brings up a hand, intending to brush the strand of hair out of Katya’s face. Aware of what she’s about to do, she stops mid-motion and awkwardly lets her hand fall to her side. Katya doesn’t make an effort to catch the strand of hair, keeps it there playing around her nose.

Trixie is hyper aware of Katya’s eyes on her body; even when Chi Chi stumbles over a discarded sand mould on the ground and almost brings Jinkx down where he uses them to catch himself, Katya’s eyes never leave her. Katya’s own eyes are the colour of the sky above them, and her lipstick a couple of shades darker than her shirt.

Before Trixie can think of anything else to say, Shangela clears her throat loudly from where she’s standing by the stereo on the table. Juju is standing hugging Chi Chi to her side, bouncing on her heels, clearly aware of what’s about to come. Trixie can practically see the yes formed on her lips already.

“Umm. Thanks everyone for coming,” Shangela starts, her voice trembling slightly. It’s more than obvious that this part she forgot to rehearse. “So, umm. The kids and I have something prepared. This is for Juju, who – umm. This is for you.”

Miraculously the kids manage to get into formation without Trixie needing to intervene. She’s less than willing to leave her spot next to Katya, not when she thinks she can still feel Katya’s eyes on her even when she herself is focussed on the kids. Shangela walks to stand in front of the kids,
turns around to nod at them one last time and give them a thumbs up and then gives Latrice a sign after which Latrice presses a button on the stereo, and the music starts. Out of the corner of her eyes Trixie notices Bob stepping away from his family and getting his camera in position, squatting down to get the best frame.

The dance routine is simple, but effective. Shangela isn’t afraid to make a fool out of herself, and Trixie loves every second of it. Shangela cut the song so that it’s only one and a half minutes long, one and a half minutes filled with the kids twirling and jumping around in their wings and crowns and Shangela showing off some more elaborate dance moves that more or less mesh with what the kids do. Trixie is moved. If Shangela walked up to her now and told her the story of how the two of them met, she’s not sure she’d be able to say no, her beach proposal be damned.

“Trixie,” Shangela would say, “I met you the night you got here, you were wearing cowboy boots and I immediately thought you were a style icon. Then you spent all evening sitting on my couch, eating pancakes, and lusting after my roommate, who was taken. You’re the funniest, prettiest, smartest girl I’ve ever met, and I want to wake up to your impeccable face every day. Will you marry me?”

Once the routine is over, Shangela walks up to Juju, who untangles herself from Chi Chi and walks towards her a couple of steps. Shangela takes a deep breath, out of nervousness or because her routine left her winded Trixie doesn’t know. Trixie’s heart is beating fast. She almost grabs Katya’s hand for support but settles for curling her hands into fists on her side and bouncing up and down on her heels a couple of times. Katya huffs out a breath of air, then takes the smallest of steps towards Trixie to touch their shoulders together. Or rather, touch Katya’s shoulder to Trixie’s upper arm. Trixie unclenches her fists. She allows herself one quick glance at Katya; Katya’s eyes immediately jump from where they rested on Trixie’s cheek back to Shangela and Juju.

In the moment Trixie takes to untangle her eyes from Katya’s face she misses Shangela getting down on one knee in front of Juju. Why didn’t she kneel in front of Trixie earlier, did Trixie not deserve a kneel? “Juju, I—” From where she stands, Juju’s body is hiding Shangela’s face from her. She’s vaguely aware of Sasha, Jinkx and Adore moving around little to get a better look, but she isn’t about to unglue her arm from Katya’s shoulder, and Katya makes no indication she wants to move either.

“When I first met you almost four years ago you talked me into too tight jeans and, uh. No, hang on. When I met you almost four years ago, I didn’t know that you would change my life forever, and. And now we are going to LA and everything is changed forever, and I can’t believe the luck I had and I can’t believe how happy you make me even though you’re, uh, so much work, but it’s the best job I could ever have and, umm, we moved to Bob’s and Bob is here, and he is a dad now, I still can’t believe that, and now we’re moving again and I feel like as long as you’re by my side I can do anything. Expect maybe remember my speech. I promise it was a good speech, originally. I love you. I will love you tomorrow. I will love you ten years from now. I want to love you fifty years from now. Will you marry me?”

Trixie is secretly glad she can’t see Juju’s face. From the noises coming from Juju she’s pretty sure Juju is crying and almost as sure she’d join her in crying if she looked at her now. Trixie doesn’t hear Juju’s answer, doesn’t hear her give any response at all, but before she knows it, Shangela is up and Juju is hugging her close, trying and failing to wrap her legs around Shangela’s middle. They stumble back a little, into the crowd of kids that are wondrously well-behaved, staring at the scene with everything from complete disinterest to wonder.

Latrice is the first one to start clapping, shouting congratulations in her deep booming voice. It’s enough to break the tension, for the kids to scatter a little, and everyone to come congratulate them.
Considering the crowd of their friends that is forming among Juju and Shangela, Trixie stays put for another moment, waiting. When Katya’s shoulder stops touching her arm, it is to Trixie’s surprise quickly replaced by Katya’s whole face that she’s burying into Trixie’s jacket.

“I’m so fucking proud of them.” Her voice is muffled by Trixie’s jacket. “So fucking proud.”

Katya’s face on her arm is all the encouragement Trixie needs to finally swing her arm around Katya’s shoulder, hugging her to her side. Her heart is beating fast, but she feels almost peaceful with the warm wind on her face and most everyone she loves being here and being happy. Chi Chi and Shangela high five so hard they both end up rubbing their wrists with a pained expression. When Katya leans a little more of her weight into Trixie, Trixie closes her eyes and rests her head on top of Katya’s. Katya’s hair smells like this day, like flowers, and warmth, and love.

She’s only vaguely aware of everything happening around them; somebody is turning on the stereo again, re-playing Shangela’s song, some kids repeat parts of their routine, and the first dad comes to pick up his kid. The first thing to pull Trixie out of her bliss is Lucía’s voice.

“Hi!”

Katya moves her head so she’s looking at Lucía, but the side of her head is still leaned against Trixie. Trixie pulls her in a little closer.

“I remember you!” Katya says, and Trixie can hear the smile in her voice even when she can’t see it. “You were such an amazing Lady Santa. How was Christmas in Argentina? Did the bunnies do their job?”

Lucía crinkles up her nose, apparently not able to remember the lies she told Katya about her grandparent’s bunnies. “It was good, I got a book.”

“Oh, nice!”

“It has Barbies and you can colour them. I’ve already coloured seven.”

“I bet it looks great,” Katya says, and straightens up a little. Trixie’s arm feels cold where her face was before. Katya makes up for the loss by snaking her arm around Trixie’s waist. “You should show it to Ms. Mattel, she loves Barbies.”

Lucía giggles. “She’s too old to love Barbies,” she decides.

Trixie snorts.

“You can like Barbies, I allow it,” Katya says, and Trixie wants to kiss her cheek.

“Why isn’t she wearing a wedding dress?” Lucía asks not bothering to gesture to Juju, or Shangela. Trixie laughs. “Lucía! Don’t you remember I told you about this? This was the proposal. You wear the dress at the wedding.”

Lucia scratches her nose, doesn’t reply.

“Come on, Ms. Wadley told you at the first rehearsal and then I told you again, and then we also told you at lunch at least six more times.”

“My mom always says you have to tell me everything ten times, and even then,” Lucía says with a sigh she can only have picked up from her mother and nods earnestly.
Katya wheezes and reaches out her hand to muss up the little girl’s hair. “A proposal is when you ask a person to marry you. The marriage comes later, if the person says yes,” Katya tells her, a strand of Lucía’s black hair wrapped around her index finger.

“That’s what I said,” Trixie insists, not quite knowing why her voice sounds like she hopes for Katya to tell her she’s done a good job teaching the kids, even though the kids ended up not understanding.

“Maybe they got distracted by your talk about a beach proposal fantasy,” Katya says, teasingly, looking straight into Trixie’s eyes. “Understandable.”

“I didn’t tell them about the beach!” Trixie replies, “I never even thought about my proposal before, ever.”

Katya grins, her eyes twinkling. “Ah, so you just made it up the second I asked you about it?”

Trixie swallows, tries to find a way out, and, thankfully, Lucía delivers:

“You said you wanted a hamburger cake for your proposal,” she says to Trixie, her tone almost accusing.

“No, oh my god, Lucía! That’s not what I said at all. I said—” she tries to remember what it was that she said but finds this extremely difficult with Katya breaking out into her wheezing laugh once more, leaning her whole weight against Trixie.

“It’s okay,” Katya assures her, “I’m sure we can get you a vegetarian hamburger cake for your beach proposal.”

Trixie rolls her eyes and gives up the fight. A vegetarian hamburger cake would be nice.

Chapter End Notes

as always i would love to hear your thoughts! please keep them coming and give me something to get through my exam weeks of death :’)

♥
hello friends, here's some more words for you! i like words! i hope you do too.
my love to rosie, thank you for beta reading, always holding my hand, and being my
favourite person.

The day after her last exam Trixie spends in bed with Kim. It’s a nice day outside, spring is
apparently coming early this year – though Kim warns her not to store her winter coat under her
bed just yet because winter might return for a dramatic comeback – but Trixie and Kim shut out the
sun behind the blinds, get enough take out to feed another three people and spend the day watching
Netflix and painting their nails. Trixie changes her mind about the perfect nail colour for her mood
often enough for the polish remover to fail her, and the different colour remains are clearly visible
through the iridescent coat on the top.

This day is also, coincidentally, the day of Kim’s first exam, since her exams are meant to start a
little later than Trixie’s. Till this morning Kim hadn’t made up her mind about going or not, had set
an alarm clock and had let the alarm tear Trixie out of her sleep three times before finally shutting
it off for good. Trixie monitors Kim closely all day, looking for any signs of regret, but Kim seems
mostly relaxed and at peace. She will soon have to figure out how to break the news to her family
and what her next steps are going to be. Trixie tells her a good next step is trying fake nails on her
toe nails. It looks ugly enough and impractical enough to keep them occupied for most of the
afternoon.

Trixie feels fine about slacking off in bed all day: she’s a big believer in a day in bed every now
and then and knows that she’s thoroughly deserving after weeks of studying and exam-taking,
especially since the next few days look to be a bit of a whirlwind. Only two days from now she will
be on another flight to Milwaukee, spending a couple of days with her family to celebrate her
mom’s birthday. She never planned to fly out just for the day, but a couple of people from back
home had asked her to come, including her sister, her mom’s new friend, and an old neighbour who
must have just learned how texting works and told her she would pay for a part of Trixie’s flight,
and Trixie had felt too touched to say no.

Tomorrow, Saturday, she will spend most of her day at the Love Shack, saying goodbye to
Shangela and Juju, and while she’s a little sadder about them leaving than she would ever admit to
them, she can’t deny she’s thrilled there’s another Love Shack party coming up. As with all of their
parties, this one seems mostly freestyled and Trixie barely knows what to expect:

Shangela: Halleloo Ladies and Gentlemen, as you know Juju and I are going to leave you forever
on Monday, March 5th. Obviously we are gonna go out in style, with one last party on Saturday,
March 3rd. There is gonna be food (hopefully? Jinkx? Kim?) and music (I got this), and a camp
fire (if Chi Chi and Adore make good on their drunken promise to get enough firewood together).
Juju thinks it would be lovely if we all stayed at the Love Shack overnight. We could turn the living
room into a blanket fort or something. We don’t know yet, but you’re all welcome to stay!
Halleloo!
Juju: I didn’t say lovely, I said cool

Laganja: lovely! :D

Bob: how many people are you planning to have sleep over? Please send me a private message,
Shangela

Jinkx: If shawls are okay for the blanket fort I have enough to cover the living room I think

Kim: I’m making a cake

Kim: But please somebody else make something as well I’m not responsible for feeding 40 people,
Shangie

Adore: I never said I’d get the wood together

Adore: I’m gonna make music at the campfire somebody else get the wood

Chi Chi: @Kim NICE

Chi Chi: @Adore You get the wood and I make the music?

Katya: @Chi Chi I have the plastic sax, you can use that

Jinkx: @Trixie maybe bring your guitar as well? That would be wonderful

Katya: @Trixie yes god! Please!

Katya: @Chi Chi you should still use the plastic sax, just because the star of Trixie’s talent will
outshine you and nobody will have eyes or ears for you at all doesn’t mean you shouldn’t follow
your dreams

Jinkx: @Kim I’m also making a cake, let’s check that we don’t make the same one

Chi Chi: Making music isn’t my dream @Katya but thanks I guess

Chi Chi: is nobody going to offer to collect wood with me?

Katya: @Chi Chi no

Juju: @Chi Chi no

Yara: @Kim you should make that chocolate sprinkles cake you made for Shangie last year!

Katya: @Jinkx let’s set up the blanket fort right now I’m ready

Shangela: @Yara are you gonna be there?

Katya: Yara!! Yes!!

Sasha: Bob says no more than 15 people max sleeping over in the living room, how many people
are coming?

Jinkx: @Katya okay, meet you in the living room in 10
Yara: @Shangela no I don’t think I can make it I have work all weekend I’m sorry

Laganja: DDDDD’:

Trixie: Yes, I’m bringing the guitar! I love the blanket fort, aaaaah!

Katya: @Jinkx we’ll make it witchy and wonderful!

Katya: @Trixie yes!! I’m ready!

Sasha: @Yara so sorry you won’t be able to come

Juju: @Jinkx please decorate without Katya, we are going to have people over, I don’t want it to look like we’re having a séance

Juju: @Trixie for sleeping over pls bring that night gown again, I love not being the only problematic one

Shangela: @Juju you’ll always be the most problematic one

Laganja: :'D

Katya: @Trixie yes! Please bring that nightgown <3

Trixie: @Juju @Jinkx I’m sure Katya will do a wonderful job decorating!

Chi Chi: @everyone, do you feel like we need to remind certain people that flirting is banned from the group chat?

Sasha: @Chi Chi I just talked to the others and we are going to get wood all of us together tomorrow morning

Sasha: @Chi Chi to be fair, Trixie doesn’t know

Juju: Can we please reinstate flirting in the gc?

Bob: Please no

Adore: Maybe we can bring it back except for those of you who are responsible for the ban @Juju @Shangela

Laganja: :D Bring it back! @Trixie @Katya

Even though the first three months of 2018 have almost passed, Shangela’s and Juju’s goodbye party is Trixie’s first party of the year. In an attempt to make good on her half-assed New Year’s resolution to be a good person in 2018, Trixie leaves for the party early to see if she can help anyone get ready. An hour before Shangela told them to come over, Trixie is on their doorstep, in one of her favourite light pink dresses, her guitar in hand and a nightgown shoved into her backpack. She doesn’t know how big this party is going to be, from what she’s gathered it’s going to be a couple more people than in the chat, but not a big party like Juju’s birthday or New Year’s Eve.

The front door is closed. Trixie rings the bell twice before letting herself in with the key hidden under a flower pot in a bed of pink and orange tulips. She has just leaned her guitar against the wall
in the hallway when Chi Chi walks out of the kitchen, a big pile of blankets in his arms, a pile he pushes into Trixie’s arms immediately upon seeing her.

“Hey Trix, can you put those in the garden please? Around the fire?”

Trixie hums and walks straight back into the garden, where, of course, there’s no fire to be seen. She dumps the blankets onto a nice patch of grass and then notices somebody stashed twigs and branches for a campfire to the side of the patio. She considers them for a moment, contemplating if she should start piling them up, or if she should head inside and find a nicer party-prepping job more suitable to her interests of keeping her dress clean and pretty, but then Chi Chi walks out of the house, presses an unopened beer into her hands, and gestures for her to help.

♥♥♥

Trixie is busy figuring out in what order to place the blankets around the now stacked firewood to have the most compelling colour story, when Chi Chi turns to her and stops popping his gum for a moment, considering her.

“What?” Trixie says. She is slightly annoyed with how much Chi Chi is popping his gum ever since she asked him if she could have one two minutes ago and he said he was out. She loves popping gum.

“I was just thinking, did any of them tell you she’s coming?”

Trixie stares at him in shock for a moment, almost spitting out her sip of beer.

“Violet’s here? What the fuck?”

Chi Chi furrows up his brows. “No. The, uh, other one. Fuck, what’s her name? The butch one you made out with so much.”

Trixie exhales slowly. Her poor heart. “Oh, okay, God. I thought…”

“You got a problem with Violet though? I didn’t know—” He cuts himself off, takes a sip of his almost-empty bottle of beer and then flashes Trixie a shit-eating grin. “Oh, right. Didn’t connect the dots. Katya, huh?”

Trixie bites her lip. She isn’t close enough to Chi Chi to confide in him, and doesn’t even want to begin thinking about what she did to let him know about her crush. She re-read the part of the group chat where her and Katya were accused of flirting again and again, going from confused, to hopeful, to giddy, and back to confused again, and she still thinks that there wasn’t obvious flirting going on. That’s just the way Katya talks. And obviously she would love Trixie’s music, she isn’t deaf, so why wouldn’t she? So how does Chi Chi know?

She wants to tell Chi Chi that her issues with Violet have nothing to do with Katya, tell him that Violet just riles her for reasons unknown and Katya doesn’t make her heart feel like the sun has taken permanent residence in her body, but she’s fully aware of a blush creeping up her face and so instead goes for a confusing non-committal motion with her hands.

Chi Chi must be able to tell how embarrassed she is. He takes a step towards her and awkwardly pats her shoulder.

“Anyway, Violet is not coming. Katya and she talked about it and figured it’s better if they don’t see each other for a while.”
Trixie nods; she is so uncomfortable. She didn’t know Katya and Violet were talking.

She half wants to ask Chi Chi if Katya and Violet talking is a regular thing, or maybe how he knew about her being interested in Katya, but getting herself out of this awkward situation seems more pressing to her, so she dumps the last two blankets on the grass, her colour story be damned, and takes off into the house.

♥♥♥

An hour later, Trixie is sitting cross-legged on the yellow blanket, pulling her guitar strings, humming along and idly tuning in and out of the conversations around her. It’s early in the evening, the sun is setting and painting the sky around them a dark warm orange, and there aren’t many people here yet. Next to her are Juju, Shangela and Chi Chi, eating chips and chatting with a couple of people who are a hazy blur of faces and names in Trixie’s mind. Since they sat down, Juju has already cried twice, and she is dramatically carrying a box of tissues with her everywhere she goes. Katya is not here yet. She should come home from her dance class around six. It is three minutes after six, and Trixie keeps inconspicuously twisting her head to the left towards the gate, checking for a sign of a red lace bodysuit or any problem pattern.

Despite of her looking out for Katya, Trixie misses her entrance. She’s playing the song Juju announced as her favourite for the third time in a row when people greeting Katya – and Laganja, who’s trailing up behind her – make Trixie look up from the fire reflecting on her nails where she’s pulling the strings. Katya’s eyes are on her, her teeth perfectly white in the light of the fire, and Trixie’s heart skips a beat when she notices Katya give Chi Chi a look accompanied by an innocuous pat on the arm after which Chi Chi scoots closer to Shangela, making just enough room for Katya to squeeze in right next to Trixie.

“Hi,” Katya says, and her whole right side is pressed against Trixie. Katya’s hair is a little wet on the ends and she smells of shampoo. She must have showered at the dance studio. Trixie knows she doesn’t usually use the showers there, she complained more than once about the water there being too cold and the shower stream being too fickle.

“Hey you,” Trixie answers, and flinches a little when she notices her unsupervised fingers pull a wrong string and ruin her melody. Katya is wearing less mascara and foundation than usual, but her lipstick is strong as ever. She must have gotten ready quickly.

When Katya doesn’t strike up a conversation, Trixie focusses back on her fingers, hyper aware of Katya’s body against hers. She wracks her brain for all her favourite melodies to play, transitioning in and out of songs whenever she is struck with a new idea, sometimes only after a few chords.

Once the sun has left, taking with it the colour in the sky to paint a different sky somewhere, Adore gets out their own guitar to support Trixie, and Adore sings loudly and confidently enough to encourage others to join in with them.

The fire that Sasha and Jinkx keep feeding and fanning is getting bigger and Trixie feels warm enough to take of her scarf and open her coat. The fire is crackling, the trees are rustling, and Trixie sings along, trying to sing beautifully enough to make up for Shangela butchering every song she starts to play. At first, Katya isn’t singing with them. She also isn’t talking to anyone, doesn’t at all contribute to the intermingling sounds of the conversations and the nature around them. Only once Trixie starts repeating the songs she has already played – because, if she’s honest, she doesn’t know that many songs – does Katya join in. She is humming quietly, wordlessly and a little off key, and the way her head is so close to Trixie’s makes the sound go straight into Trixie’s ears, as if it’s meant just for her.
After a while, Katya pulls out her phone and Trixie expects her to drop out of the moment and text someone, or maybe scroll her Instagram, but instead Katya nudges her a little and holds up the phone to take a selfie. On the screen, Trixie can see Katya leaned closely to her side, smiling and with the fire reflected in her eyes. Trixie smiles as well, and her smile is neither as straight nor as white as Katya’s but lights up her face just the same. Before Katya get a chance to push the camera button, Chi Chi, Juju and Laganja show up on the screen behind them, crowding into the picture. Katya takes a couple of pictures before shushing them away and taking one of just her and Trixie.

When Trixie’s fingers start feeling numb from playing the guitar and from the cold wind that sometimes wins over the campfire, Trixie places her guitar on top of her guitar case that’s lying in the grass behind her, pulls her knees up to her chest, and zooms in on the conversations around her, scouting for one she wants to join.

Sasha, a guy Trixie doesn’t know, and Jinkx are brainstorming ideas for Sasha’s final art project for graduation. Sasha isn’t graduating for at least another year, but Katya graduating has nudged on both her creative processes and her anxieties, and she has a list of possible options for her opened up on her phone that they are now going through.

Adore is still playing the guitar absentmindedly, half-involved in a conversation about buying abandoned storage units with a group of people Trixie vaguely remembers from New Year’s.

To Trixie’s left, Juju and Shangela are entertaining a big group of people showing them pictures of their new apartment and half bragging, half making fun of their new temporary job at Disney Land they will be starting only a couple of days from now. Juju has snatched a gig as a Disney princess whose name Trixie doesn’t know, it must be one of the newer ones she hasn’t been keeping up with. Shangela will sell mini donuts out of a little van. Both of them are convinced they snatch the better job and tease each other with all the things they will have to go through as a princess and a donuts-salesperson, respectively. Trixie picks this conversation to be a part of, the conversation that happens to be the one that’s currently holding Katya’s attention as well. She rearranges her position slightly so that she’s looking at the group now, and because she doesn’t want to scoot away from Katya she is now a lot closer to the fire than before and can feel her right side heat up immediately.

“But you’re going to job interviews to find a job in your field soon, right?” a girl asks Shangela and Juju, and Trixie thinks she saw her in a lecture sometimes.

Shangela nods, her curls bouncing up and down. “Yeah, I got a ton of applications sent already, Disney is just a temporary gig,” she answers, and Trixie is slightly annoyed with the relieved look on the stranger’s face.

So is Juju, apparently, because she jumps in with: “I don’t know, girl, I might just stay there for as long as they’ll have me. I’m getting to walk around in the sunshine all day, wearing pretty shit and being nice to kids? If that isn’t the dream, I don’t know what is.”

Trixie gives her an encouraging smile and nods and Katya leans forward to kiss Juju’s hair.

“I’m going to miss you so much,” Katya tells Juju, and Juju starts crying once more.

Chi Chi immediately fires a bunch of questions at Juju, about her wanting to take up surfing, about her thoughts on Shangela’s proposal, about the other princesses she will meet at Disney and that she has already decided are going to be her new best friends, much better friends than the losers at the Love Shack, and Juju calms down quickly, chattering away.

Katya isn’t too involved in the conversation – but interjects that the only role she would want to
play at Disney Land is Cruella de Ville – and even though she keeps fidgeting around, a part of her is constantly touching Trixie, be it her thigh, her knee, her shoulder, or all of the above. Trixie puts her weight on her arms behind her, leaning back a little, and makes sure to spread her arms so that one of them is behind Katya’s back, touching it. Katya looks at her and grins, and when Trixie expects her to look away again, she doesn’t. In the light of the fire Katya’s eyes are a sparkling green, and they are focused somewhere around Trixie’s mouth. Katya’s cheeks are painted in the shadow of Trixie’s curls where Trixie sits between her and the fire, and Trixie bites her lips nervously, unsure of how to proceed. Her right side is so close to the fire, too close maybe, she can feel the skin under her jacket practically glowing and there’s beads of sweat forming on her lower back. In the flickering light of the fire, Katya seems to shiver, just slightly.

“Oh, umm, am I blocking the fire from you?”

“Hmm?” Katya asks, and frowns a little. Her eyes wander up to Trixie’s slowly, lingering.

“I, uh, I’m sitting between you and the fire, sorry,” Trixie explains. “You must be cold.”

“Oh,” Katya says, thinks for a beat and then huddles up even closer to Trixie. “I’m good.”

Trixie swallows hard, lets her eyes roam for a moment, searching for the next thing to say, and gets stuck on the shit-eating grin on Chi Chi’s face. He winks at her.

Trixie gives him a look she wouldn’t know how to describe herself. She isn’t dense, isn’t oblivious. She knows that if anyone else treated her the way Katya is treating her tonight – has treated her for longer than tonight, maybe – she would clock them as flirting with her, and, if she was interested, that would be enough for her to flirt back, and flirt back hard. With Katya, however, she is about ninety percent certain she isn’t flirting with her. Katya has always been nice to her, and her being different towards her now just shows her how much closer they have gotten in this new year, and how comfortable Katya is with her now. She is grateful Katya feels this way about her, and a little proud of herself for putting in the work and securing this position in Katya’s heart. She takes her weight off her arms and brings her left arm around Katya’s shoulder. Katya leans her head into her immediately, a couple of frizzy hairs on her head tickling Trixie’s nose. Trixie is too close to the fire, and her body is burning up.

It takes Trixie about two minutes to finally relax into this new position, and then a group of new people arrive, some of them joining the people on the patio and around the swing set, and some of them trying to squeeze themselves onto one of the blankets. One of the people sitting down with Adore is no other than Pearl. Trixie is suddenly grateful to Chi Chi for mentioning Pearl to her earlier. At least she isn’t caught by surprise now. Pearl is wearing a leather jacket, a lot of hair gel, and her headphones wrapped around her neck, and she waves at Trixie non-committedly before focusing on Adore. Apparently, she brought booze as well as many opinions on abandoned storage units.

Trixie waves back and immediately her heart starts racing again. She is very aware of the fact that Katya and her are sitting here as if they were a couple, and even more aware of the fact that if she had her way they would be. On the other hand, she doesn’t like the idea of Pearl seeing her like this, not when Pearl was so nice to her and one of the reasons they ended before they even started is currently curled up against Trixie, looking at Trixie like she is waiting for a reaction from her. On the other hand, she wants the whole world to see them like this, and Pearl’s presence isn’t enough to unglue herself from Katya, not just yet.

Trixie, unsure of what to do, opens her mouth, and this is what comes out:

“I didn’t know you and Violet were still talking, by the way.”
“Oh,” Katya says, and the way she lifts her head of Trixie’s shoulder is having Trixie wish she had just kept her mouth shut, “We aren’t, not really. I mean, I had some things left to say. I said them.”

Trixie nods, and Katya goes on, “I find the best way to deal with thoughts running wild in my head is to say them out loud, and so I called her, and I did.”

“Like what thoughts?” Trixie asks, and is trying not to notice Pearl’s eyes on them.

“Hmm. Hey, Trixie, uh,” Katya scratches her cheek and seems to carefully weigh her next words for a second, “I’m so happy with how you and everyone else were there for me through this whole mess, so happy. But, uh, I don’t really want to talk about it anymore, for now. I feel all talked out.” She takes a deep breath before she adds, “I’m, uh, ready to move on.”

Her eyes are on Trixie’s face again, seemingly having taken permanent residence there for tonight, and Trixie leans forward to grab Juju’s bottle out of her hand and take a long sip. She’s not exactly sure what she’s tasting, there is rum, definitely, and a swirl of other things in there too. The bottle reads organic orange juice. Now that Trixie is drinking, Katya starts rolling a cigarette in her lap. When it’s finished she hands it to Chi Chi and gestures for him to light in on the campfire that Katya can’t reach. Trixie is glad Katya didn’t ask her to do it, she is barely brave enough to use a lighter, always thinking she might get burned. Chi Chi indeed burns himself and takes off towards the house to rinse his finger, cursing. Katya’s cigarette is burning up in the campfire now, and she doesn’t roll another one.

♥♥♥

The bottle in Trixie’s hands is mostly empty, and whenever she looks up and turns away from the campfire for a while, she can see stars glistening above them. She wants to lie down on her back, sprawl out her legs and watch the stars, and take Katya down with her, preferably have her lie with her head on Trixie’s stomach with Trixie’s stroking her hair. Alas, there’s not enough space on the blankets for anyone to lie down, and she is also achingly aware of the fact that the conversations she is having with Shangela and Juju right now are going to be their last ones, at least for a while, so she tries her best to listen and contribute at least a little bit.

“I’ve been getting so many e-mails about the room, it’s insane,” Shangela tells them, “and it’s so tough trying to figure out who is just looking for a cheap space to live for the hell of it, and who really needs it.”

“Doesn’t Bob take care of that stuff?” Laganja asks. Trixie remembers Katya mentioning to her that Laganja, too, wanted to move in here a year ago, but she comes out of a family that is not only loving and supportive but also rich, so Bob offered the room to Sasha instead.

“Yeah, I guess,” Shangela says, “But I want to filter the people that contact him, otherwise it’s too much work for him. It’s the least I can do.”

“Anyone interesting?” Kim asks, scooting closer to Shangela to squint at her screen where Shangela is currently scrolling through her phone with a frown.

“Yeah, I think lots of them could be a good fit.” Shangela nods and keeps scrolling.

“Do you want one person moving in or a couple?” Kim asks. Trixie only ever saw Shangela’s and Juju’s room once, when she helped Juju declutter her closet, and it’s much bigger than the room Katya is sharing with Sasha.

“Please not a couple,” Katya chimes in, “I know we’re all pretending we’re sad to see you go but I
Juju blows Katya a dramatic kiss. “You’re just jealous,” she tells her with a smile. “Just because you’re one of the sad single people now.”

“There’s no sad single people here,” Kim responds, at the same time as Katya says, “Well, don’t get used to it,” followed by a wink at Juju.

“I’m sad single people, you guys,” Laganja moans, and Kim gives her an eyeroll Trixie is used to being used on her exclusively, “Can the new person please be the love of my life, I’m so ready.” She snatches Shangela’s phone out of her hands and starts scrolling. Shangela lets her and gets up to get more drinks.

“Most of these people didn’t even send pics,” Laganja complains, “This is worse than tinder. I don’t want to read all of this.”

“Maybe the love of your life is worth that?” Trixie suggests. She doesn’t know Laganja but is thoroughly entertained by her. If Laganja lived here instead of Sasha, she knows they would be great friends by now. “The love of your life is worth a lot.”

Laganja turns Shangela’s phone so Trixie can see the screen, covered in text. “Yeah, sure, but this is just a long ass email about how hard this person’s life is,” she says, sounding whiney. “That’s depressing.”

She hands Shangela back the phone as soon as she comes back and has passed out drinks to all of them. Katya is sipping strawberry juice out of a carton and Trixie pours some of it into her vodka. The nape of Trixie’s neck is covered in sweat and she notices nobody is sitting as close to the fire as she does, and yet she doesn’t move away, instead strokes her hand lightly up and down Katya’s side and focuses on the stars glistening above them. She’s almost sure Katya can’t feel her touch through her coat.

♥♥♥

It is almost midnight when they run out of wood to make the fire big enough to warm them in the late-February night, and they gather their things and move into the kitchen. Trixie feels a little dazed as they make their way across the garden; there’s spots dancing through the darkness in front of her eyes where she spent too much time looking into the fire, and the alcohol makes her limbs, eyes, and brain feel heavy.

There are some people sitting in the kitchen already, and Trixie, Katya, Shangela, Juju, Chi Chi and Kim are the last ones to abandon the camp fire.

“Wooo, drinking games,” Juju yells as she takes in rows of plastic cups on the kitchen table, “I’m in!”

She throws her hands into the air, and doesn’t look like she is going to be lasting long.

“Not beer pong again,” Chi Chi complains, “literally anything else?”

One of the people currently involved in the game of beer pong is Pearl. Trixie half wants to leave the kitchen, but when unexpectedly a big enough space opens up on her favourite sofa she lets herself sink into the cushions. Katya follows her, and for a split second Trixie thinks she is going to sit down on her lap – not because Katya would want to sit there, of course, but because there is no space on the sofa left – but then Katya sits down on the armrest instead. She lifts her legs up into the air and reaches forwards to strip off her boots in a motion that Trixie is sure she herself doesn’t
have enough abdominal strength to do. Then Katya lets her boots drop to the floor and rests her feet on Trixie’s thighs.

“How about ‘Most Likely to’,” Juju suggests, pulling three folding chairs out of the store room and flopping down next to Pearl.

When her suggestion is mostly ignored, she claps her hands together twice and announces, loud enough for everyone in the room to hear:

“We are playing “most likely to” now, this is my party and I cry if I want to, and you have to do what I want, it’s in the rules.”

Several people leave the kitchen after this, leaving Trixie with only a couple of the people whose names she doesn’t know, most of her friends, and Pearl. Trixie feels awkwardness nudge at her, feels she should feel more flustered about Pearl being here, but Katya has her feet on her thighs and Katya is wearing black tights with white polka dots on them, a black A-line skirt, and a black blouse covered in sequins with mesh around her cleavage and parts of her stomach. Katya has never looked better, she thinks, and isn’t sure if she thinks this every time she sees her, and, if she does, if that makes the thought any less valid.

For her part, Pearl doesn’t seem too bothered by Trixie’s and Katya’s proximity; the few times Trixie looks over to her, Pearl is either not looking at her, or just shooting her a lopsided grin. At some point while Trixie wasn’t looking, Laganja must have pushed one of the folding chairs into the too-narrow space between Juju and Pearl; she is now sitting slightly behind them and chattering at Pearl.

“Do you want to play?” Katya asks, Trixie, and she leans in closer, even though there is no music on and Trixie would have understood her either way.

“Huh?”

“Most likely to. Do you want to play it? If no, we can see what’s going on in the living room, or we can go upstairs and maybe watch a movie, if you want to.”

On her way to meeting Katya’s, Trixie’s eyes catch Pearl’s over the table. Pearl raises an eyebrow at her in question, then smirks. She’s sharing a joint with Laganja now, her elbow resting on the backrest of Laganja’s chair.

“Umm,” Trixie says, “Yeah, yeah, sure, let’s play.”

The rules of the game are simple enough, and Trixie has no problems following them even though she’s now nursing another fruity drink, provided by Adore. They all get a pen and a bunch of post it notes and then somebody says something like “most likely to cry at the dentist” and all of them have to write down and hold up a name. The person who is mentioned the most has to drink and come up with the next statement. Adore hands Katya a glass of carrot juice that Katya considers with the corners of her mouth pulled down. Apparently, this is Katya’s go to drinking game drink.

“This is vile,” Katya comments, and takes a sip before the game has even begun.

Juju starts them off. “Most likely to put a bikini shot into their tinder profile.”

They are laughing, whispering, scribbling, and when everybody holds up their post it note, an overwhelming majority of them have Juju’s name on it.

“Yes, bitches!” Juju comments, “I just picked that one because I’m really thirsty.” She takes a
generous swig from her bottle, then giggles, “Oh no, now it’s my turn again. Umm. Most likely to swipe right on the bikini shot.”

This time, the results are more varied. Some of the post it notes say Shangela, some say Pearl, one says Gia (giving a name to the Asian girl whose name Trixie hadn’t been able to remember) and Katya wrote down Kim’s name, which earns her one of Kim’s bigger eyerolls.

Pearl and Shangela both drink and Pearl motions to Shangela to ask the next question.

“Most likely to go through mine and Juju’s boxes to steal stuff and keep it for themselves.”

That round goes to Adore.

The first time Trixie’s name is thrown into the mix is when one of the people whose name Trixie doesn’t know asks, “most likely to make their phone background a selfie.”

“My background isn’t a selfie,” Trixie whines once she’s taken in everyone’s answers and sees she came in right ahead of Kim and Gia, who are tied on second place. “It’s never been a selfie,” she adds, omitting the one time years ago when Max had snapped a picture of her on a meadow and with a flower crown on her head, a picture that is her profile picture on Instagram to this day. She remembers how, looking at this picture, she had felt truly beautiful for the first time, and how she was reminded of that feeling every time she looked at it, which lead to her setting the picture as her phone background, chasing that feeling.

She takes a sip of her drink, pink and bubbly, and likes the thought that Adore made this drink just for her because they know her by now. “Why would you think it’s a selfie?”

Sasha laughs. “Aww, we’re just teasing, Trixie,” she says, “I wish I was as confident as you are, it’s beautiful.”

“I’m confident?” Trixie asks. She is, she supposes, but with the way Katya makes her act around the group, she didn’t think anyone noticed.

“Confident, really feeling yourself, completely in love with yourself, potato potato,” Juju responds with a slight hiccup. “Next question please.”

Sasha leans across the table a little, apparently having noticed the look of hurt and confusion Trixie feels pulling on her features. “She doesn’t mean that in a bad way,” she tells Trixie and smiles, “honestly, if we all found someone who loves us the way you love yourself, we’d be the happiest household on earth.”

Trixie nods, still confused, and a little too rattled to come up with a snippy comment for the whole situation. She can’t remember if she has already taken a sip and takes some more. Thankfully, conversations around them pick up again, and she leans a little closer to Katya to ask:

“I’m in love with myself?”

Katya looks at her seriously, then a small smile tugs at her lips. “You should be.”

♥♥♥

The next round Trixie wins is round ten, ‘most likely to start a family’. She feels warm and tingly when she reads her name on the post it notes this time, and is drunk enough that her eyes start to well up with tears a little. The last person whose post it note she checks is Katya’s, as she has to twist her head all the way to the side to get a look at it. It says “Trixie”. How does Katya know she
wants to have a family? She tries to recall the one short-lived conversation they had on this topic when she was home for Christmas, how she had joked about wanting to be a mom and had wanted nothing more but to ask Katya if that’s a wish she has, too, but didn’t. As she drowns more of her pink drink she feels a flurry of emotions rise up in her belly, the most dominant one being happiness at the thought that Katya really knows her quite well. Another dominant feeling she’s experiencing is longing, and it causes her to hold Katya’s eyes for a long moment, wishing she knew what to say. By now she is drunk enough that she has to fight the instinct to let herself fall into Katya, with her face landing in Katya’s crotch where Katya sits higher than her on the armrest. If she buried her face in Katya’s crotch and had Katya stroke her hair, surely nobody would use that against her? The game goes on and she is still looking at Katya’s middle in contemplation when Katya reaches out and her fingertips touch Trixie’s hair at the back of her sculp, first lightly, then she’s lacing her fingers through Trixie’s hair, her palm cupping her head. Trixie searches for Katya’s eyes, but Katya is listening to Juju tell them about her princess costume, is listening in more concentration than is adequate considering Juju has told them these exact things more than a handful of times tonight. Trixie drops her eyes off Katya after a while, relaxing into her touch. Katya’s hands are a little chilly on her skin, and yet she thinks if Katya dropped her hand off her head now she would try to chase after it.

“Most likely to write a book,” Kim asks after a few minutes in which Katya, thankfully, doesn’t drop her hand, and this round goes to Katya.

“What’s the book gonna be about?” Laganja asks, hollowing out her cheeks while drawing on her joint. Laganja’s note says her own name, and her elbow is resting on Pearl’s shoulder, a sight that makes Trixie giggle.

Katya shrugs and takes a long swig of her carrot juice. “Your mom’s huge ass,” she says after a second, and the only person laughing louder than Trixie is Katya herself.

♥♥♥

Trixie is enjoying this game, again and again letting out a screeching laugh that has Juju look at her incredulously every time, and has Katya wheezing most times. As she did outside, Katya is constantly changing positions, but never stops touching her. She’s currently sitting up straight on the armrest, with her legs crossed over each other, and her arm around Trixie’s shoulders, playing with the hair falling down Trixie’s side.

When it’s finally Pearl’s time to ask a question, she winks at Trixie before drawling, “Most likely to find love in 2018.” So she did hear Trixie’s little singsong-mantra she sang to herself on New Year’s Eve. Trixie carefully winks back, hoping to come off chill enough that Pearl can’t see the way her cheeks are burning up.

“Twenty gay-teen!” Juju yells and raises Shangela’s wine glass off the table, spilling a considerable amount of white wine on Pearl’s lap.

Trixie has written down the K for Katya before her mind has caught up with her fingers, and she worries her lip between her teeth for a long moment before scribbling down the rest of Katya’s name with slightly shaky fingers. Katya did mention maybe wanting to be fall in love again soon. Trixie wants Katya to have everything she wishes for, writing down Katya’s name isn’t too much of a risk, is it? She is just being a good friend. Katya’s finger ghosts over her earlobe for a second before returning to her hair and Trixie can barely suppress a shiver.

When it’s time to hold up their post it notes Trixie does so with her heart beating out of her chest and fingers she can’t quite stop from shaking. She reads her name on Pearl’s post it note first, and realizes quickly her name and Katya’s are on most post it notes in the room, some of them even
showing both of their names together. Juju is one of the people who wrote down both of their names, and – and Trixie isn’t quite sure she can trust her eyes – has even scribbled a doodle of Trixie and Katya holding hands under a grinning sun into the corner of her post it note. Maybe that isn’t her and Katya though. Katya, maybe, Katya is easily recognizable by the cat face on her stomach, but the one holding her hand doesn’t look like Trixie at all, looks more like a clown in a night gown. Slowly, and almost like she isn’t ready to face the answer, she turns her head to see what Katya wrote down. Katya holds her post it note angled in a way that it’s difficult for Trixie to see, and her eyes are focussed on the table. ‘Trixie’ the post it notes says, and both i’s look suspiciously like hearts, but could also be misshapen triangles, or maybe little upside-down ghosts.

♥♥♥

It’s 4 am when Trixie is getting too tired to follow any of the conversations around them anymore. They have moved to the living room a while ago, the conversations have started to get more muted and scattered, Juju is asleep under the coffee table, snoring softly and her mouth hanging open, and Adore is playing the guitar again.

“You sleeping here?” Katya asks her softly, and she’s idly twirling a lock of Trixie’s hair around her finger. Trixie is thankful for the alcohol and the fact that they have been physically close pretty much all night, so Katya’s action doesn’t make her heart want to burst out of her mouth anymore. Instead, she feels warm and cozy, ready to melt into Katya and the carpet underneath her.

She looks to the other side of the room where Kim and Shangela are lying in their sleeping bags already, quietly talking. The living room is a mess of blankets and pillows. Katya and Jinkx have draped some dark translucent shawls over most of the furniture making the room look unfamiliar and all the more cozy, and earlier Jinkx had untangled the fairy lights from the tree outside and put them over the bookshelf in the living room. Katya’s lava lamp is on the coffee table, casting the warm shifting light Trixie has come to appreciate, and Trixie is a little disappointed they apparently gave up on their idea of a blanket fort, but appreciates the minimal effort either way.

“I’m sleeping here,” she says, and wonders if she would be able to fall asleep if she remained sitting here and dropped her head back a little so she would fully be leaning into Katya. She feels like she could.

Katya smiles. “I’m going to fetch my blanket from upstairs, hold on a minute.” She shuffles to get up, and Trixie feels cold at the loss of contact. Luckily, she can suppress the whine she feels bubbling up in her throat. She can’t believe how quickly Katya is moving all of a sudden, isn’t she tired? Trixie feels like she wouldn’t be able to move in a million years.

“There’s so many blankets here, just stay.”

Katya shakes her head and grins. “I need my favourite blanket,” she says, and, after a short glance at Trixie’s face extends her hand to her. “Wanna come?”

Trixie has a hard time making it up the stairs to Katya’s room, but she gladly follows her anyway. She relies onto the handrail a little more than usual and has just reached the halfway point when Katya is already upstairs. Maybe she should drink carrot juice for their next drinking game.

Katya’s door is locked, and Katya uses a key in a little bowl of keys half-heartedly hidden behind a monstera on a window sill.

Once they are inside, Katya heads towards a drawer and pulls out a pair of black yoga pants and an oversized sweater. For a moment, Trixie thinks she is going to undress here in front of her, an action that would have confirmed Trixie’s assumption that Trixie is not a romantic prospect for
Katya and she’s just comfortable with her as a friend. Katya doesn’t undress however, instead stows the clothes under her arm before picking up a red glitter marker from her night stand. She unscrews the cap, giving Trixie a small smile but avoiding her eyes otherwise, the turns to the list glued to her wall. Trixie blinks stupidly as she watches Katya put a checkmark behind the ridiculous “be happy for 24 hours in a row” point, opens her mouth to ask a question but finds she doesn’t know what to ask.

Trixie is standing in the middle of the room rather uselessly. She would get Katya’s favourite blanket, but there are three blankets on her bed. There’s the black velvety one covered in little golden stars, and Trixie suspects this is the one. She reaches for the blanket when something in Katya’s room catches her eye. The pictures of Katya’s art project are leaning against the foot of Katya’s bed, piled in two rows. The top canvas on the right is a painting Trixie hasn’t seen before. She remembers Katya telling her she was thinking about re-doing one of her earlier paintings; she must have done that. It’s the pink color that lures Trixie in, and then there’s something else, something she needs to make sure is really there. With her heart fluttering in her chest she moves closer and holds the canvas up for inspection, squinting at it in the light seeping in from the hallway. The canvas is covered in pink paint, and, like all of Katya’s work is presumably showing a couple of different things, but all Trixie can see is herself. The way she has of doing her makeup – overstated, thick lines – nobody else does, and she can see it mirrored in Katya’s painting, down to the line of her cheek contouring.

“That’s me,” she states, simple and yet questioning, and Katya turns around on her heels from where she is going through her sock drawer.

Not even in her current buzzed state can Trixie miss the blush that creeps up Katya’s neck, painting her ears the colour of the fuzzy socks she just pulled out of the drawer. Katya’s cheeks fill with air and she lets it out slowly before getting up and walking the three steps over to Trixie with a look of determination on her face. The look stays there until she is standing right in front of Trixie, then she’s visibly wavering before saying:

“That’s what you see?”

Katya is taking another small step forward, and she’s standing too close to Trixie now. Trixie is suddenly achingly aware of the alcohol on her breath and doesn’t want her breath to meet Katya’s face. Is she insensitive for drinking around Katya? Why did she never ask? Did any of the others ever ask? They must have. Sasha drinks around Katya, and Sasha wouldn’t mess up like that, would she?

“Huh?” she asks. She expected Katya to either tell her yes, that is you (followed by an explanation, maybe about how Trixie is currently her favourite friend, her favourite person, or how her makeup is just easily transforms into an abstract art piece), or to laugh at her and tell her what she’s really seeing is some eggs in a pan, or the insides of a bird’s brain.

“You see what you want to see,” Katya says, quietly, and her eyes catch Trixie’s and don’t let go. If Katya only knew what she’s doing to her. Trixie’s hands are tingling, and she wants nothing more than to bring them up from where they are hanging uselessly at her sides and wrap them around Katya’s neck, pulling her closer. They are at a place where she could easily hug Katya now, she thinks, they are friends after all, and yet she feels frozen in place, unable to hug her in an innocuous way. She can’t scare Katya off now.

In the couple of moments Trixie wasn’t paying attention to her, Katya must have wiped her makeup off her face. Her lips are nude now, and the skin around her eyes is a little oily from the product. Katya must have noticed Trixie staring, because she brings up a hand and wipes around
her eyes with her knuckles, looking almost bashful. Trixie is vaguely aware Katya was the last person to speak and the last person to move, so it’s probably her turn now, but all the words she knows make a detour through her stomach and get caught in the messy pool of emotions there, never making it up and through her mouth. If she leaned forward a little now, she could kiss Katya’s lips and paint them in lipstick again, pink lipstick this time.

Katya is the first one to speak again, and Trixie wants to envy her ability to string words together for a moment, but for a reason she cannot wrap her mind around, Katya seems to be struggling as well.

“I, uh,” she says, her voice rather quiet and a little bit deeper than Trixie knows it, followed by “do you,” and Katya almost imperceptibly shaking her head, apparently giving up on words for now as well.

The stairs outside are creaking, there’s footsteps coming towards them, and Trixie is almost relieved somebody is coming in to diffuse this situation. As much as she likes looking at Katya’s face this close up, she doesn’t think she can last much longer without inevitably letting on how much she wants to kiss her and ruining everything they have built so far. Sasha must have heard her silent wish, because she’s opening Katya’s door, hovering in the doorway with an unsure look on her face when she sees Trixie and Katya standing there.

“I just wanted to get my pillow,” Sasha says, and if Trixie didn’t know any better she would swear she saw her mouth a silent “sorry” in Katya’s direction. Sasha gets her pillow from where it rests on her neatly-made bed, then turns towards the drawer as if to get something but seems to change her mind and backs out of the room. Trixie isn’t sure she’s ready for her to leave quite yet, isn’t sure the situation has been sufficiently diffused.

“What do you see?” she asks Sasha, noticing a slight slur in her voice, and holding up the painting for her to check. Sasha doesn’t look at the canvas, instead looks at Katya and furrows her thick black brows until they touch on her forehead.

Suddenly a grin tugs at the corners of her mouth. She takes another step towards the door, standing right in the doorway now, and the last thing she does before heading back downstairs is give Trixie a wink.

♥♥♥

Wrapped in her black blanket with the golden stars, her hair falling softly on the carpet beneath her, Katya is beautiful, and Trixie can’t help but look at her. A couple of minutes ago after they had taken turns getting ready for bed in the bathroom – Trixie had put on one of her favourite yellow night-gowns – Katya led them to a space behind the couch in the living room. The couch now blocks out most people in the living room, Adore has stopped playing the guitar, and there’s only scattered whispers intermingling with snoring and heavy breathing. Someone has turned out all the lights in the room except for the fairy lights, and Trixie wishes Katya was lying to her left side instead of her right; then the fairy lights would reflect in her eyes like the fire did earlier. Katya is lying on her side, facing her, and Trixie is mirroring her position.

Katya’s eyes fall closed after a while and Trixie thinks she must have fallen asleep when they lazily open again. Katya’s pupils wide and dark, and Katya’s hand comes up to catch Trixie’s in hers. Katya’s skin is warm on hers and where Trixie was almost drifting off to sleep before now her heart is fluttering again. Katya slowly pulls Trixie’s hand over to her and upwards to her face, and for a split second Trixie almost loses her mind thinking Katya is going to take her finger into her mouth and suck on it, like she did in Trixie’s fantasies around Christmas and a couple of times since.
Katya doesn’t do that. Instead, she twists Trixie’s hands delicately, and moves it to her lips, until her nose brushes against Trixie’s palm. She presses a soft kiss to the inside of Trixie’s wrist, just one, right where there is a little freckle that Trixie often wishes looked like something special, a sailing boat maybe, or an exotic flower, but that only ever looks like a freckle.

Katya guides Trixie’s hand back after that, lays it to rest on the carpet between them.

Trixie watches Katya’s face until sleep slowly pulls her away from Katya and all the way into herself.

Chapter End Notes

I KNOW.
i promise one of them is gonna crack soon enough! so so soon. the soonest. too soon.
any guesses who it will be? let me know!

back when i wrote this chapter it was my favourite, so i'd love to hear your thoughts. to anyone who has commented and keeps commenting: you really make it feel like writing this is worth it, and i love you for it.

also, did you know if have another story on this account? one in which they aren't uselessly pining? try that one out for a nice change of pace!
In Which Trixie Has a Lot of Nerve

Chapter Notes

hello fellow ladylovers, i hope you enjoy! kisses to rosie, thank you for beta-reading and being there. you're the most angel!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Trixie has taken the flight between Milwaukee and Boston less than a handful of times and yet the queuing, the baggage drop, and the queuing again feel oddly like a routine at this point. The lady checking her flight information may just be the same lady who checked her flight information the last time, hair in an updo so tight it looks like it’s pulling on her cheeks and widening her smile, and Trixie could swear the crying child in line behind her was here for her last flight home as well, crying about the exact same misery, probably.

Trixie strolls through the airport for a while, making sure she knows where to find her gate – the same as last time, of course – then buys her favourite airport smoothie before deciding she’s too tired to browse through the stores and flops down on a spacious metal chair in one of the countless waiting areas. She slept surprisingly well on the carpet in the Love Shack’s living room, but even the best quality sleep isn’t enough when you only get two hours of it. She stretches her legs out in front of her, feeling only a little sorry for blocking part of the floor space between the rows of seats and closes her eyes for a moment. The sounds of people chatting, the countless tiny wheels of suitcases on the light grey linoleum, and the soft music drifting out of a clothing store behind her start blurring together, and she jerks up when she realizes she’s about to fall asleep in the waiting area. She shakes her head vigorously, trying to wake herself up. Better not risk missing her flight, even if sleep is beckoning her.

In order to make sure she stays awake she fishes her phone out of her bag, wanting to shoot a message to Katya who she assumes is still asleep, but Katya pre-empted her.

KATYA

NOOOO

You left already?

I wanted to take you to the airport!!

Trixie furrows her brows, trying to remember if Katya ever thought to tell her about this wish. She can’t recall anything and is almost positive she wasn’t drunk enough last night to miss a gesture like that.

TRIXIE

Hey, good morning, sorry, Sasha took me

She was the only one who was up already, and she said she didn’t mind

When Trixie woke up almost three hours ago, Katya was still fast asleep, her hair covering half of
her face and her mouth hanging slightly open. Trixie had played with the idea of waking her up for a couple of minutes, wanting nothing more than for Katya to smile at her one last time before she is away from her for few days, but Katya had looked so peaceful, and Trixie felt tired to her bones, a sensation she didn’t want to subject Katya to. She could do without Katya’s smile for a couple of days. She got so much of it yesterday, it should carry her through the following days.

**Katya**

*Oh, okay*

**Trixie**

*I’m back in three days!*

*Why are you up already?*

**Katya**

*Juju woke everyone up for emotional support*

*I can’t believe they’re leaving today*

*Well maybe not today, there’s problems with the moving van, we’ll see*

*I’m hiding out in my room now because everybody is getting sappy and nostalgic and I need a little break*

*What are you up to?*

**Trixie**

*Ah I’m sorry*

*I got the world’s second-best smoothie*

[*pic*]

*The best one is one my mom made in her infamous health and fitness phase of 2011*

*We were never able to recreate it for some reason, I’m still crying about it*

*You doing okay?*

**Katya**

*Do you ever drink things that aren’t pink?*

*Yeah, I’m fine*

*Jinkx gave me a new set of tarot cards the other day, I’m getting to know them*

**Trixie**

*I know nothing about tarot*

**Katya**
I know little!

Working on it

Trixie

So you just ask your cards a question and then they tell you the answer?

Katya

Something like that

Little more difficult

You have a question?

Trixie lets her eyes wander through the waiting area. She still has over an hour left to go. Sasha made both of them breakfast earlier, they ate quietly so they wouldn’t wake anyone up, and when Trixie claimed they still had time before they had to leave and considered taking a little nap on the kitchen table Sasha had insisted they had to leave now and were, in fact, already a little late. Could she use all that extra time to text Katya now? She gives her battery a worried glance; she probably shouldn’t overdo it if she wants her phone to be alive by the time she touches the ground in Milwaukee. Maybe she should do some browsing through the stores after all. She turns her phone in her hands absentmindedly: a few of the glittery stones on the back of her phone case have come off, making the case look a little trashier than even Trixie likes. She got the case as a gift from her sister about two years ago, maybe it’s time for another one. She stretches her arms above her head and prepares to get up to look for a store that sells phone cases, then remembers she hasn’t replied to Katya’s message.

Trixie

Yeah

Why is that guy next to me talking on the phone so loud and why does he insist that the Star Wars prequels are the best Star Wars movies there are

Katya

Lemme ask the cards

The cards say it’s because he’s an idiot

Trixie

Wow, magic!

Katya

Anything else I can help you with?

Trixie

Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?

Trixie stares at her phone screen, waiting for Katya’s reply and hoping she isn’t putting off Katya
by not taking her tarot reading seriously enough. She knows it’s serious to Katya, or at least she thinks it is, and she respects that, but as usual she can’t help but make a joke out of everything. As she watches her screen, she sees three little dots appear, waits, and then the dots disappear again. They don’t reappear, and Trixie shuts off her screen in frustration. So she did put off Katya.

Katya. Now that Trixie has an hour of absolutely nothing to do ahead of her, her mind is racing towards the events of last night, fast forwarding through the nights and getting tangled up in a pile of little and not so little moments between the both of them. Katya pushing away Chi Chi to sit next to Trixie at the campfire. Katya singing quietly almost into her ear. Katya hugging her to her side at the campfire, Katya threading her hands through her hair in the kitchen, Katya never quite letting go of her all night. Trixie bites her knuckles when she remembers Katya’s painting and Sasha’s wink, and then she gets up after all and paces up and down between her gate and the next one when she remembers the drinking game, Pearl echoing Trixie’s New Year’s wish and resulting in everyone promising her – and Katya – love this year.

Trixie needs to put an end to this, she decides when she tries to calm her racing heart by sitting down in a different but interchangeable waiting area and trying and failing to recall Katya’s meditation techniques to reign in her mind. Breathe in, breathe out, count, repeat, count, count. Katya checked of be happy for 24 hours in a row last night. That was the last point on her list, wasn’t it? She isn’t sure anymore. What did Katya say again happens as soon as she’s done with her list? She can move on to other things? She seems ready to move on, whatever that means, she said it straight to her face last night, said she doesn’t want to talk about Violet anymore.

Trixie needs to put an end to this, because Katya is leading her on -- inadvertently so, because she doesn’t know Trixie is head over heels for her. Katya is a flirt, constantly telling everybody they’re her favourite person, and doing little things like kissing Juju’s hair, and hugging Trixie for too long. Katya also likes hooking up with people, and even though Trixie knows she made her own thoughts on this topic clear to Katya and knows Katya wouldn’t want to fuck her over, she can’t help but worry about Katya wanting to hook up with her just for fun. She wouldn’t be able to take it, yet thinks she also wouldn’t say no if it came to it. It would be unfair to herself, she knows, and moreover it would be unfair to Katya as long as Katya doesn’t have any idea about Trixie’s feelings for her.

She takes out her phone, knowing she isn’t truly able to tell Katya to back off but needing to do something anyway. Pulling up their messaging window seems as good a place to start as any.

Katya has sent a picture of one of her tarot cards. It’s black and painted in ornate gold lines, and Katya holds it up with fingers coated in chipped black nail polish matching the card. The bottom of the card spells “The Fool” in gold lettering.

**Trixie**

*What does that mean?*

Katya doesn’t answer again after that, and Trixie spends the time remaining till her flight sampling perfumes in one of the duty-free stores, never quite managing to unglue her thoughts from last night’s events, feeling only a little bit of shame when she covers her hair, clavicle, and wrists in the perfume she believes to be Katya’s. When she checks her phone again she is about to board the plane, queuing in front of the floor to ceiling windows opening to the landing strip outside, and her phone’s battery has almost given out.

**Katya**

*It’s you!*
It means YOU’re the fairest of them all

It means you’re the most beautiful woman in the world.

♥♥♥

Trixie spends the flight to Milwaukee in the blissful sleep that is only granted to those who spent the night playing drinking games, and when she is shaken awake by a rough landing, she feels like she only boarded the plane five minutes ago. She furrows her brows, taking in her surroundings. She missed out on the airplane food. What a shame. As far as she knows, she’s the only person on earth who appreciates the tiny sandwiches served in rigid plastic boxes, tasting just like their containers, and making everybody around her pull them apart to see if they can do anything to fix the taste.

She hopes she’ll at least get one of the heart-shaped goodbye chocolates they handed out at the end of her first ever flight, years ago.

She doesn’t.

When she has reclaimed her suitcase – she decided to travel with a suitcase this time because she wants to feel as good as possible about herself at her mom’s birthday party and for that she needs clothing options – she walks up to arrivals, checking for her mom’s friend Rose. Rose is picking Trixie up, giving her mom time for the party preparations, and Trixie isn’t thrilled about spending the long car ride with a stranger. She knows nothing about Rose, has only seen her in the one New Year’s picture her mom sent her, and she checks her surroundings for middle-aged Chinese women. There are plenty.

Rose proves to be smart, however; she’s holding up a sign spelling Trixie’s name in messy pink letters, and Trixie walks up to her with a grin. She recognizes the sign from years ago. Her little sister had painted the letters, and her mom had held it up as a joke when Trixie got home from where she stayed at a school in France for three weeks. She remembers feeling choked up when she saw the sign, confused about being hit with the sudden realisation that she did miss her family while she was away, and a little touched by them using Trixie’s preferred name for one of the first times. She had no idea her mom still had the sign.

♥♥♥

Apparently, Rose isn’t the only new friend her mom made. Two hours after Trixie arrives, her childhood home is filled with people most of whom Trixie has never met before and all of whom are curious to meet her and give her compliments, making her head spin while trying to come up with nice compliments in return. Trixie’s phone is charging behind the couch in the living room, and once she has eaten more than she thought she could fit inside her body and starts to feel a little bored by the conversations around her, she itches to make the few steps into the living room and fetch her phone. She needs to text Katya, though she doesn’t know what she’d say. Katya’s ‘you’re the most beautiful woman in the world’ is still flashing behind her inner eye, spilled out in bright red letters against the backdrop of every other thought Trixie has, and she helps herself to another piece of dirt cake, which earns her a raised eyebrow from Brenda. Trixie barley supresses the urge to stick out her tongue at her.

She stays at the table another hour longer, making polite conversation with her old neighbour who insists on giving Trixie 50 dollars for her flight here. Trixie makes an effort to tell her the cutest and most entertaining stories from the day care and answers her questions about what Trixie intends to do after college with as much patience as she can muster up.
When her little sister gets up and drapes herself on the couch with her phone in hand, Trixie uses the moment to get up as well, fetching her phone from behind the couch and flopping down in her favourite arm chair.

*It means you’re the most beautiful woman in the world.*

She re-reads Katya’s message, smiles so wide she can feel it in every part of her face, shuts off her screen and then turns it on again, and wonders how she could let Katya know that she can’t go on like this, that this is too much for her. Her fingers hover over the keyboard for a long minute, trying to come up with a phrasing that isn’t too pathetic, that doesn’t give her away, but then she is hyper-aware of the fact she doesn’t truly want for Katya to stop this at all. Maybe she could indulge in this, just one more night? Now, with cities, forests, and waters between them functioning as a safety net, and Trixie snuggled into her favourite chair, wearing one of her favourite dresses and still tasting oreos on her tongue, she feels rather brave, dauntless.

She types up a message quickly, and presses send before she can overthink it and inevitably end up deleting it.

**Trixie**

*If I didn’t know any better I’d think you were flirting with me*

She twists and turns her phone around in her hand after that and can’t help grinning at the screen when she re-reads Katya’s earlier messages. One more night of this won’t hurt.

“Is that your boyfriend?”

Trixie jumps when Alice hops onto the armrest of her chair, making a motion to snatch Trixie’s phone out of her hands. Trixie slaps Alice’s hand away and secures the phone under her butt for good measure.

“Nope,” she answers, brusquely.

Alice has a plate with another slice of dirt cake in her hands, and Trixie checks for her mom telling them they aren’t allowed food on the couch, but her mom is wrapped up in a conversation with Brenda and doesn’t pay them any mind. She dips her finger into the whipped cream.

“Hmm,” Alice replies, and watches Trixie quizzically before typing up a message on her own phone. Trixie squints at her screen and sees a string of hearts in one of her previous messages. Alice isn’t dating anyone, is she? Alice is fifteen. Trixie thinks back to when she was fifteen - she had her first date at sixteen, with a guy from her Rocky Horror show production, and she knows some of her friends started dating much earlier than her – her straight friends, who didn’t have to figure out their sexuality on top of everything else you have on your plate at that age.

She steals some oreo crumbs from Alice’s plate and notices her watching Trixie with a challenging look, as if she dares Trixie to return her earlier question. Trixie doesn’t.

“Well, this is *my* boyfriend.” Alice grins, ignoring the absence of a question, and scrolls a second before tapping on a picture. It shows Alice and a stranger standing in front of an aquarium at the nearest mall, a mall Trixie used to spend most of her Saturdays in. The boy is tall and lanky, has red hair and grins into the camera with a rather impressive gap between his front teeth. “That’s Liam, he dirt bikes.”

Trixie considers the picture for a long moment, worry pooling in her stomach. Is Alice old enough to have a boyfriend? She hopes her mom has met Liam and makes a mental note to ask her about
him later.

“I like his teeth,” Trixie says, because she does.

“Me too, they’re so dumb.”

Alice licks the last piece of cake off her fingers and sits the now empty plate on the floor before going in to wipe her hand on the armrest. Trixie snatches her wrist with her best stern big sister look and stretches to reach the coffee table, where someone discarded a barely used napkin.

♥♥♥

Trixie spends the next half hour chatting to her sister, Alice’s feet propped up on Trixie’s thigh like Katya had a little less than 24 hours ago, and filling Trixie in on life in Wisconsin. Trixie can’t remember the last time she had a conversation this long with Alice; Alice had become a little too insufferable for her tastes once she hit thirteen, and Trixie is surprised by how comfortable she feels talking to her sister now. Alice tells her about her new dream job as a beekeeper and how she’s been trying for weeks to talk their mom into letting her start a hive in the garden. She tells her about how Liam just had/got a baby brother two weeks ago, and how Trixie’s mom and Rose took Alice and Liam out to brunch last weekend and riddled Liam with invasive questions for over two hours. Maybe she should call home more, Trixie thinks, and hopes the fact that she never calls hasn’t put too much of a strain on her mother these past couple of months. She doesn’t want to be the one to bring negative feelings into her mom’s life, not now that her mom has all these people who know her as a laid-back woman who likes woodworking and cooking and taking her daughter out to brunch, and not a woman who is hiding away in her home, trying not to drown in her past.

“Mom worries about you,” Alice confirms Trixie’s thoughts when Trixie has stayed silent for a beat too long, “We never know what’s going on with you.”

Trixie nods and feels her stomach twisting uncomfortably. “I’m really good,” she tells Alice, because it’s true, “I love Boston.”

Alice grins easily, and it lifts a little of the sudden heaviness of Trixie’s shoulders. “Good,” she says. “Also, mom keeps asking me if you have a boyfriend.”

Trixie scoffs, almost a hundred percent certain that her mom never once asked Alice about this. She’s about to tell Alice to fuck off but shuts her mouth before the words have left her lips. Alice asking her about a boyfriend, not a girlfriend, is endlessly frustrating to her and she can’t help but feel irritated with her sister. Alice, however, has no way of knowing Trixie is gay. Trixie has made damn sure nobody around here ever found out. She remembers the many times she thought about clearing things up with her family, telling them about Shea, or even Courtney, but was never able to, not when her stepdad and grandparents littered homophobic comments all over the house and neither her mom nor her big brother ever challenged their words.

Alice is young though, and Trixie knows one of her closest friends at school is a gay boy who Trixie has always admired for being out in High School of all places.

“I’m not interested in men,” Trixie mumbles, before she is sure she wants to have this conversation.

When Alice doesn’t verbally react, Trixie squints up at her face, nervousness pulling all the strings inside her body. Alice’s mouth is hanging slightly open, but when she notices Trixie’s eyes on her she closes it and gives her a small uncertain smile.
“Are you, uh,” she starts and then pokes Trixie’s shoulder awkwardly, a motion that she probably intends to make the moment a bit more relaxed. “Are you interested in girls then?”

Trixie stares down at her knees, catching her fingers trace her wrist, the wrist Katya kissed last night. She nods, just once, just slightly, and Alice’s hands don’t leave her shoulder.

“So did you text your girlfriend earlier? I saw the way you were grinning at the screen like a loser.”

♥♥♥

Telling Alice about Katya is easier than Trixie expected it to be. Alice doesn’t know Katya, doesn’t know any of their circumstances, so it’s easy for Trixie to talk about the things she wants to talk about, and gloss over the things she doesn’t want to talk about. She has taken her phone out from under her butt and is scrolling through Katya’s Instagram, with Alice’s eyes glued to the screen. She shows her some of her favourite videos of Katya, all the while talking about the people at the house and the things they do together, noticing absentmindedly that she makes it sound like she does a lot more partying than she truly does. She’s showing Alice the video of Katya in a handstand at the dance studio when a message from Katya comes in, and she wipes it off the screen before her or Alice have a chance to take it in.

“I like her,” Alice decides after a while, “Those are the second-best teeth I’ve ever seen.”

Trixie nods. “Definitely.”

Alice taps on the screen to replay the video, but looks at Trixie instead, a grin on her face.

“So are you like girlfriends, or are you like totally just having fun and living life and whatever?” she asks, using her best impression of a valley girl voice that she picked up from Trixie years ago.

Trixie opens her mouth to come up with a hilarious response in the same voice but bites her lip when she realizes she doesn’t know how to response. She isn’t my girlfriend at all, but I’m dying for her to be? Something tells her this wouldn’t mix well with a valley girl voice. Luckily, this is the moment Rose calls Alice into the kitchen, and Alice happily skips off, apparently not too intrigued with Trixie’s love life after all.

“Hey Alice?” Trixie calls after her, “This stays between the two of us, yeah?”

Alice nods and gives her a thumbs up.

As soon as Alice isn’t hovering over her anymore, Trixie opens the message Katya sent her earlier.

Katya

I am!

Trixie’s eyes jump to her last message. If I didn’t know any better I’d say you were flirting with me. She swallows hard. She wants nothing more than to ask Katya if she remembers Trixie isn’t up for casual flings and even if she was, the dynamic they have makes that impossible with Katya. She stares at her screen, trying to reign in the emotions that want to spill out over her fingertips, and then Katya starts typing again.

Katya

Sorry, do you want me to stop?
Trixie doesn’t, not really. What’s one more night?

**Trixie**

*Please never stop*

**Katya**

!!

*I can’t believe you went to the airport without me*

*Ruining my carefully crafted plans*

*Well to be fair I only crafted them after I failed my plans for last night, but still*

**Trixie**

*What plans?*

**Katya**

*Kissing you goodbye!*

*Kissing you!*

*Hello, goodbye*

*Romance!!*

*This is gonna kill me for the next three days, fuck*

**Trixie**

*Oh*

**Katya**

*Yeah*

**Trixie**

*You wanted to kiss me?*

Trixie’s whole body is brimming with nervous energy, driving her to jump up from her arm chair and uselessly making a round through the room, collecting a couple of plates and setting them near the sink to give herself something to do before she lets herself fall onto the couch. The minute she was out of her chair was enough for an elderly woman to claim it for herself. Now Trixie is stuck on the couch with her brother and Brenda. Brenda is pregnant, is barley showing yet but making up for it by handing everybody pictures of her ultrasound. Trixie knows Brenda hates when Trixie texts in her company and is a little hesitant to get her phone from out of her bra, but after she’s given the grey blob on the grey background her best appreciative smile she returns to her conversation with Katya anyway. It’s not like she can just ghost on her now.

**Katya**
I wanted to kiss you so bad

So bad

I want to kiss you now

Trixie just stops herself from letting out a yell, but can’t stop herself from slapping Brenda’s shoulder in excitement.

Trixie

Oh god why didn’t you?

Katya

I tried!!!

Bitch!! More than once!!

I really didn’t know if you wanted me to

Talk about mixed signals, you’re making this HARD

I didn’t want to do anything you don’t want, and I didn’t want to get rejected, because I’m a baby

Trixie feels all her insides pulled up to towards her chest by a tight string and only notices she’s bouncing her leg when Brenda puts her hand on her knee, forcing her still.

“You’re glowing today,” Brenda tells her, not with a smile but with a quizzical frown. “You got a boyfriend?”

Trixie rolls her eyes as far back in her head as she can and gets up, not knowing where she wants to go but not wanting to sit next to Brenda of all people. Her eyes find her mom in the kitchen, scribbling down one of her recipes for a distant neighbour. So far, Trixie has barely exchanged more than five sentences with her mom today, and she knows she needs to spend some quality time with her in order to make the best of her time her.

Trixie

I’m going to join the birthday fun for a bit, but!

I’ll talk to you later

In the meantime, don’t stop thinking about kissing me

Never above being dramatic, Trixie opens a kitchen drawer and stores her phone behind the cutlery because she knows that if it stays right on her body, Katya’s presence will burn into her skin and she will never stop texting, missing the rest of the party. The phone stays hidden in the drawer for hours, and Trixie helps her mom get ready the Crème Brûlée, supports Alice in whining about wanting to start a bee hive, helps Brenda settle on a wallpaper for the kid’s room, and even listens to one of the church ladies gush about how well her grandson is doing at school. The whole time Trixie is buzzing with nervous excitement and can’t stop shooting a longing glance at the kitchen drawer every once in a while. Katya was scared of Trixie rejecting her.

♥♥♥
It’s almost two am and most of the guests have left already when Trixie gets up from where she’s sat next to Alice on the dining room table and excuses herself to go to bed. She feels dead tired from sitting around the past few hours, but as soon as she’s dragging her suitcase up the stairs to her room, her still switched off phone in hand, she feels like she wants to stay up another twelve hours.

Her room looks different than how she’s left it, and yet just the way she expects it to look. All her furniture is pushed away from the walls a little and the calendar Max made for her is on the wall again. She leaves it there, throws her phone onto the bed, and gets her makeup bag and nightgown out of her suitcase before heading to the bathroom. The bathroom has always been Trixie’s favourite room in the house. It’s large, covered in baby blue tiles, and for a moment Trixie considers drawing herself a bath before she remembers there’s still company downstairs and the small guest bathroom downstairs might not be enough for everyone. She quietly sings her Kim-themed version of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer to herself as she wipes off her makeup, ever fascinated by the heavy black streaks she leaves on the cotton wipes.

She is relieved she spent a couple of hours without talking to Katya and has given her heart a chance to calm down a little. As much as she wants to drown in every word Katya has been sending her, there’s still the sad knowledge that this might not end well for her, not when Katya isn’t serious about her. Is Katya serious about her? The notion that she might be feels too chunky for her to fully wrap her mind around, and she splashes lukewarm water into her face, considers herself in the mirror for a moment. The unwelcome memory of the fight she had with Kim what feels like in another life but was only four months ago pushes into her consciousness. I’m a good girlfriend, she had claimed in one of her less than stellar moments, and I would make Katya happy. She wishes she felt as certain about these sentiments now than she did then, but then chases that thought out of her mind impatiently. It’s not like being Katya’s girlfriend is on the table, she reminds herself, and then she slips into her nightgown and pads back to her room where she slips inside the covers, shivering slightly, and grabbing her phone.

Katya

Thinking about kissing you is my new favorite hobby anyway, I will happily do it all night

Hope you have a nice time!

The messages were sent a little over four hours ago and make Trixie’s heart sing.

Trixie

Are you there?

Katya comes online as soon as Trixie’s message has sent, and she can’t help but grin at the notion of Katya waiting for her to return to their conversation.

Katya

Yes

Trixie starts typing I’m thinking about kissing you all the damn time but then deletes her words before she presses send. It can’t help to have the tiniest bit of leverage here, she thinks, even if that leverage is just an illusion. She feels awful about the thought as soon as it’s crossed her mind, it sounds suspiciously like she’s playing a game, which she never wants to do. She doesn’t retype the message, however, instead sends
I just came out to my sister

Katya

Oh!

I didn’t know you aren’t out to your family

Are you okay, do you want me to call you?

Trixie

It went well!

My sister is a pretty cool person, who would have thought

Katya

I bet she is

I’m so happy for you

Trixie switches her screen off for a moment, finding a more comfortable position to lie in. There’s an extra pillow in her bed; her mom or Alice must have put it there earlier as a little gift to Trixie, and Trixie snuggles in, ravelling in the warmth of the blanket slowly winning over the cold air of the room. She’s warm and comfortable, the noises from downstairs are mostly shut out by the hallway and the door between them, and she’s glad she came home. Maybe she shouldn’t worry too much about what’s going on between her and Katya. Maybe she should just embrace the wonderful things Katya is throwing her way right now. Maybe she can put off worrying till the morning.

Trixie

I keep touching my wrist where you kissed me last night

Katya

I love that

I spent about 400 hours feeling anxious about that being an awful move, but now I feel like it was worth it

Trixie

Are you kidding me

It’s about the best thing that’s ever happened to me

Well

No

The best thing that’s ever happened to me was when my friend Max sent me a video of that guy Jordan (he bullied me a bit in High School)

He crashed his car into a wall while parallel parking and completely lost his mind about it
He cried

He cried real tears, and he’s such an ugly crier too

Nothing will ever top that

Katya

Well, I will spend my whole life trying

God, why did you have to leave now?

I miss you

Trixie throws her new pillow over her face, taking a couple of deep breaths. Katya misses her! She
misses Katya. She always misses Katya. She wishes she were here with her now, she wishes she
could show her Max’s dumb calendar with the horrid black and white photos of the two of them,
wishes she could introduce her to Alice and eat dirt cake together, wishes she could hold her, right
now, here in her bed.

Trixie

Get ready because I’m kissing you as soon as I get back

Katya

Okay, I’m flexing already

Trixie

Good!

What now?

It’s 2.30 am, and Trixie knows she should go to sleep, knows that her family will have breakfast at
an ungodly hour tomorrow morning and knows that she maybe shouldn’t skip that, not when she
only comes home every couple of months. She also knows, however, that there is no way she is
falling asleep now, not when she feels like there’s a million tiny stars dancing inside her chest,
slowly spreading out all over her body.

Katya

Well

What are you wearing?

Trixie lets out a loud screech before she can help herself, and Alice bangs her fist against the wall
to her right. She must have left for bed shortly after her, Trixie hadn’t even heard her go into her
room. She bangs on the wall right back.

Trixie

Katya!

I’m not sexting you right now
Katya

I know

It was just a joke

Shame though, I’m really good at it

A sext-pert, if you will

Trixie bites her knuckles and pushes her face into her pillow as hard as she can.

Trixie

I bet you are, oh god

What would you say?

Katya

If we were sexting, hypothetically?

Trixie

Yes

Hypothetically

As Trixie watches three little dots appear, disappear, reappear, and disappear again she sits up, too wired to lie down any longer, pulls the blanket over her shoulders and settles into the wall next to her bed, her knees drawn up to her chest. She hasn’t been this excited about anything since – well, since last night.

Katya

I was bluffing, I’m horrid at sexting

When I’m not physically there you can’t be compelled by the raw sexual energy oozing out of my rotted skin at any given moment

Trixie

...

That’s hot.

Katya

I just

I want to touch you

Are you wearing that night gown from last night?

Trixie
Yes

Katya

*Do you know how beautiful you look in that?*

Trixie

Yes

Katya

*Oh god*

*It’s so cute how offended you were when Juju told you you’re in love with yourself last night*

*I love your shoulders*

*There’s that constellation of freckles on your left shoulder that looks like my zodiac*

*Sasha says it doesn’t, and in fact looks more like her zodiac than mine, but she’s a cancer, we can’t trust her*

Trixie

*I sampled perfumes a while back and found the one I think you’re using and I sprayed it all over me at the airport earlier*

*I can still smell it in my hair*

*If I close my eyes it’s almost like you’re here*

Katya

*Daisy?*

Trixie

*Daisy*

Katya

*I want to touch you and smell myself on you, Jesus*

Trixie

*I’d let you*

*Will let you*

*What else do you want to do?*

Katya

*I just*
Ugh

Can I be that girl for a moment and uhhh say how much I wanna bury my whole face in your tits

Trixie

Omg

Katya

I know, shit

I just wanna touch you, Trixie

I can’t believe I invited you up to my room last night and you didn’t bite and now you have the NERVE to ask me why I didn’t kiss you

That do take nerve

Sorry I’m getting carried away

Good thing we’re not sexting, that’s one of my less sexy qualities

Trixie

You know who gets to touch me anytime?

Me!

So much fun

Katya

Oh bitch

Would you mmm maybe touch yourself now?

Trixie takes a deep calming breath, a breath that ends up a little too deep and not nearly as calming as she wants it to be, making her head spin. She’s knows her shoulders aren’t supposed to rise up like this when she’s breathes the way she’s supposed to be breathing. The air is supposed to travel into her belly without her shoulders playing any part, and yet her shoulders are almost up to her ears now, and her chest too tight to fit in as much air as she needs. She tries to mull over the question Should I be sexting with Katya right now but all she can think about is Katya touching her, or Katya sitting somewhere miles and miles away and thinking about touching her, and she rolls her head back against the wall for a long moment. Katya wants her, wants her right in this moment, and she isn’t dramatic enough to turn this into a conversation about Katya’s other feelings and intentions towards her, or maybe she is, but she’s too turned on for that now.

Trixie

Do you want me to get undressed?

Katya

Yes, oh god
Trixie sits up a little, dragging the thin nylon out from under her and pulling it over her head, a motion made difficult by her refusal to put her phone away. She didn’t switch the screen off either, and when she glances at it again realizes she accidentally sent ‘bzllbhr’ to Katya, but refrains from explaining the message in favour of:

I’m in my underwear now, and I’m sitting on my bed

Maybe she should send Katya a picture? She looks down at herself and feels like she looks nice enough with only the dim light on her nightstand casting shadows on her body. Feeling gutsy, she opens her phone’s camera and looks at herself through the screen. The picture is dark and grainy, and she immediately changes her position from sitting to lying to make her stomach rolls fuck off, but as soon as she’s lying down her breasts are looking less than favourable: They do a great job as long as they’re covered by a bra and a tight shirt, but flounder once they are left to their own devices. Should she get up and put on a bra? She only brought one, and it’s her plain blue comfort bra that would certainly not look all that impressive in a picture. Her panties look cute enough, with a bit of lace at the waistband, but the details are barely visible through the camera and instead the white fabric looks grey and sad. Trixie repositions the camera so that her bottom half is cut off, then uses her free arm to mould her breasts into a decent looking position with her elbow. She finds a nice position, snaps the picture, scrutinizes it and realizes she hates the way her elbow is in the picture, giving away her technique. She drags her hand over her face in frustration, her breasts flopping back down, and decides that Katya doesn’t need any more of a visual than she has already given her. There’s another message from Katya coming in, and she switches the camera off.

Katya

Can I see?

Trixie

No :)

I’m wearing a pink bra, mesh, and with lace flower detail

Katya

mmmm

I just remembered you smell like me right now and I died and ascended to heaven

Trixie takes one hand off her phone and gathers her hair from between her back and the wall, holding it close to her nose. The scent of Katya’s perfume is almost gone now, so faint that she can’t be sure she isn’t making it up entirely, but still she is able to conjure it in her mind. Letting out a huff of loud air through her nose she lets herself drop against her mattress, her shoulders welcoming the softness after being pressed against the wall for the past couple of minutes. She feels warm, a glowing sensation in her belly spreading out over her whole body and warming her skin from the inside; only her fingers around her phone are a little cold still, and when she starts running them over her skin she shivers slightly.

She touches her neck first, softly lets her fingertips dance over the heated skin, then rubs her breasts, rolling her nipples between her thumbs and her index fingers. Her phone lies discarded next to her and for a moment she wishes she had a third arm she could use for texting, or maybe use her arms for texting and Katya’s arms for touching instead, but then a quiet moan escaping her lips reminds her of a bigger issue. She doesn’t have any music on, and certainly can’t turn the music on now at 3 am, at least not loud enough that it would swallow her moans.
Trixie

Katya, I have to be so quiet
I can never be quiet

Katya

Oh god
You

ffff tell me what you're doing?

Trixie is touching herself over her – white, not grey! – panties now, a pillow half-heartedly thrown over her face to catch any treacherous sounds. She stars typing *I'm so wet, Katya* because she is, but then deletes the message, unsure about it sounding too pornographic.

Trixie

*I'm taking off my panties now*

*Diving in with one finger*

*Two*

*Feels so good Katya*

Katya

*I want to touch you, Jesus*

*I wish you were crushing my face with your thighs right now*

Trixie

*Oh I could crush you, trust*

Trixie puts her phone away for a moment then, focussing only on herself for a couple of minutes. It had taken her an embarrassing amount of tries to type that message correctly using only one slightly shaking hand and most of her focus on the fiery sensation she feels building up low inside her belly. She uses her free hand to press the pillow tighter against her face and lets out a couple of measured moans, spurring herself on. She feels she is ready to fly over the edge already, what with her feeling on edge for the longest time – the last half hour? The last two days? The last two weeks? – but slows down her movements a little, purposefully avoiding her clit to give herself a little more time. She huffs into her pillow when she realizes she’s past the point of no return and her orgasm is building now no matter how scarce the stimulation, so she might as well touch herself the way she wants to and make the most of it. All of her nerve endings, all the glowing stars dancing through her body, seem to coil together, hot and tight, and then explode into a sudden softness, and she catches her moan in her pillow as well as she can.

She starts laughing as soon as she’s done, feeling boneless and hazily light, and Katya wants her, Katya is thinking about her right now. She doesn’t know how to tell Katya she just came, tries and fails to find an exciting way to say that end ends up sending:
I just came

Katya

Oh!

There’s a long moment in which Trixie waits for another message but there isn’t one coming through, and suddenly it hits her that she did this all wrong. She should have involved Katya more, send her more messages, not just tell her once she’s done, and, moreover, she hadn’t even thought once to focus on Katya. Well, she had focussed on Katya, the Katya concentrated in the messages on her screen and the fantasy Katya between her thighs, but she doesn’t know what Katya has actually been doing this whole time, hasn’t asked her what she’s doing or told her what she should be doing.

She bites her lip in frustration, making sure it hurts. She can’t believe how caught up in herself she got, not when she needs to make sure Katya doesn’t immediately drop her again.

Trixie

Fuck

Fuck shit I’m sorry

I promise I’m not always this self-involved

What were you doing this whole time? I’m so sorry, I’m an idiot

Katya

Haha Trixie, it’s all good! Promise

I’m just sitting on the swing outside

But don’t worry, I took plenty of care of myself this evening

Shit, Trixie, I can’t wait for you to get back here

Trixie

Me either

I can’t believe you were outside this whole time

Do you maybe wanna go inside and we continue?

Katya

mmm sounds lovely

But Shangie and Juju are officially leaving now, they just got back from saying goodbye to their room one last time, which means fucking, which is why I’m outside

I’m gonna say goodbye now, okay?

Are you okay to go to sleep or do you want to keep texting later? I can call also
Trixie

Are you going to be there in the morning?

Katya

I am

Trixie

Are you sure you’re not pissed at me?

Akjsjsjk I promise I can do better

Katya

You’ll just have to show me

Trixie

Oh god

Okay, I’ll try to sleep now

Thank you!

I’m

Thank you

I forgot to tell Shangie to go find a good job and get rich and get a beach house I can stay at anytime. Please let her know I’m counting on her

Katya

Will do

Good night, Trixie <3

Chapter End Notes

let me know what you think, GUYS IM NERVOUS. i really am.
if you can, please leave your comment on here!
Trixie doesn’t sleep well that night, not when she’s re-reading not only hers and Katya’s non-sexting but every message they had sent each other lately; knowing what she knows now, Katya’s interest in her slaps her in the face with every message she reads. Katya constantly checking in on her during her exam period, even when Trixie failed to be her most charming self, Katya telling her all she needed to know about Violet and her wishes for the future, Katya wanting to spend time with her, Katya never quite leaving her side even when Trixie was too busy to see her.

She sends a message to Kim, a string of exclamation points, hoping for Kim to reply with a question mark and the unspoken permission for Trixie to gush over what just happened, but Kim remains quiet, and it’s 4 am by now, of course she does. Instead, Trixie paces up and down her room, playing with the idea of going outside to take a walk, but it’s raining now and it’s the middle of the night, and she lies back down, trying her best to fall asleep. The house is quiet: the party ended a little while ago, and the only noise is the floorboard creaking beneath Brenda’s feet when she walks back and forth between Brad’s room and the bathroom in short intervals, making Trixie stir up every time she’s put her phone away long enough to give herself a chance to finally fall asleep.

♥♥♥

Trixie is woken up with a slap to her face. The slap comes from a tiny, slimy toy hand on a string, and Trixie is all too used to the sensation of it sticking to her skin. The hand has been one of Alice’s favourite toys since she found it in a forgotten drawer in Trixie’s room years ago, and she keeps slapping it against the walls, making their mom lose her mind over the stains it leaves on the floral wallpaper.

She tries to kick Alice against the shins without losing her comfortable position in her bed, but only slightly brushes against Alice’s knee with her toe, and she hears Alice slapping the hand against her floor repeatedly.

“It’s 12pm,” she informs Trixie, “we were wondering why you’ve come home if you’re just going to spend all day sleeping.”

Trixie groans into her pillow and when she moves her head a little, her face gets pressed into her phone. She must have fallen asleep almost on the screen early in the morning.

“If I am, who is we? Brenda?”

“Who is we? Brenda?”

“You know it.”

“No, I don’t. I don’t just hate her?”
“You know it.”

Trixie pulls the blanket over her head.

“The neighbours are coming over because they couldn’t make it last night, and we’re all having lunch together,” Alice goes on, and slaps the hand on Trixie’s back over the blanket.

“Wanna ditch them and go shopping?” Trixie suggests into her pillow.

“Talked mom into giving me 50 bucks already. Meet you at the car in 20.”

Trixie buries her face into her pillow a little deeper. “Make it 30.”

Trixie spends the ten extra minutes she just won lying there grinning into her pillow, with snippets of hers and Katya’s conversation from last night chasing through her mind. She feels elated, and like she could run the 20 miles to the mall, could run them while carrying Alice on her back even.

She puts off checking her phone, knowing her giddiness will inevitably be a little dampened if Katya hasn’t sent her a morning text, and tries to talk herself up, tell herself it doesn’t matter, before glancing at the screen.

Katya did text her.

Katya

Good morning! I hope you don’t have too many regrets ((¿))

Trixie

Regrets?

Katya

I feel like it should have happened differently

That wasn’t ROMANCE, was it

Trixie lets out an audible giggle, relieved she isn’t the only one overanalysing things and almost kisses her phone screen.

Trixie

Everything doesn’t have to be ROMANCE

And it’s not too late for ROMANCE either

I feel amazing

Going shopping with Alice now, need to get ready!

♥♥♥

Trixie and her sister stay at the mall until it closes. Trixie spends an agonizing two hours watching Alice try on various sneakers at a store she would normally never set foot in: All the sneakers are white with different-coloured neon stripes on them, they all look the same, and Trixie wouldn’t be caught dead in any of them. They are expensive too, and Trixie decides to pitch in and help Alice
get the pair she’s set her heart on, feeling like for once she’s nailing being a good big sister.

After the sneakers store, Trixie drags Alice into a lingerie store, the windows filled with brightly coloured floral bras and panties announcing spring time. She rummages through rows and rows of frilly bras before she unexpectedly finds what she was looking for: a pink mesh bra with floral detail. It doesn’t look quite like the bra she had in mind when she described it to Katya last night: this one has a little more coverage, but given the reality of her breasts this can’t hurt. She gleefully takes the bra into the changing rooms with her, throwing in a couple of pretty panties for good measure, and when the bra moulds her breasts into perfect shape and even fits her lipstick, and the warm, indirect lighting in the cubicle softens her features, she impulsively snaps a selfie of the top half of her body and sends it to Katya.

**Katya**

*Last night’s bra!!*

*Are you buying that just now?*

**Trixie**

*No no, I always leave the price tag on*

*Don’t call me out on my bullshit :’)*

**Katya**

*I need you back here right now*

*Do you think I can pick you up from the airport?*

Trixie can just picture it:

She’s landing back in Boston, well rested after blissfully sleeping on the plane, her curls neat and her dress clean and crisp, and Katya’s waiting for her, the sun illuminating her frame against the floor to ceiling windows at the airport. Katya’s carrying a bouquet of yellow flowers, or maybe white flowers, or maybe no flowers at all, and she’s smiling her biggest, warmest smile and they walk up to each other, Trixie’s suitcase light as air, people around them gracefully floating out of their way.

She’s coming to stand right in front of Katya and for a split second she drowns in Katya’s ocean-coloured eyes before they close the distance between them, and Katya leans in to capture Trixie’s lips in hers and they kiss and kiss and kiss until the world around them melts away and Katya takes her hand, leading her home.

**Trixie**

*Yes please!!*

<3

♥♥♥

The next two hours Trixie spends searching high and low for a dress beautiful enough to deserve to be featured in their perfect first kiss at the airport – none of the clothes she owns feel deserving. Alice isn’t helpful, gets snarky and bored and doesn’t seem to remember how nicely Trixie
indulged her shopping for sneakers earlier, and Trixie is left to her own devices. She finds her dress long after Alice has abandoned her in favour of the food court; it’s a hot pink dress covered in a light pink all-over print of theatrical masks, flared A-line, magically making her breasts bigger and her tummy flatter, and she has to stop herself from sending Katya a picture of the dress right there and then. She doesn’t want her to see it, not yet.

Another hour later, filled with Chinese noodles in peanut sauce, they make one last stop at the book store before driving back home to spend the evening with their mom – who, Trixie knows, will have something cooked and expect them to eat again, making her thoroughly regret the Chinese food.

Trixie browses through the store idly, picking up book after colourful book promising her stories to get sucked into and almost deciding to buy some of them, but then she remembers all the unread books on her shelves in both of her homes and all the nights she picks up one of the books and, after reading a few pages, turns to her phone or her computer instead. She shakes her head lightly, promising herself to start reading more soon – maybe in 2019, 2018 has already started and it’s no use starting anything now – and when out of the corner of her eye she notices one of the books her mom listens to as an audiobook she makes towards the shelf of self-help books. She picks up a couple, all the while glancing over to Alice, her arms filled with books and obviously nowhere near done browsing, and lets her eyes fly over the blurbs, not quite knowing what she’s looking for until she finds it: a pale-yellow book entitled “Addict in the Family: Story of Loss, Hope and Recovery”. She has never heard of the book before, of course, and after skimming the blur doubts it’s a book that’s helpful to her in any way, but it reminds her of a thought that has been tapping at the back of her mind for a while now: Katya is an addict, and she, Trixie, doesn’t know the first thing about addiction. She should definitely learn. She doesn’t know the protocol for this kind of situation, doesn’t know what she should google and what sources to trust, if she should buy books or not, if she can just outright ask Katya how to best inform herself. She mulls over the thought in her mind for a while, thumbing through the pages of the book without taking any of it in, and decides that yes, she can probably just ask Katya. She is ready to learn, she thinks, and hopes Katya will just tell her all she needs to know, but knows that even if Katya gave her eleven or thirty-nine books to read she would do it.

♥♥♥

Saying goodbye to her family feels harder than it felt when Trixie first moved out half a year ago, and when she hugs her mom and sister goodbye at the airport she makes a silent promise to herself to come back soon. She doesn’t make that promise verbal out of fear she won’t keep it, won’t even want to keep it as soon as she’s in Boston again and carried away by her busy life in her new home, having to force herself to respond to texts from home for reasons she barely comprehends.

Over the last three days Trixie has spent as much time as possible with her family, has done her best to resist the urge to lock herself up in her room with her phone and talk to Katya all day and night. She has, however, texted Katya a lot, reading about Katya starting her job at Dorothy’s and her endless love of Trish, telling Katya how her days are going, how she misses her; not telling Katya that only last night she had jolted awake at 2 am, worrying about Katya not wanting what she wants, and unable to fall back asleep for hours.

Trixie uses her time at the airport to treat herself to a sparkling golden phone case, and sends one last text to Katya right before she boards the plane.

**Trixie**

_I can’t believe I’m seeing you in three hours_
She closes her eyes for a moment, the line not moving for now, and imagines herself kissing Katya at the airport again, her new favourite fantasy she has replayed in her mind at least seventy times by now. The fantasy has slightly shifted by now and they’re kissing outside on the landing strip. She doesn’t know how Katya could get there but she made it happen somehow, she’s there in a bright red dress and messy hair and in Trixie’s arms as soon as she steps off the plane.

Katya

Trixie, shit

I was just about to text you, I’m so sorry

Darienne called me in to work this afternoon short notice

I arranged for Sasha to pick you up, I hope that’s okay

I can swing by after my shift around 6.30, or you can come by mine?

Trixie swallows around the lump building in her throat, swallows down her fantasy of a perfect first kiss in arrivals, texts back an unenthusiastic “okay” and spends the time remaining till boarding trying not to drown in self-pity too much. It doesn’t matter, she knows, she’s still boarding a plane to Boston where Katya is waiting for her, Katya wants to see her, Katya wants to kiss her.

♥♥♥

When the plane touches the ground in Boston, Trixie is nervously twisting the hem of her new pink dress between her fingers, frowning at the wrinkles caused by her hands and the airplane seats. Had she known she wouldn’t see Katya as soon as she lands, she wouldn’t have made herself suffer through a flight in a dress this tight. She probably won’t even wear the dress when she goes to Katya’s later, not now that it’s wrinkled and messy-looking. Still playing with the hem, she mentally goes over hers and Kim’s wardrobe, thinking of what else she could wear tonight, glad for any thought that keeps her occupied and isn’t a nervous mulling-over their encounter later.

♥♥♥

Trixie’s nervousness is only building when forty minutes later she is riding shot gun in Sasha’s – Bob’s? – car, sipping on a smoothie. It’s Trixie’s favourite airport smoothie, the one she sent Katya a picture of when she flew out a couple of days before, and her stomach feels warm at the notion of Katya instructing Sasha to get her a smoothie when she picks her up, and get her this exact smoothie.

Sasha is making polite conversation, filling her in on a long skype date with Shangela and Juju just this morning and talking about babysitting Bob’s kid last night, but Trixie has a hard time listening and contributing to the conversation. Should she meet Katya at hers or at Katya’s place? Kim isn’t home tonight, she’s staying with her family for a couple of days as she tells them about her decision regarding college and walks them through the vague ideas she has for her future. She never responded to Trixie’s string of exclamation point, but when Trixie called her yesterday, Kim let her gush and fret about Katya for almost an hour, and Kim promised her she’d indulge Trixie some more over her favourite cake once they’re both back in Boston in a couple of days.

“You want me to take you to your place?” Sasha asks, and it’s almost 5pm now, only an hour until Katya’s shift ends, and somehow Trixie can’t conceptualize herself waiting around in her apartment for Katya to show up there.
“Actually, could you maybe drop me off at Katya’s store?” Trixie asks, impulsively, and thinks she would take back her request in a heartbeat if Sasha showed so much as the slightest hesitation, but Sasha just nods easily and turns left, and then they’re heading downtown, towards Katya.

Trixie is relieved when Sasha makes no move to get out of the car once she’s made a half-assed attempt to parallel park opposite Dorothy’s. Instead, she reaches over to squeeze Trixie’s shoulder and gives her a patient smile indicating that Katya has filled her in on everything that has happened these past couple of days. Trixie’s heart jumps at the notion of Katya discussing her with other people, and she grins back at Sasha, almost forgetting her nervousness for a moment.

Trixie leaves her suitcase in Sasha’s trunk, knows she will need at least her toiletries tonight but can’t deal with logistics right now, and then suddenly she’s standing in the cold late-February air in the light of a streetlamp that just turned on, glad that Sasha drives off without waiting for Trixie to disappear in the store. She needs a minute.

The brick building looks different in the semi-dark: there’s the same colourful hats and wigs in the windows, but from the other side of the street Trixie can barely make them out over the reflections of the streetlights. She breathes in and out deeply, once, twice, and knots her fingers through her curls, curls that probably don’t look as good as they should, not after the plane. Her chunky ring with the light pink stone gets tangled in her hair, and she tries to yank it out impatiently before taking a couple of deep breaths and untangling it. Then she crosses the street, determined.

Trixie pushes the door open with a wave of confidence she was able to conjure when she crossed the street seconds ago and that is already unravelling now at the unexpectedly loud chime of the silver bell announcing her presence. Even with the loud sound of the bell, Katya doesn’t look up from her space behind the counter, doesn’t notice Trixie. Katya looks different, and it takes Trixie a moment in which she watches her through narrowed eyes to figure out what has changed: Katya’s hair, before almost the same shade as Trixie’s but without the underlying honey tone in it, is now tinted a shade of light grey. With the unfamiliar light in the store Trixie isn’t sure how much her hair colour has truly changed, but nevertheless the difference is noticeable.

Katya is behind the cluttered glass counter, writing or drawing something hidden behind a display of flashy bracelets, propped up on her elbows. Trixie waits another beat, waits to see if Katya will notice her, but she doesn’t, and then she walks over to her, her heart beating through her chest. Her steps get swallowed by the dark grey carpet and the soft music coming from somewhere behind Katya, and it is only when she is standing almost in front of her that Katya looks up.

Katya’s polite “hi” gets stuck in her throat halfway through when she sees who her costumer is, and she stares at Trixie in bewilderment for a second before she smiles, Trixie’s favourite smile that somehow soothes her while making her heart beat even faster at the same time.

“Hi Katya,” Trixie says, and her voice sounds a little smaller than she expects it to.

For a couple of seconds, Katya hovers on the white plastic bar chair behind the counter, then she gets up and awkwardly steps over a box filled with colourful clutter to come and greet Trixie properly. Katya looks amazing, Trixie thinks for what must be the millionth time now; she’s wearing part of her newly-grey hair in two high pigtails at her sides, the rest of it flowing openly over her shoulders and back. Her black, short-sleeved shirt is covered in silver stars and golden moons and tugged into a tight black sequin pencil skirt, and Trixie is elated by the thought that Katya might have put just as much thought into today’s outfit as Trixie put into hers.

Trixie feels her hands shake slightly and is relieved when Katya is finally right there in front of her and she can hug her close, giving her hands something to do. She hugs Katya for a long moment, neither of them speaking, breathing in Katya’s scent that is so distinctly recognisable to her by
now, her right arm tight around Katya’s narrow waist and her left hand idly tracing a sequin moon on Katya’s lower shoulder. Katya’s body feels familiar in her arms; she has hugged her so many times now, and yet this hug promises something new, and Trixie is nervous enough about finding out what this new thing might be to not want to let go of the hug at all.

Katya is the first one to break the silence between them. “I didn’t know you’d come here,” she mumbles against her shoulder, and of course she didn’t, not even Trixie knew.

Trixie wants to apologize for catching Katya off guard, but then Katya slowly lets go of Trixie’s waist and moves her face back just a little, just inches from Trixie’s now, looking at her expectantly, and Trixie can’t remember what it was she wanted to tell her. Katya is wearing red lipstick that might be a little darker than usual, but Trixie isn’t sure, isn’t used to the colour of Katya’s face now that it’s framed by grey hair.

Trixie moves her right hand up slowly, cautiously, and lets her fingers thread lightly through Katya’s hair, her index finger tracing Katya’s cheek from the highest point of her cheekbone all the way down to her chin in the process. Katya’s eyes are on her, green and intent, waiting. Trixie’s heart is racing, she can hear the rapid beat in her ears and wishes Katya would say something, do something, to make this easier for her but Katya doesn’t, just stands there and looks at her, a barely-there smile ghosting on her lips. It takes Trixie some willpower to move her other hand as well, to put it on Katya’s hip, and as soon as she does, Katya takes a small step towards her, and she’s so close now Trixie can feel her breath on her face. With the step, Katya moves her hands to Trixie’s shoulders and immediately lets them drop down slightly, coming to rest on her clavicle. Trixie is still in her winter coat and can barely feel Katya’s touch on her, wishes she was wearing less, and is burning up in the too-warm air at the store.

Katya grins all of a sudden, then a silent laugh escapes her lips and she cocks her head.

“You alright?” she asks, lightly, and Trixie both feels grateful for her attempt of breaking through the tension and like a failure for not being able to kiss Katya right there and then, like she promised Katya, like she promised herself. “You look like you’re about to pass out.”

Trixie nods. “Let me just take off my coat, it’s, uh, pretty hot in here,” she says lamely and inwardly rolls her eyes at herself. Katya laughs again and then her hands are gone from Trixie’s body and she takes a step back, waiting for Trixie to move.

“Let me get that for you.”

Trixie’s head snaps around at the noise of a deep raspy voice coming from behind her. There’s Trish, climbing down a small ladder leading to stacks of boxes and even more clutter, wearing the same white lace dress Trixie remembers her wearing when she saw her the first time.

Trixie unclasps the buttons of her cream-coloured coat hastily and shrugs it off, immediately relieved when the air of the store hits her naked arms in her new sleeveless dress.

“Who is that?” Trish asks, directed at Katya, taking Trixie’s coat and looking around in obvious confusion for a moment before taking a few steps in direction of the counter and unceremoniously throwing Trixie’s coat over the box of clutter on the floor.

“That’s Trixie,” Katya answers, and Trixie’s heart swells when she notices a trace of pride in Katya’s voice. Katya has turned in Trish’s direction slightly but is still mostly facing Trixie, and her fingers move to lightly clasp Trixie’s wrist, her thumb tracing the thin skin there.

“Trixie,” Trish nods, no recognition in her voice, but then she gives the two of them a long look
and repeats “Trixie!” before winking at Katya through an ambitious amount of dark lashes. “Katya really likes you, she does.” Trish directs at Trixie and nods earnestly before picking up a couple of sheets of paper Katya was scribbling on before, squinting at them, and stacking them a few inches to the left.

“She knows that,” Katya grins, and Trixie envies her for being seemingly completely relaxed, in no way out of her element. “I’ve told her that,” Katya says to Trixie only, turning her back on Trish. Trixie smooths her hands over the wrinkles in her dress, taking a deep breath and trying to get back to her usual flippant self, a self that would be able to handle this situation much better than the current mess she is. She gives it her best try, bats her eyes at Katya and says:

“I could get used to hearing it some more.”

Katya grins, and her expression turns into a challenging one when she steps into Trixie’s space, impossibly close, wraps her arms around Trixie’s waist, and when she moves her face towards Trixie’s, Trixie is sure she will kiss her, closes her eyes in anticipation, but then Katya’s lips are at her ear.

“I like you so, so much,” she murmurs, her lips almost touching Trixie’s earlobe, and Trixie is achingly aware of the way her thighs are trembling with Katya’s proximity.

“Katya!” Trish’s raspy voice disrupts their moment and makes the butterflies in Trixie’s stomach dive downwards, into certain death, “Darienne said to tell you to rearrange the, uh,” she hesitates for a moment, scratches her neck, “the shelf back there.” She points to the back of the store, a motion that could indicate a whole array of shelves. “Well, she told me, but whatever, I don’t know what she wants me to do. She wants it done by tomorrow morning. I mean I could do it probably, but you were just sitting there drawing your thing, and art is important, or at least that’s my interpretation. Art is important. But you don’t wanna be too comfortable, gotta keep yourself on your toes.” She points to the back of the store again and Katya shakes her head lightly.

“Sure, I’ll rearrange that shelf,” Katya says, waving both arms through the air indicating that she has no clue as to which shelf she is supposed to be working on. “I’ll just sort the wigs by how much I feel like wearing them right in this moment, yeah?”

“Yeah, whatever.” Trish waves her off and Katya steps away, not without tracing her hands teasingly over Trixie’s sides, and Trixie supresses a shiver.

Trish’s eyes, big and green under a heavy layer of startlingly green eye-shadow, follow Katya to the back of the stores, then she bends at the knees and stretches to the left to see Katya vanish behind the shelf.

“Good,” she says towards Trixie once she can’t see Katya anymore, and Trixie isn’t sure how any of this is good at all. She makes a motion to follow Katya; now that Katya isn’t here she doesn’t understand why she didn’t just kiss her before, it’s so easy, she’ll just follow Katya now and kiss her, press her against one of the shelves and kiss her till closing time, the easiest thing in the world.

“It’s Trixie, right?” Trish asks her and steps into her way, keeping Trixie from following Katya. Trish’s voice is comparatively small now in what might be her attempt at a whisper.

Trixie nods, trying not to get too annoyed with the woman in front of her.

“See, Katya told me all about you,” Trish goes on, dragging her husky voice over every sound slowly, “And I know she’s all excited about today and you look like you’re about to freak out, no
offence, it’s my interpretation. Of the situation, you know. So I wanna help.”

Trixie shakes her head slightly, shaking off her irritation and trying to embrace the ridiculous situation. Katya isn’t far, and she’s going to kiss her today for sure, it’s all good, she can entertain Trish for a moment. There’s a crash in the back of the store and her head snaps around immediately, but then Katya shouts, “it’s all good” and Trish grabs her wrist and leads her towards the front of the store, away from Katya. Trixie lets herself get dragged over there and frowns when she catches herself appreciating Trish’s face. She really is quite beautiful, with her sharp cheekbones and her full painted-red lips. She huffs out a breath, suppressing a giggle. Trish is far from being her type.

“So I was thinking,” Trish goes on, and her voice goes back to her usual level now; apparently she’s deeming them far enough outside Katya’s reach, “I was thinking we could have two birds and one stone, and kill them both. Is that how that goes? Anyway, you help me, I help you. Like, a win win, for me. And you.”

She looks at Trixie expectantly, not offering any more explanation.

Trixie sighs. “Help you how?” she asks and notices a quality in her voice that she usually reserves for the kids at the day care.

“So I’m doing my best you know, every day’s a journey, every day’s a miracle, doing my best making sales here but here’s the thing, I haven’t made any sales today. And you, you happen to be in need of a lot of good items.”

Trixie laughs and wishes Katya was here to witness this exchange. “I am?”

“Yes. I was taking a nap earlier and thought about it, you know, used my precious time to think about it, and I know what you need, right?”

She points to the display behind her. It’s underwear, tacky and revealing and Trixie lets out a screaming laugh.

“I have underwear,” she giggles.

“Right but like, maybe something special. For Katya. Look at this,” Trish grabs one of the panties hanging on the wall wrapped in clear plastic. “Those are lace panties,” she explains her choice as if Trixie doesn’t have two working eyes, presses the ugly orange thing into Trixie’s arms, “They are great because, like, you see the vagina right through them, like you know it’s there.”

This is certainly true: the panties are made of barely any fabric and Trixie’s vagina would surely hang out a little on both sides.

“Do you have any other options for me?” Trixie asks politely, deciding to entertain Trish for now. This will make for a good story if nothing else.

“Right, yeah, I told you I thought about it.”

Trish turns back to the shelf, taking in her options with her right hand moving slowly in the air, and she obviously hasn’t thought of anything else to offer to Trixie.

“I’d give you these,” Trish says and points at an even skimpier number, white and uncomfortable looking, “but I don’t think you would fit in those.”

“I really wouldn’t,” Trixie confirms.
“Right. Unfortunately, the clitoris is like, it’s like a big –” she trails off, walking over to a display of corsets and stockings and Trixie fears for the worst, “you know when you make brownies? When your mom made brownies, and she’d ask you if you wanna lick the spoon, that’s what it’s like. I mean, it’s a metaphor, right? And those panties are just no good, are they?”

Trixie lets out another screaming laugh, unsure now if she wants Katya to join them or not.

“I mean, I’m assuming. I haven’t, to be really honest with you, I haven’t found my clitoris yet, I’ve been looking, you know, doing my best, but I haven’t been able to find her yet. But you’re a lesbian, yeah? You know things. I mean, I’m assuming. That’s good, right, we’re all just women of grace and dignity here.”

Trixie shakes her head again, unsure if she wants to invest the brain power she feels she needs to follow Trish’s train of thought. Trish is surprisingly good looking, she notices again, she’s about the same height and stature as Katya, and when she gives Trixie a loopy smile Trixie can’t help but notice that her teeth are just as perfect as Katya’s. Well, almost. No one has teeth like Katya does.

“If I buy something off you, will you let me go?” she bargains, glancing at the light blue corset in Trish’s hands and thinking it could be worse.

Trish nods. “Yeah, but would look weird if you wore that corset with your Hello Kitty underwear, wouldn’t it? I mean, I’m assuming. I don’t mind Hello Kitty, I have no thoughts on her. Except, there was that one time, when I thought – but yeah, no, this isn’t important now, is it? If you buy this you need like, you need to give the whole fantasy, stockings and panties and everything, you want her to drop dead when she sees you, right? Like, you step out in that and she sees you and you’re like: ‘Dinner’s served, Julia.’ It’s just like, Darienne is always on my case about making the sales and I’m like, I’m here, I’m doing my thing, it’s not my fault people aren’t buying things. People always have so many things already, right? I don’t have that many things, except I wanna get a cat but I’ve been told this shouldn’t be my priority right now. Your girlfriend sold this wig earlier that looks like a mushroom, she’ll have to tell me how she did it, it looks like a mushroom and she sold it. Darienne will be pleased.”

“I have panties that go with that,” Trixie lies and takes the plastic-wrapped corset out of Trish’s extended hand to check the price tag. At least it’s as cheap as it looks.

“Right.” Trish nods and grabs a pair of white and light-blue stockings from the wall unprompted before she makes towards the counter. “If you buy another like five things I made more sales than Katya.”

Trixie grins and shakes her head apologetically, lets Trish lead her to the counter, ring up her purchases and shove them into a plastic bag, and Trixie lets the bag vanish into her purse in a hurry, relieved Katya hasn’t shown up to see what she’s let Trish talk her into buying.

“Can I go in the back and see Katya now?” Trixie asks, in mock-exasperation, and Trish nods.

“Yeah, sure. If you need me, I’ll be taking a small nap,” she announces, and then she closes her eyes while she remains standing, her head falling slowly towards her chest.

Trixie squints at her in disbelief, then shrugs, and turns towards the back of the store, her heartrate picking up immediately. She steps behind a shelf carrying everything you need for dressing up like a pirate, or a mermaid, and then she sees Katya, slightly bent over something, and Trixie lets her eyes linger on Katya’s ass unapologetically, flicking her tongue over her lips. Katya turns around then, a big smile spreading over her face, and on her way over to Trixie she bends down to grab a
white sunhat off the floor.

“I thought you might like this,” she says, stepping into Trixie’s space once more and holding up the hat, silently asking for permission to put it on Trixie’s head.

Trixie nods. “Are you all just trying to sell me things, is this what’s happening?”

Katya sets the hat on her head, rearranging it until she seems satisfied.

“Beautiful,” she says, and Trixie can’t help but giggle again, “wait, you didn’t let Trish talk you into buying anything, did you? What is it? Not the crab costume? We can return to crab costume, Trixie. I mean, if you want to. You can also wear it, of course, if that’s your thing? Whatever you want, honestly, I’m down.”

“It’s not the crab costume,” Trixie assures her, and makes a mental note to ask Katya what it is she is down for another time.

Katya smiles again, looking up at her, and Trixie can only assume she looks good in the hat. She hopes she does. Katya looks good, that’s for sure; Katya is all black and gold and sparkling, her golden geometric earrings and the heavy-looking necklace of golden chains woven together around a big eye letting Trixie know Katya really tried today, and Trixie loves her for it. Katya’s hand rises to cup Trixie’s cheek and Trixie is once again frozen in place, heart racing, waiting for Katya to close the distance between them, a distance that can’t be more than a few inches but that feels miles wide to Trixie.

She swallows hard, bites her lip and Katya’s eyes drop to her lips longingly before fluttering shut. Katya’s fingers apply a bit of pressure on her cheeks, urging Trixie forwards, and Trixie does, hasn’t moved more than an inch before Katya is right there, and her lips are on hers.

Katya’s lips are warm and soft under hers and Trixie can’t stop herself from sighing against them, first pulling Katya towards her by her waist, then surprising herself by taking a step forward and crowding Katya back against the shelf until her back hits the plastic and Trixie can lean her whole weight against her. Now that the distance between them is closed, now that she’s finally doing what she’s been dreaming about doing for months, she isn’t holding back.

Neither is Katya. Katya’s mouth is open under hers, inviting her in, and her hands fly into Trixie’s hair, pushing off the hat she just put there, dragging over her sculp. Trixie traces her fingers up Katya’s naked arms using just her fingertips, making Katya shudder lightly against her lips, then she sets her hands on Katya’s clavicle, wants to drag them down, wants nothing more than to firmly cup Katya’s breasts but stops herself for now, focussing instead of the warm sensation of Katya’s lips on hers, making her lips tingle.

“Trixie,” Katya sighs against her lips, and for a moment Trixie thinks Katya wants to tell her something, maybe even tell her to stop, but Katya just keeps kissing her, then sighs Trixie’s name again and Trixie melts into Katya’s smaller frame against the shelf. Katya’s hands follow the lengths of Trixie’s long curls to her back and settle on Trixie’s hips, squeezing the soft skin there and holding Trixie in place as if Trixie needed any incentive to stay right where she is. Trixie traces the outlines of a sequin star just above Katya’s breasts, and when she feels her head start spinning from a bit too much kissing and not enough breathing she reluctantly lets go of Katya’s lips to kiss down her neck, carefully avoiding the heavy golden chains of Katya’s eye necklace. She can feel Katya’s rapid heartbeat in a vein on her neck, her skin there warm and slightly flustered, and Trixie traces Katya’s skin with her lips, keeping track of Katya’s breath hitching, and when she glances up at her she sees Katya has her head leaned back against the shelf and is biting her lips.
Katya’s hands travel back to into her hair and she tugs there lightly, bringing Trixie back up to capture her lips once more, and this time the kiss feels less urgent, softer, and like they’ve always been doing this. She leans her forehead against Katya’s after a while and slowly lets her eyes flutter open. Katya’s eyes are still closed, her dark long lashes casting a small shadow on her cheekbones, and her lipstick is completely fucked, dragged all around her mouth and much lighter than it was just minutes ago. Trixie can only imagine the way she looks, with Katya’s dark colour melted into the light pink she chose to go with her dress.

They stand there, breathing lightly against each other’s faces, and Trixie waiting for her heartbeat to calm down, lacing her fingers through Katya’s hair.

“I love the new colour,” she says after a while, then clears her throat when she notices an unusual hoarseness in her voice.

“I love that you’re here,” Katya counters and moves in to drop a chaste kiss on Trixie’s tingling lips. “I’m so happy you’re here.”

Trixie hums, goes to play with the chains of Katya’s heavy necklace. After a while she closes her eyes again, leans her forehead against Katya’s once more, and there’s nothing on her mind besides the feeling of Katya’s fingers running up and down her arms and Katya’s breath ghosting on her face. “So how much time until you can leave?” she asks after a couple of minutes when another loud crashing sound reminds her of Trish’s presence and the fact that Katya is technically at work. She glances around for a clock but can’t find one.

“Uhh.” Katya bends forward a little to gather her phone from where it’s tucked into the shaft of her knee-high boots and Trixie takes a step backwards to give her a little space. “A little over twenty minutes now. I need to do the closing up though and see if everything is okay, Trish is sometimes not so great with-” she trails off, then grins at Trixie. “Trish is amazing, isn’t she?”

“Uh-huh,” Trixie shrugs, and can’t stop herself from dragging her hands down Katya’s sides slowly, drinking in the sight of her skin-tight pencil skirt on her narrow hips.

Trixie spends the next thirty minutes hovering near the door, itching to leave the store and do she doesn’t know what, and her heart seems to double in size every time Katya laughs, be it over the enigma that is Trish’s thought process or Trixie’s obvious impatience. When Trish abandons closing down the register in favour of rambling about how Trixie and Katya make a lovely couple and Katya never chimes in to tell her they aren’t, in fact, a couple, Trixie ducks out of the store for a second to have a moment. She really did it, finally. She walked right up to Katya in the back of the store, overcame all her fears, and just kissed her with all she had. She can’t wait to tell Kim. Who’s the useless lesbian now?

Chapter End Notes

let me know what you think and thank you so so much for commenting on previous chapters, you guys make me feel so warm!
i’m mallstars on tumblr, if you wanna drop by!
In Which Things Need to Be Explored

Chapter Notes

ahhhh, we are slowly but surely coming to an end, and i can already feel the nostalgia kicking in :) i need to fix some stuff in the epilogue but other than that this story is fully written! thanks to rosie for beta-reading and being there for me! getting to talk to you might just be my favourite part about writing this thing.

i hope you guys enjoy this chapter and have a happy easter time! ♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s a forty-minute walk from Dorothy’s to the Love Shack, and Trixie is happy about the crisp wind playing in her hair and the opportunity to gather her thoughts a little before she is in Katya’s home. Trixie walks out of the boutique ahead of her while Katya keeps turning around and checking on Trish closing the store multiple times. When Katya catches up to her, she bumps their shoulders together and smiles up at Trixie. The wind has picked up considerably since Sasha dropped her off, or maybe she didn’t notice before, not when she was that on edge about seeing Katya again. She’s on edge still, but the nerves are curled up in a tiny ball in her lower stomach, leaving room for multiple other emotions when before they seemed to occupy her whole body, including her teeth and fingertips.

There’s a slight drizzle in the air, and even though only one tiny drop has landed on the tip of Trixie’s nose so far, some people on the sidewalk already start pulling out their umbrellas and Trixie has to sidestep an elderly lady with an inexcusably large beige umbrella that threatens to poke her in the eye. She bumps against Katya, Katya grins, and then Katya’s hand is in hers. Katya’s hand is cold, and Trixie’s starts freezing immediately now that she can’t pull it up into the sleeve of her coat any longer, but the feeling of Katya’s hand in hers makes her heart speed up enough that it will hopefully warm her up from the inside any second now. She squeezes Katya’s fingers and hopes her rings don’t dig into Katya’s skin too uncomfortably. If they do, Katya seems willing to take it.

“Oh!” Katya says suddenly and stops in her tracks, causing a disgruntled man their age to walk around her in a huff, “where’s your luggage?”

Trixie grins and shrugs, coyly. “Sasha took it with her. It’s at your place, I think.”

Katya’s eyes widen slightly, then she nods and walks on, the wind whipping through her hair behind her. “My place then.”

♥♥♥

Holding Katya’s hand in the middle of the city feels beautiful. Barely anyone is looking at them, and Trixie knows she has the biting wind and the drizzling rain to thank for most people walking with their heads turned down, their hands in their pockets and rushing to wherever they’re going as fast as they can, not minding their surroundings much. She doesn’t know how things would be different if the sun was shining and people were more aware of their environment, doesn’t know if she’d have to deal with staring, doesn’t know if the staring would be curious, or hostile.

Back when Trixie was seventeen, closeted and anxious, she used to fantasize about holding Shea’s
hand in public. Trixie had always been tactile with her female friends, sitting in each other’s laps, occasionally holding hands or even kissing their cheeks, but once Shea and her slowly realized their feelings for each other, the casual touches had stopped; touching Shea had felt too private, and like it was burning her fingertips, like it was the opposite of innocent, and then, over time, she had slowly stopped touching her other friends as well, was unsure if she was allowed to anymore.

She remembers about two years ago, not long after she met Courtney, they spent a weekend in Milwaukee, and Courtney, well-versed in Milwaukee’s queer scene, had taken her to a few clubs, meeting her friends, watching drag shows, getting drunk. Holding Courtney’s hand had been the easiest thing in the world, because Courtney didn’t seem to have a care in the world, and why would she, being surrounded by a scene in which Courtney and Trixie weren’t outsiders. Even though she hasn’t talked to Courtney in a year and can’t say she misses her anymore, she is well-aware of the help Courtney has been in her path to self-acceptance, can’t help but feel she wouldn’t be where she is now if it wasn’t for her.

“You look like you’re trying to figure out the answer to the universe over there,” Katya remarks, and her thumb rubs slow circles on the cold skin of the back of Trixie’s hand. “Are you okay? We can always just get your suitcase and I’ll walk you to your place and let you get a bit of rest alone, or we can go for a drink right now, or watch a movie, or whatever you want.”

“I’m really good,” Trixie answers, and is a little flustered when she notices how choked up she sounds. She turns her face away from Katya, focusses her eyes on the little Bistro on the other side of the street where two waitresses in dark green aprons are hurriedly collecting the menus and little vases off the table, saving the tulips from the rain drops that are by now getting heavier by the second.

Katya twists her head around and for a moment Trixie thinks she’s trying to get a look at Trixie’s face, but then Katya pulls her a couple of steps to the side and into a bus that’s stopping a little ways ahead of its stop, the stop being occupied by truck unloading crates into a little corner shop. Katya pays with lose change from the pockets of her oversize jean jacket and leads Trixie to the second to last row of seats, flops down on a blue plastic seat by the window. As soon as Trixie sits down next to her Katya rearranges her position, draws her leg up onto the seat until her knees rest on Trixie’s thighs. She reaches up her hand and starts tracing a gentle line down Trixie’s cheek with her index finger, smiling up at Trixie carefully. Katya’s jacket doesn’t have a hood and the top of her light grey hair is wet, a few drops of rain trailing down her forehead and getting lost in her dark eyebrows.

“I’m happy I’m here,” Trixie says, and the sentence feels too familiar in her mouth; she figures she might have already used it earlier, but then Katya’s eyes light up and Trixie thinks she could get away with saying those exact words another twenty times today.

Katya smiles at her, her eyes sparkling, and her face is so close Trixie can see the faint remaining smudge of pink and red lipstick around Katya’s lips where she wiped her lips clean on a tissue earlier. Trixie withdraws her eyes from Katya’s with some difficulty, turns them towards where her hands trace idle patterns on Katya’s knee.

“Can I kiss you?” Katya asks. She sounds unsure and Trixie doesn’t know if she’s sad or grateful for Katya being in tune with her body language, understands this is a question she needs to ask.

Trixie worries her bottom lip between her teeth and glances around. The bus is far from being busy; even though the rain is pouring by now most people seem to be content walking tucked under their umbrellas or hoods. There’s an elderly couple sitting in front of the bus, the woman staring out of the window while the angle’s of the man’s head, dropped down to his chest, has
Trixie assuming he’s fallen asleep. The only other person around is a young girl carrying a gigantic school bag covered in farm animals and reflecting lights; she’s sitting on the edge of her seat, her backpack occupying almost the complete seat. Neither the couple nor the girl are turned towards where Katya and Trixie are sitting.

Trixie takes a calming breath, steadying herself on Katya’s knee, and kisses her. As soon as she feels Katya’s mouth move against hers, she feels a thrill shoot through her body, and while she intended the kiss to be chaste and short she is now pulling Katya towards her, kissing her open mouthed, shutting out the world around her. Katya’s hair is wet under her fingers and she can feel Katya smiling against her mouth. When Trixie feels Katya’s hands on the small of her back she inches closer, trying to align their bodies and the small space between the rows of seats.

The bus is jerking to a sudden stop and tears them apart; Trixie’s eyes shoot open. A middle-aged man enters the bus, squinting at his wet camera in concern. He is followed by almost a dozen people: all of them sharing similar features, all of them chattering amongst each other in loud Italian. The large family spreads out over the bus, some of them sitting in the middle, some of them towards the back, and when the bus starts driving again they have their noses glued to the window, loudly reading out the signs of random shops and restaurants they’re passing, and when they pass Fenway Park some of them try unsuccessfully to take pictures through the raindrops running down the bus windows.

“My sister has a boyfriend now,” Trixie says conversationally once she’s checked in with herself and realized she could never kiss Katya now, not when the world is so busy around them. She feels unhappy with that realization, and hopes things will change for her, hopes Katya will help make things change for her.

Katya for her part seems completely relaxed, her head leaned against the uncomfortable plastic seat and her fingers lacing through Trixie’s.

“My sister’s boyfriend just quit his job to focus on his music,” Katya replies. “His music being the awful garage band he started with his college roommate only a couple months ago and who have come up with exactly one song so far. It’s about sex in the bath tub. My sister is pretty desperate.”

“Is bathtub sex a thing?” Trixie has to raise her voice quite a bit; the Italian family are happy to shout over each other through the whole bus and seem oblivious to the glares the elderly couple and Trixie are sending their way. One of the women has huddled all the kids together into two rows of seats to take a picture of them and is standing in the aisle, being shaken around by the movements of the bus and apparently unable to take a non-blurry picture without making the biggest fuss.

“Not according to my sister, but I don’t trust her. These things always need to be explored. So what’s your sister’s boyfriend like? Did you meet him?”

Trixie tells Katya about her sister and about her mom’s party, and Katya listens while cracking up every time Trixie interrupts herself to glare at various members of the Italian family. Every time Katya laughs Trixie feels a tingling in her stomach and she notices herself shamelessly playing up her exasperation with the family to lure more laughs out of Katya. When Trixie mutters the one Italian curse word she knows under her breath – Vaffanculo – Katya leans her forehead against Trixie’s while laughing, and before Trixie can scrutinize her actions she has captured Katya’s lips in hers, her hands on Katya’s cheeks.

When she lets go of Katya a couple of seconds later, Katya’s smile is bright and gleeful, and the Italian family is still glued to the windows, twisting their heads to catch a view of Boston University.
By now, Trixie has walked into the Love Shack countless times, but she has never gone there in Katya’s company. The few minutes it takes them to walk from the bus station to the house are all Trixie needs to get over her initial shock of being with Katya; the heavy rain has turned into a backdrop drizzle again, Katya is talking about vague plans of flying out to LA in late summer, and then she needs almost a full minute to find her keys in the bottom of her purse. Katya’s keys include a variety of intricate old-fashioned keys that Trixie suspects don’t open anything and are just there for intrigue. Her keychain includes a little wooden star that Trixie has already seen on Shangela’s keys as well, and the too-big metal crow Katya had bought in the flower shop on Trixie’s second day here and had sworn to wear as a necklace every time she sees Trixie. Trixie remembers the way the heavy necklace had bitten into the skin on the nape of Katya’s neck the one time she saw her wear it, and when Katya finally turns the keys inside the lock, Trixie hugs her from behind, brushes her hair aside and kisses the skin where she remembers the red marks.

“You want something to drink? I have some of that awful tea you like to drink, the one that tastes like cupcakes or something?” Katya offers when she strips of her boots. Her tights are black and sheer, covered in tiny white polka dots. Trixie is hit by the sudden realisation that Katya probably wouldn’t mind her ripping off all her clothes now – well, maybe not right here right now, but in a minute, in Katya’s bedroom – and freezes mid-motion while unbuttoning her coat. She does need something to drink for sure. Something that isn’t cake-flavoured tea.

She trails behind Katya into the kitchen, where Jinkx is sitting on the kitchen counter, reading a thin black book; its title is so faded Trixie can’t make it out.

“Hey,” Jinkx greets them when they get in and folds over the page they are currently reading, but doesn’t shut the book. “Katya, have you read my messages yet?”

“Ahh,” Katya answers and grimaces, draws her chin to her chest and pulls the edges of her mouth downwards, exposing her bottom teeth. “I forget.”

“I know.” Jinkx smiles and looks like they want to pat Katya’s hair, but Katya is standing too far away, taking an unopened package of Trixie’s favourite blueberry tea from a shelf above the kitchen sink and ripping into the plastic. “That’s why I text you about it every fifteen minutes.”

“Ah,” Katya nods. “I thought it was because you were lonely and desperate for my charm and company.”

Jinkx snorts.

“I didn’t have time to text! I was busy being a woman?” She’s doing the grimace again, and now Trixie wants to pat her hair as well, or maybe muss her hair up, or maybe pull on it, just a little. “The dog ate my phone? I was busy!”

Jinkx lets out another snort, then their thin red eyebrows travel up their forehead as their eyes come to rest on Trixie. “I noticed,” they say, and Trixie bats her lashes at them before asking:

“What are we talking about?”

“We still haven’t picked a new roommate. We narrowed it down to fourteen people and we’ve been very unsuccessful in narrowing it down further now. Katya is being the least helpful person.”

Trixie nods and goes to pour water into the kettle, because Katya seems to have forgotten that cooking tea entails more than just grabbing a tea bag from a box.
The group chat has been constantly buzzing with a discussion of new roommates in the last couple of days, and Trixie has barely read any of it, has all but dropped out of the conversation to focus all her attention on Katya.

“I told you I like the one with the eyes.” Katya shrugs and grins. “That’s the best one. But I’m good with whomever, really.” When Jinkx looks unimpressed Katya raises her hands up. “I’m not a decision maker, Barbra! Can’t you and Sasha pick one? You’re, no offense, you’re so picky. Just make the decision and I’ll be happy. But also, pick the right one. Pick Yuhua.”

Katya bops Jinkx’s nose when Trixie pours herself water into her favourite mug of Katya’s, the one she made in pottery class that’s covered in crooked yellow stars, and then she follows Katya into her room, trying to focus on anything but the glowing ball of nerves in her chest.

When Katya pushes the door to her bedroom open and leads Trixie inside, Trixie’s mouth falls open in surprise.

Katya’s bed stands in the middle of the room, at a weird angle that makes it look like her narrow bed occupies most of the space. Sasha’s bed is gone, and so are most of her things; the wall behind where her bed used to stand is empty safe for a post it note reading, in bold letters: Katya, read your messages.

“So what’s happening here?” Trixie asks, trying to figure out if it’s possible Sasha told her something about moving out in the car earlier and Trixie was just so wrapped up in herself that she didn’t even notice. She wasn’t that far gone, was she?

“I’m like,” Katya hesitates for a moment, then makes a motion as if she was swimming, waving her arms around the room, “learning how to use my new space.”

“I can see that,” Trixie says, and flops down on Katya’s bed. Even though the room seems pretty spacious now, there’s absolutely no place to sit besides the bed. “I mean, where is Sasha?”

“Oh! Right. She’s moved into Jinkx’ room for now.” Katya grins, then does the same grimace she did in the kitchen earlier, pulling her bottom lip down towards her chin, while simultaneously batting her lashes.

“Oh my god,” Trixie replies, and hopes she isn’t blushing, “how, uh, convenient.”

Katya is standing in front of the bed, frowns, and then moves to push the bed back against the wall where it used to stand with Trixie still sitting on it. She’s surprisingly strong, and cares unsurprisingly little about Bob’s hardwood floors.

“Yeah,” she agrees when she seems satisfied with the bed’s position, “very convenient for sure. But also, Jinkx is moving out soon, probably, and Sasha wanted to secure herself a single room because she wasn’t fast enough to claim Juju’s old one. But it’s a win win, for me.”

She remains standing in front of Trixie, almost as if unsure she’s allowed to join her on her bed, and Trixie gathers every little piece of courage floating free in her body, channels them into her hands and grabs Katya’s hips. She pulls her forwards until their legs touch, and Katya leans in to kiss Trixie once more.

Katya’s lips on hers are enticing, addicting, and she simultaneously wants to undress Katya as fast as she can and to not move past this moment at all, to just remain kissing her, to do nothing else all night.

Katya pushes her back into the mattress then, her hands soft but determined on Trixie’s chest, and
she climbs on top of Trixie as if they had done this a million times before. Trixie lets herself fall down gladly, her hands brushing over the many sequins on Katya’s body, and then giggles when the cold chains of Katya’s extravagant necklace fall onto her face. Katya sits up a little, flashes Trixie a smile that makes her want to pull her back down immediately, and unclasps the necklace. The necklace falls onto Katya’s nightstand with a clink. Katya’s big geometrical earrings follow, and then she pulls her hair free of her pigtails, combing through her long hair with her fingers with a few strong strokes and then shaking her hair free lightly. Trixie is transfixed. She pushes herself up on her elbows, doesn’t really know why, but wants to be as close as she can get to Katya. Katya kisses her once, softly, and then her hands are on the back of Trixie’s neck, unclasping the understated golden necklace with the little heart charm she likes to wear; the act feels unexpectedly intimate and Trixie feels a small shiver run down her spine. When her necklace has joined Katya’s, Katya moves on to her earrings, and Trixie is glad she’s wearing clip-ons today, so Katya doesn’t have to do any fiddling, can clip them off easy and join them with her own jewellery on her nightstand. When Katya’s eyes are back on her, Trixie holds up her hand, indicating the oval moon stone on her ring finger and Katya slides it over her knuckle, not without kissing her finger first.

When Katya seems satisfied and ready to dive back into kissing, Trixie puts her hands on Katya’s chest, a little further down than she’s ever had them before, holding her still.

“My hair,” she says, and smiles her sweetest smile, and then leans back into Katya’s touch when Katya carefully undoes the little braid that holds a small part of Trixie’s hair on the back of her head. By all means, Trixie doesn’t at all care about the state of her hair right now, but having Katya’s hands work her hair makes her chest feel tight in the best of ways.

“Anything else?” Katya challenges once she’s done lacing her fingers through Trixie’s curls.

Trixie’s heart starts racing at the feeling of Katya’s eager eyes on hers and she can feel her cheeks burning up. She doesn’t want Katya to see how easily she’s flustered, and doesn’t want Katya to be more than an inch away from her anyway, so instead of an answer she pulls her close again and then immediately pushes her to the side a little until they are both lying on their sides and Trixie can wedge one of her legs in between Katya’s. Katya is kissing her still, warm and wet and almost familiar now, and Trixie can hear herself hum against Katya’s lips.

Trixie’s hands are still on Katya’s shoulder, and for a minute she focusses on how she can feel Katya’s muscles move under her skin where Katya lets her hands roam over the starched fabric of Trixie’s dress. With every fraction of a second that Katya is kissing her she can feel all her restless thoughts get pushed to the side of her brain a little farther, making room for a warm and fussy ball of bliss that sends out signals of pleasure into every part of her body. She detects a small trembling of her thighs, a dampness between them, could definitely use Katya’s touch somewhere that isn’t her chest, but for now she is content to have Katya right where she has her. They have time now, she thinks; she doesn’t need to rush anything. She deliberately takes out a little of the urgency she can taste in their kiss, and Katya responds immediately, her grip getting a little lighter and her lips a little slower, a little softer. Trixie lets her hand travel to Katya’s cheek, touches her skin there lightly with the tip of her fingers and Katya pulls back to smile at Trixie, her lips slightly parted. Even though Katya is smiling, her eyes are still closed, and when Trixie intently runs her hand down Katya’s chest, Katya lets her head fall back, lets out a soft moan that cuts right through Trixie’s body.

“Oh my god,” Trixie whispers, and lets her fingers dance over Katya’s slightly parted lips, “I’m so gay.”

Katya’s eyes fly open at that and she laughs Trixie’s favourite laugh, and this time, for the first time, Trixie doesn’t have to hold herself back and can kiss her right into the laugh, capturing it
between them.

“The most gay,” Katya confirms, looks at Trixie as if what she’s really saying is ‘the most wonderful’.

Trixie’s fingers move to the inside of Katya’s bottom lip, drag her lip down just a little to expose her bottom teeth.

“Well,” she replies after a second of admiring Katya’s teeth, “it’s been a journey.”

“Being gay?” Katya asks and snuggles her arm closer against Trixie’s hip, holding her tight.

“Hmm,” Trixie hums, and kisses Katya’s lips once more. There’s nothing quite as wonderful as kissing a woman, she decides, and no woman she would kiss rather than Katya.

“When I was eleven,” Katya starts, her lips still almost on Trixie’s, speaking right against them, “one of my friends said that we needed to practise kissing, so we could get boyfriends, and our three other friends refused but I kissed her, and I knew.”

“You knew when you were eleven?” Trixie asks and pulls back a little, a flurry of emotions welling up in her chest; incredulousness, interest, maybe a touch of jealousy.

Katya nods, and moves her head so she can kiss the top of Trixie’s cheek bone, her nose brushing against the corner of Trixie’s eye.

“Well, not that I was gay, obviously,” she explains, “because the main reason I wanted to practise kissing was to kiss this guy Nate from yoga class. He always told the best ghost stories during break. Real gory. But, you know. That I like girls too.”

“I love girls,” Trixie giggles, and thinks she will probably never get enough of saying that.

“How did you know?” Katya asks, and then immediately furrows her brows in concern. “We don’t have to talk about that, if you don’t want to.” She looks at Trixie sincerely, carefully, as if trying to find a trace of hesitance or hurt in Trixie’s face.

“It’s fine,” Trixie assures her, because it is, mostly. “I had this friend Shea, my best friend. And we were so close, and things were confusing for me sometimes, but I didn’t truly know why, or I didn’t acknowledge it, I don’t know.” Trixie closes her eyes for a second, shakes her head lightly and kisses the back of Katya’s hand that’s lying between them. Katya looks at her the way Trixie always wants to be looked at, and she goes on. “Anyway, long story short, we kissed four times before I even acknowledged there was something going on at all, and then we kept our relationship secret forever and it was awful and now I don’t even know where she is.”

Katya hums in understanding, then scoots closer and a little higher up on the bed until she can hold Trixie’s head against her chest, both of her hands on the back of Trixie’s head. Trixie doesn’t need to be comforted but she isn’t about to complain, not when her face is squished into Katya’s chest and Katya’s scent is all around her. After a while of running her fingers through Trixie’s hair, Katya goes over to tracing patterns on her back and even though it can’t be much past eight and her dress is a little tighter than she’d like it to be, she can feel herself slowly drifting into sleep, her mind getting hazy around the edges.

“Can I ask you something?” Katya asks, her lips against Trixie’s forehead and her voice calm and quiet, pulling Trixie away from sleep and back into her arms.

“Hmm,” Trixie hums, “anything, always.”
“It’s kinda silly,” Katya says, and Trixie wants to pull away a little to look into Katya’s face, but Katya senses her intentions and tightens her grip just enough to indicate Trixie to stay put.

“I’m the queen of silly. Tell me.”

Katya waits for a long moment, then she says: “I’d love to, uh, make stuff and maybe sell at Dorothy’s? I don’t know, I think I could do it, maybe?”

“Of course you can!” Trixie confirms, extra loud because her voice is muffled by Katya’s chest. “What kind of stuff?”

“I was thinking of maybe starting with jewellery. I love making jewellery. I don’t know, everybody’s always said that nobody would ever wear the shit I wear, well, maybe just Juju mostly, but let’s be real, the costumers there? They would. Or I think they would? They get lots of drag queens too, do you know how much I love drag jewellery?”

“I can imagine,” Trixie grins, and when she notices Katya’s grip has eased up, scoots up a little to look into her face. Katya’s face looks hopeful and a little excited, and Trixie can’t help but give her a long lingering kiss before going on. “You can probably ask Darienne about it, right?”

“Yeah, maybe,” Katya answers and scrunches up her nose a little. “I don’t want her to say no? Also, I don’t want to make stuff that nobody buys.”

“Oh, they’ll buy it!” Trixie assures her. “Well, umm. Are you gonna make stuff like the cigarette necklace? You made that, right? Oh, but the drag queens! They’ll buy it. They’ll love you.”

“I love them!”

“Please ask Darienne? That could be such a cool thing.”

Katya looks at Trixie for a long moment before she nods and gives a little shrug. “Ahh, maybe.”

Before Trixie can protest and play the part of the supportive girlfriend a little longer, Katya kisses her again, this time with more intent, more urgency, and Trixie’s immediately feels heat coil in her stomach. She’s on top of Katya before she knows what she’s doing, her knees digging into the mattress on both sides of Katya’s hips, and Katya moans into the kiss when Trixie’s fingers start pulling her shirt free from where it’s tucked into her tight black skirt. Once the fabric has come loose, Katya arches up just enough to allow Trixie to drag the shirt over her head and unceremoniously throw it onto the floor.

Katya’s bra is plain and black and doesn’t look like it has much of a job to do, and her stomach is more toned than Trixie imagined it; even now that she’s just lying down Trixie can see how strong her body is.

“God Trixie,” Katya sighs when Trixie takes a long moment to take in her body. “Touch me?”

“Hmm,” Trixie answers, cocks her head and sits back on Katya’s groin a little, considering her. “Ask me nicely?”

Katya’s mouth drops comically open, but she collects herself after what can’t have been more than two seconds. “Was that not nice?” she asks, Trixie’s favourite smile on her face and Trixie commends herself on not giving in to Katya’s wish right away. Her fingers are itching to touch every inch of Katya’s body.

“I’m sure you can do nicer,” Trixie replies.
“Mmm,” Katya moans and digs her head further into the mattress, exposing her neck. Trixie watches the movement of muscles in her neck when Katya whispers: “Please touch me, Trixie? I’ve been wanting you just here for what feels like forever, please, please touch me.” There’s a hint of elation in her voice, leaving no room for doubt that she enjoys telling Trixie this just as much as Trixie enjoys hearing it.

“Don’t you tell me about forever, you don’t even know,” Trixie responds, and then all of her hesitance flies out of the window as she makes quick work of Katya’s bra and then her hands are everywhere, running over the heated skin of Katya’s strong upper arms, her breasts, her surprisingly soft stomach, while she’s kissing Katya messily. Katya’s hands are working on the zipper of Trixie’s dress; either the zipper is stuck, or she’s too gone to get anything done, either way, the zipper stubbornly remains in place, trapping Trixie in her pink dress that’s as much of a prison as it is a comfort at this point.

“Can I help you with anything?” Trixie smiles against Katya’s lips once Katya groans in frustration and abandons the zipper in favour of grabbing Trixie’s hips.

“You,” Katya says, and Trixie is sixty percent sure she can feel her grin against her lips, “are too much.”

“Get used to it,” Trixie replies, before sitting up again and trying to take off her dress. The zipper is stuck, but just a little; when she uses one hand to hold up the fabric at the back of her neck the zipper glides open easily.

Trixie lets the dress fall down both of her shoulders, the fabric pooling on Katya’s stomach, and thanks her past self for choosing to wear her new fancy bra. The feeling of being exposed and vulnerable is clawing at her consciousness, trying to get center stage, but Katya’s dark eyes on her body leave it no room.

“Jesus, Trixie.” Katya’s hand is on the back of her neck, bringing her down to her and Trixie sighs at the sensation of the warm skin of Katya’s stomach on hers. Katya’s hands on her back are strong but unmoving, and Trixie reaches around herself to guide Katya’s fingers to the clasp of her bra, showing her what she wants her to do. Katya unfastens her bra while she’s kissing Trixie’s neck, and then Trixie’s bra joins Katya’s on the floor.

Trixie is spared from having to deal with Katya taking in her naked upper body; as soon as her bra is off Katya angles her head until her face is all but buried in Trixie’s breasts, and she kisses, nips, and breathes hot wet air against them and every inch of Trixie’s naked skin she can reach until Trixie’s head starts spinning and she loses track of her own motions, only focuses on Katya’s touch.

She can’t remember ever being this turned on. She rationally knows that she probably has been, at some point, or maybe at 200 points in her life, but right now this feels like the absolute peak. Katya’s body moving under her, lithe and radiating off heat, Katya’s worked up little noises, the fact that she’s here with Katya and that this is happening. She considers flipping them over, so she’d get to revel in the image of Katya sitting above her, she considers trying to find out where the zipper of Katya’s skirt, she considers sitting up enough that she can get out of her dress completely. Instead she lets herself fall to the side and into the mattress, grabbing Katya so she turns onto her side as well, their middles still pressed together.

“This is a lot,” Trixie comments, noticing how her voice sounds slightly breathless. Katya’s cheeks are flushed red and her hair in tangles, and Trixie simultaneously wants to make her unravel and hold her in her arms for hours and hours.
"Yeah," Katya answers, and lets her eyes drift down to Trixie’s breasts, opens them wide in comical exaggeration. “A lot.”

Trixie giggles. A strand of Katya’s messy grey hair has fallen down the side of her cheek, covering part of her chin and bottom lip, and Trixie raises her hand to brush it away, is reminded of previous times she wanted to do just that, but couldn’t. The thought hits her harder than she would care to admit, and she scrambles to hide her face in Katya’s chest and let her hold her, just like they did ten minutes or maybe an hour ago, only that this time Katya is naked and her chest even more inviting. Just like before, Katya’s fingers are running through her hair, occasionally focussing on little massaging movements on the back of her scalp.

Katya kisses her forehead. “Hey, Trixie? We’re not having sex tonight, okay?”

Trixie keeps silent, waiting for Katya to go on, burying her face into her skin just a little deeper.

“I mean, I want to, god, I do, but I know you don’t. Or I think I know you don’t. Or maybe you want to, but not really. Either way, I think it’s better if we wait. At least for tonight. Okay? I’m so happy you’re here, please tell me you’re staying over? But I can take you home, of course. Sasha still has the car, or I could walk you. It’s really no – “

“I’m not leaving this bed for the next fifty years;” Trixie interrupts her, aware that she’s going to have to leave for the bathroom in the next half hour or so but never one to let the reality of her bodily functions ruin her moments.

“I love that,” Katya says, and Trixie feels like she’s melting in her arms.

♥♥♥

An hour later, Trixie is in her slightly crumpled up nightgown, her face naked and moisturized, and she crawls back into the bed and Katya’s arms where she holds them open for her. Her heart is still beating a little bit too fast after the shock she had gotten from Adore walking into the bathroom while Trixie was washing her face and taking off their own makeup right next to her, not asking any questions, as if Trixie has just always been here. Adore was much quicker than Trixie, leaving oily streaks of black makeup around their eyes and their phone on the sink when they headed up to the attic, and before Trixie went back to Katya’s room, she made a little detour to drop off Adore’s phone by their room.

When Katya’s arms embrace her once more she has the ridiculous thought that she missed them.

“Are you sure you can go to sleep yet?” Katya asks, for the third time, and traces her fingers over the naked skin on Trixie’s back in a way that makes it hard for Trixie to zone in on the meaning of her words. “I’m sorry, I’ve been getting into the habit of going to sleep super early, but I know that’s not really your style. Or anyone’s style, really.”

Trixie kisses the corner of Katya’s chin. While she was in the bathroom, Katya put on a pair of soft red shorts, and her upper body is still naked.

“I’m sure,” Trixie replies. “Two hours on an airplane are twenty-two hours in real life, you know?”

In reality, Trixie isn’t sure she can go to sleep just yet, but she’s more than happy to have Katya sleep in her arms. She’s more than happy to hold her, more than happy to listen to the sound of her breathing, more than happy to give her mind a chance to catch up on today’s events. She’s more than happy.

“Alright.” Katya yawns for what must be the thirtieth time now and then she reaches over to her
nightstand to switch off the lava lamp that Sasha sadly doesn’t seem to want in her new room. “Thank you.”

Katya turns over then, away from Trixie, and presses her back against Trixie’s side. She isn’t covered by any of her three blankets, and Trixie drags the black velvet-y blanket up from the foot of Katya’s bed and covers the both of them. Under the blanket she finds a pillow that she is almost sure has never been on Katya’s bed before, and she places it under her head gratefully, snuggling up to Katya.

“Good night, Katya,” she whispers, and places a soft kiss to the back of Katya’s head while her arm finds the most comfortable position around Katya’s warm middle.

“Mhmm,” Katya mumbles into the mattress, and then the only sounds Trixie can hear is Katya’s breathing, the wind rustling the trees outside, and muffled conversations in the kitchen.

Chapter End Notes

please leave me a comment, those make me so happy ♥ i feed you gay shit, you feed me comments, deal?

some things to look at:

[fanart 1]
[fanart 2]
[fanart 3]

[katya's playlist]
[trixie's playlist]
The next day Trixie is off work at four; Katya won’t finish for another two hours. This morning, waking up in Katya’s bed for the first time, Trixie had made the hasty promise to visit Katya at work again today, even though Dorothy’s is almost forty minutes from the day care and Trixie has to take the bus once more.

Apparantly, today is a baseball game at Fenway park, so the bus is stuffed to the brim with Trixie’s seventh-least favourite group of people - people who are overly enthusiastic about sports - and Trixie is wedged in between a particularly loud bunch of them. Hoping it will provide a distraction until the bus reaches the stadium and she gets some room to breathe again, she takes out her phone and checks her messages.

Katya hasn’t texted her: instead, there’s about a million and one messages in the Love Shack Baby group chat. Trixie is going to ignore them, but then notices two things that make her want to backread, even if the amount of messages is utterly unreasonable: the pink colour that the chat has mismatched to Katya’s name is all over the conversation, and Juju has mentioned Trixie.

**Jinkx:** Hey you two, how’s LA treating you today?

**Juju:** …

**Juju:** I hate my life D:

**Juju:** I’m on break rn and I wanted to visit Shangie at her fucking donut stand and I walked allllll the way over there because I’m a good fiancé but she’s too busy for me I GUESS

**Jinkx:** Ah no, honey, I’m sure the donut stand gets really busy, I’m sorry. What about the other princesses, can’t you spend your break with them?

**Juju:** She’s not fucking busy, there’s nobody there

**Juju:** Well except Todd, who’s supposed to work the churros booth but who has nothing better to do than to hang with Shangie and talk about fucking game of thrones all day, as if she knows what she’s talking about

**Juju:** Shangie fully hasn’t even watched any game of thrones besides a bunch of those fucking overdramatic fanmade trailers on youtube ffs

**Juju:** Please kill me

**Juju:** Don’t tell her I said that
Shangela: I’m right here
Shangela: Todd says hi

Jinkx: I see you guys are doing great

Laganja: hi todd!

Juju: How are things at home, did you guys finally find a new roommate, did @Katya find her phone somewhere, now that I’m gone and nobody steals yoghurt from the fridge anymore did @Chi Chi figure out it was me all those years, are you giving Milk enough love, tell me

Katya: You summoned me?

Jinkx: We’ve narrowed it down to a couple people, yeah

Juju: Katya!! <3

Katya: We should pick Vixen!

Chi Chi: you should stop changing your mind every 5 minutes that would help

Katya: Vixen

Katya: I love that

Katya: I can just tell she’s gonna be trouble, Barbra

Chi Chi: she picked a fight with me within like 12 minutes

Chi Chi: too much

Jinkx: Telling you to clean up after yourself in the kitchen isn’t picking a fight, I’ve been telling you for years

Adore: she’s just keeping it real. I second vixen

Juju: I third her

Chi Chi: you got no vote also you owe me 7k in cash for all the yoghurt, you little…!

Laganja: i don’t know you guys, i still feel you should just pick me

Laganja: love me

Laganja: also

Laganja: who’s the admin here could u pls add pearl to the chat

Katya: Oh god why

Katya: Not Pearl

Adore: we’re not adding every girl you fuck to the chat the chat is already hell on earth
Adore: exhibit a, all of this

Shangela: Tempted to do it just to piss Katya off but Ganja you know the rules

Shangela: I add her if you still want me to by the end of next month

Laganja: @Adore you like pearl, remember?

Laganja: and i’m not fucking her she’s fucking me

Laganja: obviously

Laganja: do i look like a top to u

Kim: @Laganja hey how about: let’s not have this discussion right now

Juju: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaanyway, I’m back to work, have fun!! *curtsies backwards out of the room*

Laganja: What discussion?

Chi Chi: Hold on, u lesbians using the top/bottom thing now?

Laganja: yes?

Katya: No?

Kim: That discussion @Laganja

Chi Chi: @Bob did you know about this?

Katya: I just don't really get the top bottom thing

Katya: Explain it to me again?

Shangela: Not again

Bob: Dear Lord why @ me in this

Bob: I don’t deserve this

Katya: isn’t that like saying only one person does the touching and the other one just lies there every time because :(

Juju: @Trixie for future reference ;)

Laganja: DD: omg!

Adore: @Juju they’re actually dating now, I’ve been meaning to tell you you owe me 20 bucks @Chi Chi @Shangela @Jinkx @Sasha you too

Kim: @Adore You know I was way closer than you, you’re full of shit. You can all paypal your money to me, thank you very much.
Kim: Also can we talk about how Juju mentioned Trixie in this without knowing they’re dating now? A choice.

Juju: KSlsljdldDJlsldjweomg!!

Juju: bitch congrats @Katya wowowow I’m so happy for you

Juju: Trixie is so hot what the fuck

Juju: Congrats on getting into her pants, that’s goals

Shangela: Todd left, pls come over, I promise I’ll listen to your news on Cinderella

Laganja: @Shangela i’ll talk to you about this the end of the month! this isn’t over

Katya: the end of next month.

Trixie switches off her screen, uses the phone to scratch her forehead through a frown. Juju’s last messages leave a bad taste in her mouth, and for a moment she considers responding, but the conversation happened hours ago and has long since moved on, and she isn’t about to help the topic to a comeback.

After just one more stop the baseball fans clear out of the bus and she throws herself into the nearest blue plastic seat, leans her head against the window and closes her eyes. She can feel herself drifting off into a sour mood and tries to drag herself away from the corners of that mental swamp while she still can: she isn’t about to be sad when she spent all day at the day care basically glowing with happiness, couldn’t even let the fact that Betty has picked up most of Shangela’s shifts break her spirits. In little moments throughout the entire day her mind wandered to the events of last night and this morning, and she was never able to indulge for longer than four seconds, was always interrupted by one of the kids, or by Latrice expecting her to actually do things to earn her money when Trixie could just happily sit in a bean bag and braid Lucía’s hair. Now, with her eyes closed and the window vibrating softly against her temples, she can finally pull the memories out from the corner of her mind she pushed them into, can finally zoom in and out of them at will.

The heat on her body as she woke up with Katya clinging to her back. Her cold skin when, afterwards, she pushed the blanket off her shoulders, only to wake up a while after with Katya not touching her at all, but lying sprawled across the bed, banishing Trixie to the furthest corner of the mattress. Katya’s soft lips on her cheek when they somehow realise they’re both awake. Katya’s heavy breaths moving the little hairs on Trixie’s skin when she falls asleep against her side once more. The frigid morning air playing on her face when she wakes up to Katya smoking propped up on the window sill, an unbuttoned woollen jacket thrown over her otherwise naked upper body, leaving most of her shoulders uncovered. Lying there for a long moment, watching the wisps of smoke get caught in the wind and carried away into the morning, the wind trying to take Katya’s hair with it where it came loose from the messy bun on the top of her head. Trixie stirred awake with a fuss after a while, wanting for Katya to notice, and Katya noticed immediately, flicked her cigarette out of the window, and turned towards her. With a motion too minuscule for Trixie to detect, she let the wool drop off her shoulders on her walk to the bed where Trixie held her until there was no more trace of the icy morning air on her skin.

♥♥♥

When she enters Dorothy’s this time Katya is by her side in a second, and before Trixie can get into
her head about how they should greet each other in public Katya presses a quick kiss to her lips and immediately starts talking, wired, with her hands flying through the air and punctuating her thoughts:

“Oh god, Trixie! You’re too late! You’re too late, you should have been here just ten minutes earlier, you missed it.”

Trixie frowns down at her wrist where instead of a watch there’s a considerable number of dangling bracelets. “I’m not late. Also, what did I miss?” Katya is bouncing up and down on her heels and there’s a pink flush on her cheeks that Trixie would like to believe was caused by her presence but that she suspects was there before she ever got here. “Also, hi Trish.”

Trish is slouched on a bar stool behind the counter, a stool that’s too high to make it possible to prop up on the counter without almost lying on the glass, which is what Trish is currently doing. She gives Trixie a breezy wave without lifting her head up more than half an inch.

“Missed her! Her! My favourite drag queen. I sold her so much stuff Trixie, oh my god, isn’t this the best day in the world?”

“It is,” Trixie agrees, and lets her hand trace the curve from Katya’s shoulder down to her hips. Katya’s makeup is a lot messier than usual, and Trixie takes delight in the knowledge that this is because she, Trixie, kept Katya in bed until she only had minutes to get ready and leave the house after the quickest of showers, putting on the first shirt she could find – the glittery one that spells ‘Bonjour’ and was thrown over her bedpost. She put on makeup with Trixie watching her from the bed, laughing and cursing when she messed up her lip liner twice. “So Jasmine Masters was here?”

“No! No, Jasmine lives in, uh. In the internet, I don’t know. Not here, I don’t think? Oh my god, do you think she lives here?”

Trixie shrugs, pulls her features into her ‘that’s for you to know’ face. “I just thought she was your favourite drag queen. So who was it?”

“I get to have more than one favourite drag queen,” Katya decides, after frowning for a second. “Her name’s Alaska. I took a picture, see.” She gets her phone out of her bra and pushes it into Trixie’s hands, then unlocks it impatiently when she notices Trixie’s questioning face. The picture Katya wants to show her is set as her new background image and sports a grinning Katya with a tall blonde queen whose big bird nest-like hair is cut off by the screen. There’s a bunch of apps covering Katya’s as well as Alaska’s face and other body parts, leaving Trixie to mostly guess what Katya’s new favourite drag queen looks like.

“Amazing,” Trixie confirms, and thinks the grim bus ride was more than worth coming here. “What did you guys sell her?” She directs that question somewhere between Katya and Trish, wanting to involve Trish into the conversation, mostly because she feels she’s being rude if she doesn’t.

“Nails and shit,” Trish answers, sitting slightly up on the stool. Trixie wishes she hadn’t, because now she’s swaying dangerously in her seat, threatening to crash down onto the carpeted floor.

Katya nods, and scrolls through the pictures on her phone, most of them showing Alaska and Trish posing in front of the changing rooms. “Look at her nails, Trixie, oh my god,” Katya edges her on, zooming in on Alaska’s long aquiline nails. “She does this thing with her hands where she. Uh. It’s so hot! Trish, what’s that thing she does?”

Trish sits up straight now, isn’t swaying as much anymore. She brings her hands up to her chest
and suggestively flutters her fingers, brings them from her collarbone to past her shoulders.

“Yes god,” Katya says, “so hot.” Then, to Trixie’s delight, she mirrors Trish’s motion. Trixie swallows hard, her eyes transfixed on Katya’s slender fingers where they are flying through the air, curling deliciously, and she wonders for a split second if Trish would mind at all if they made out in front of her, wonders if she herself would be considerate enough to account for Trish’s feelings.

“I wanna have nails like that. You think I could pull them off?” Katya goes on, still fluttering her hands in front of Trixie’s face.

A screeching laugh escapes Trixie’s lips. “Umm,” she answers, widens her eyes as far as she can and stares and Katya, hoping for her to catch her drift. “Don’t you need to, uh. Do things?”

“What things?” Katya asks, considering her own fingers distractedly before looking up into Trixie’s face and Trixie only just swallows down the “me” that’s bubbling up in her throat. Katya seems to read it in her eyes regardless. “Oh!” Katya says, drops her mouth open and then shakes her head, “yes, right. Smart! Maybe I can put them on other people? Trish?”

Trish shrugs airily. “Anything for you, darling,” she drawls, dragging her voice sluggishly over two thirds of the required sounds and dropping another third completely, as if to make up for the loss of time. “So, are you just gonna hang out here every day now?” Trish asks Trixie, scratching her neck, leaving angry red marks on her tanned skin.

Trixie shrugs. “Umm. No? I don’t know, I have a life?”

“Oh, good.” Trish answers. “Not that I mind having you here, I mean, we love having you here, right? We do. I’m just glad you have a life. Having a life is always good. I, for one, have had many lives, some more better than others, but all very, as they say, enlightening.”

“Trish was Princess Di in an earlier life,” Katya explains, tucking her phone away into her bra again.

Trixie frowns. “Didn’t she die in the late 90s?” she asks, though she doesn’t know why she’s even asking.

“Sure,” Katya says, as if she, too, doesn’t know why Trixie’s asking.

“We overlapped,” Trish points out. “Hey darling, do you know where I put the keys for the display?” she gestures to the jewellery in the glass display under the counter. “There’s these hoops,” she presses her face directly onto the counter, smudging some of her mascara onto the glass, “that I have my eye on.”

Katya takes off towards the counter, not without taking Trixie’s hand and taking her with her. She moves some scattered pages aside, all of them filled with Katya’s scribbles, and uncovers a small golden key she then flips over the counter towards Trish. Trish squats and opens the display with some effort. The pages in Katya’s hand are covered in designs for earrings and when she notices Trixie’s eyes on them, she folds them over and hides them away.

“So how did you guys meet?” Trish asks while pulling out two big golden hoop earrings from the display, holds them up to her ears and futilely squinting to catch a glimpse of her reflection in the glass counter.

“I told you, Trish?” Katya answers, with a hesitant question mark at the end of her sentence, as if she wants to prompt Trish to remember.
“Right,” Trish drawls, her lips never forming the t at the end of the word, and nods with narrowed eyes while she still searches for her reflection. “Right, whatever, but let’s pretend you didn’t. Tell me again?”

Katya recounts the story of how they met in a couple of brief sentences then, all the while re-organizing the order in which about a dozen of shoeboxes are stacked near the counter, an action Trixie is pretty sure Katya only does to occupy her nervous fingers. Trixie likes the way Katya makes their story sound, there’s no Violet there, only Trixie coming from Wisconsin to Boston and Kim introducing them and Katya liking her right from the start. She points out Trixie’s cowboy boots, Trixie’s laugh, her holiday musical, and her singing by the campfire, and when Katya finally sits down on a chair to the left of the counter Trixie is about ready to straddle her. She wants to kiss Katya until her cheeks flush, red like her glittering shirt under Trixie’s aching fingers.

♥♥♥

There’s costumers coming into the shop not long after and only now does the shop start to feel like an actual shop, and not a dreamlike place that holds Katya, Trish, and a lot of junk. Trixie spends an hour perched behind the counter, half working on an essay she still has a few days to hand in and half watching Katya and Trish sell mermaid costumes to a mom and her two daughters, and sell nothing to a group of teenagers that have the time of their lives trying on the ugliest wigs they can find and posing for their Instagram stories.

When they are closing up the store, Katya hugs Trish, kissing her cheek, which means that Trixie has to go in for an awkward hug as well. Trish smells of cigarettes just like Katya does, but Trish’s perfume isn’t strong enough to win the battle over the ashy scent.

“We’re on for tomorrow night?” Katya asks Trish as she’s slipping the store keys into her purse.

“Yeah,” Trish nods. “Thanks, I appreciate that. What do you two lovebirds have planned for tonight?”

Trixie, never one to think too far ahead, just shrugs, but Katya replies: “I was thinking of maybe going to the milkshake bar? You know, for old time’s sake?”

Trixie snorts. “I literally moved here half a year ago. Old time’s sake.”

“It feels longer!” Katya retorts, “Please?”

♥♥♥

When Katya holds open the door to the milkshake bar for her and she steps into the familiar pastel surroundings, she feels a flurry of nostalgia well up in her chest and is glad she let Katya talk her into coming here when all she really felt like doing was drag Katya home and repeat last night, maybe with some bonuses and extra steps.

They order their shakes at the bar, standing with their arms touching, Trixie fighting down the urge to hug Katya to her side, and then sit down in the booth by the front windows. It’s raining softly, and Trixie is unwittingly reminded of watching the rain trickle down the street while Katya told her about spending the weekend in New York, sitting just where she’s sitting now. Trixie looks over at Katya, Katya with tiny raindrops painting her hair and her glasses, and she wants nothing more than to tell her how happy she is Katya isn’t going anywhere now, but the words feel dangerous on the tip of her tongue and she swallows them down. Maybe happy isn’t the right word, not really. When she allows herself to mull over the feeling for a moment she realizes that mostly she’s scared Katya is going to leave again, not for New York maybe, maybe not even for a
different city, but for a life without Trixie regardless.

Katya considers her through squinted eyes while she absent-mindedly guides her glasses to her shirt to rub them dry, only to realize that rubbing the sequins on the glass would be anything but helpful. Trixie holds out her hand, takes Katya’s glasses and rubs them dry as good as she can on the fabric of her silver sweater.

“Are you alright?” Katya asks her once Trixie hands her back her glasses. Once she has them on again, a neon light from somewhere behind Trixie reflects in them and Trixie can see the smudges she left on the glass. She’s done a lousy job. She props her head up on her elbows, lets her elbows slide across the table towards Katya until her chest comes to rest on the edge of the plastic table top.

“What plans do you have with Trish?” she asks, because she doesn’t know how to answer Katya’s question, doesn’t know if she wants to.

Katya hesitates for a beat, her eyes narrowed and seeming to stare right into Trixie’s soul, but then she answers with a level voice.

“I’m taking her to an AA meeting tomorrow. Umm. Yeah, I don’t know if it’s gonna be any good, but we’ll try it out.”

Trixie nods. “Hey, can I come sometime?” She asks the question without thinking it over first and wishes she could push the words right back into her mouth and swallow them down, make Katya unhear them. She keeps her eyes focussed on the dry patch of skin on her left elbow where she pushed her sweater up far too high, carefully avoiding Katya. This question is too much. Katya doesn’t even know how much Trixie longs to be with her, how much she needs this to be a committed relationship. Surely, going to AA meetings isn’t something you do if you’re casual. The last thing she wants to do is let on how she really feels and scare Katya off.

Trixie feels more than sees Katya slide her elbows down the table to meet Trixie’s until her face is hovering in front of her, propped up on her arms.

“Yeah, I think so,” Katya says, an easy smile playing on her lips. “There’s some stuff for friends and family sometimes. We’ll check this group out first, but I’d love for you to come at some point.”

“What about Raja?” Oh wow. That question is so awful, it kicks the question from before into oblivion. In addition to being awful, it’s not even one of the questions Trixie had in mind but told herself not to ask. That question would have been, “How do you really feel about commitment?” That question would have been bad enough, albeit way less terrible than the one that escaped her lips.

“Huh? Who? Oh! Uh, what about Raja?”

Before Trixie can say anything else, a waitress in a mint green flare dress carries their milkshakes to their table, causing both of them to sit up and bring some space in between them. Trixie’s milkshake is pink and sports a slice of colourful birthday cake wedged onto the sugary rim of the glass and Trixie starts spooning up the whipped cream immediately, knowing the sugar will help lift her mood a little. Katya’s milkshake is an unappetizing shade of green, containing matcha and other healthy things that, if Trixie had it her way, wouldn’t even be allowed at a place like this. Trixie would feel bad about her own shake being excessively unhealthy in comparison, but she can’t be bothered today. She deserves this.
Trixie is halfway through her slice of birthday cake when Katya takes her first sip and pulls a face. When Katya notices Trixie’s eyes on her face, she exaggerates her expression of abhorrence, contorts her face into a ridiculous grimace that makes Trixie snort. Biting down an ‘I told you so’ Trixie takes the remaining piece of the cake off the rim of her tall glass and lays it on Katya’s pink napkin, not without stealing one last sprinkle in form of a sugary yellow star.

“Listen, Trixie,” Katya says pulling off a piece of the icing and popping it into her mouth. “Let’s just try this, okay? With us? I was never anything but open with you and won’t start changing that now, I don’t want to pretend that – you know. You know I’m a bit of a mess, maybe, but I really want to give this a chance, okay? This could be so good, ugh.”

Trixie nods, feels slightly better now that they’re having a conversation about this – awkward as it may be; she just isn’t chill enough to not have conversations about everything all the time – and she’s had enough sugar she can imagine it coursing through her body, making everything in there feel a little softer and lighter, less tight.

“I’m not going to pretend I can make you any promises right now, of course not, but maybe let’s just wait and see and, uh, try?” Katya goes on, and Trixie appreciates how Katya is carrying this entire endeavour, knows she owes her a bit of effort on her part.

“Yeah,” Trixie answers, and gives Katya a smile that in return makes Katya’s face light up in the best of ways. If this is the way Katya responds to her smile, Trixie should smile at her as much as she can. “I just, uh, get a little scared because I’m not sure we want the same things, ultimately, in, uh.” She doesn’t add ‘in a relationship’ but knows Katya can hear it in the space between her words either way.

Katya sighs, her teeth digging into her bottom lip. Then she smiles. “Let’s burn that bridge when we get to it?”

Trixie snorts. “Are you sure that’s how that goes?”

“Let’s just see how it goes!” Katya leans back on the bench with the comfortable green leather, starts to pick sprinkles off the icing. “I don’t really know what I want in a relationship, to be honest,” she says, her tone relaxed, and the openness in everything from her words to her stance make another layer of uneasiness fall off Trixie, leaving her to feel lighter and lighter.

The raindrops that had been glistening in Katya’s hair when they first sat down have dried and left her hair in a bit of a frizz, and Trixie thanks her past self for pulling her own hair into a rather tight ponytail this morning, avoiding the catastrophe her own hair would inevitably be by now. The ponytail had been a necessity after lounging around in Katya’s bed even after Katya left, and having no time to get her hair to look nice before rushing to get to her midday lecture.

“I do know some things,” Katya goes on, “wanna know what they are?”

Katya’s smile, little crinkles around her eyes and the corners of her mouth, let her know that she does. She nods.

“I know that I’d love for you to spend the night with me again, tonight, and the night after, and the night after, and the night after, and the night after, and the night after, and the night after, and the night after, and the night after, and the night after, and wow, I was really hoping you were gonna interrupt me but okay, I see how it is.”

Trixie giggles. The gentle rain outside has stopped falling, and while the sun is setting in a corner of the sky Trixie can’t see from her window seat, she can see the last light of the day reflecting in
the windows on the other side of the road, the buildings being bathed in a warm orange light. Katya’s hand, the one that isn’t popping the cake into her mouth, tiny crumb by tiny crumb, is lying on the table, halfway to Trixie, like she’s waiting for Trixie to touch her, and Trixie covers her slightly cold fingers with her own, knows she will warm Katya’s skin in no time.

“I didn’t really love what Juju said about us earlier,” Trixie admits, the memory digging through the cosiness of the situation.

“Oh!” Katya’s eyes widen for a second. “Yeah, shit, I was gonna tell you, I messaged her privately about that. She’s uh, I love her, but she says dumb shit sometimes. But it won’t happen again.”

By now, Trixie feels a little too light, feels like she might float off her bench and drift up to the ceiling soon where she would probably burn her skin on the neon lights. She isn’t sure neon lights even emanate heat. They don’t look like they do, but better not to find out.

“So you don’t just want to get into my pants?” she prompts, batting her lashes and smiling her sweetest smile, careful to let Katya know this isn’t an accusation and she isn’t going to get caught up in Juju’s comment any more than she already has.

“Nah,” Katya answers, and shrugs airily, a motion that reminds Trixie of Trish and that she feels Katya might have picked up from her. “I told you before, sex isn’t that important to me. So no, this isn’t about wanting to fuck you.”

As often before, Trixie gets stuck on the word ‘fuck’ on Katya’s lips, how she says it with so much force and – and Trixie knows she is really gone when she considers this – beauty behind it. She for her part really, really wants to fuck Katya. Wants it enough for her heart to speed up and her stomach to tingle right here and now. She wants to let Katya know; her mind wraps around the sentence ‘I really, really want to fuck you,’ but of course she can’t say it, goes for a more innocuous variation:

“I hope you will, though.”

It takes a moment for Katya regain her breezy demeanour after this, but she gets there:

“Oh, for sure. What are you doing after this?”

Three middle aged ladies seated on the other side of the bar look over to their table in shock at Trixie’s screaming laugh, but take only a second to assess that Trixie, now grabbing both of Katya’s hands, is okay. More than okay.

Katya goes on, talks right into Trixie’s laugh. “See, I didn’t glue the nails on,” she says, waggles her eyebrows, and her fingers, in front of Trixie’s face. “Anything for you, baby.” Trixie’s chest contracts happily at the pet name, and she catches one of Katya’s hands in hers, presses a sloppy kiss onto the back of her hand while she’s still laughing, not sure anymore what she’s even laughing about. Then she holds up her own hands as if she wants Katya to inspect them. Her nails are cut shorter than she normally has them, filed into smooth half-moons, and Katya rolls her eyes at her in exasperation, trying to cover up the little blush creeping up her neck.

♥♥♥

They spend another hour at the milkshake bar after that, too comfortable in their seats to get up and walk home, an hour in which Trixie tackles the monstrosity that is Katya’s milkshake and takes sip after sip until it’s empty, not swayed by Katya’s insistence that she doesn’t know why Trixie would subject herself to this hell.
When they finally put on their jackets to leave, Trixie is holding Katya’s hand, forbidding herself every thought of what the scattered other patrons may or may not think about the two of them. She’s aware these concerns come in a little too late anyway; they’ve been touching quite a lot and at one point only a couple of minutes ago Katya had reached over to cup Trixie’s cheek with her palm.

“How was everything for you?” the waitress asks them when they’re paying. Trixie wants to pay for the both of them, but Katya insists on splitting the bill before realizing she hasn’t brought her wallet and promising Trixie she’s paying next time, and the time after that.

“Everything was wonderful,” Katya assures her, her smile blinding, and Trixie can see the lie sparkling behind her eyes, but she knows the waitress can’t.

“The green slimy milkshake was especially great,” Trixie chimes in. “A real treat.”

Once they’re outside Trixie pulls Katya into a self-indulgent hug. There’s barely anyone on the street, the wind is escorting Katya’s flowery scent right into Trixie’s nose, and Trixie has denied herself touching Katya for too long now to care. Katya presses a kiss to the side of her neck while she’s wrapping her arms around Trixie’s middle, rubbing on Trixie’s sides as if she wants to keep her warm even though Trixie is dressed for the weather and Katya isn’t.

Trixie buries her head in Katya’s hair and for a moment her world contracts, consists only of the two of them hugging in the nothingness of the world surrounding them, and Trixie feels a sense of calm spread out from somewhere in her chest, slowly taking residence in every part of her body. She loves Katya, and she can’t tell her that yet, but she can show her, or at least she can try. She loosens the hug just enough to be able to kiss her, and shivers when she feels Katya sighing into the kiss. She focusses on the love she feels for her, tries to pour it into her lips and hopes it makes Katya feel warm; she focusses on the love she feels and at the same time thinks of nothing at all but the feeling of Katya’s soft lips on hers, and the way Katya’s hands on her body make her feel like she’s floating somewhere inside her own body.

Chapter End Notes

please let me know what you think!

for everybody with a bit of commenting anxiety/no account: ao3 will let you leave anon comments very easily! they say to give a name and an email but you can just make up any name and any email, just write helloloser@yahoo.com or smth and you’ll be fine!

♥♥♥
hey everyone, here it is, the last chapter before the epilogue. the first half of this chapter is smut, so if that's not your thing just skip over to the second half. if it is your thing, i hope you'll enjoy! i'm very much not a smut writer so let's see how this goes. thanks to rosie for beta-reading and encouragement.

With a loud sigh, Trixie switches on the lava lamp and lets herself fall onto Katya’s bed, kicking off her heels on her way down. For a moment she considers stripping out of her dress and pantyhose; she’s spent all day locked inside her clothes and is ready to breathe free, but then she doesn’t want to deny herself the thrill she feels when Katya unzips her dress or removes any item of clothing from her. She’s been wearing this dress for almost ten hours now, she can wait another ten minutes until Katya gets out of the shower.

If Trixie closes her eyes and listens intently into the quiet, she can hear Katya faintly humming in the shower. Trixie giggles to herself when she recalls Katya’s efforts to talk Trixie into joining her in the shower; Trixie liked playing the part of the half coquettish, half blushy tease – after all, she enjoys making Katya work for it, just a little – but if she’s honest with herself, riling up Katya isn’t the reason she didn’t join her: four days ago, when they got here after their date at the milkshake bar, Trixie took a shower, unassuming, peaceful, and then Adore walked into the bathroom as if that’s what people do and took a piss right next to Trixie, with nothing but the barely opaque shower curtain separating them. Trixie is still very much not over this incident and has decided to steer clear of the Love Shack’s shower for the time being, maybe until she has gotten a little more chill, maybe until somebody understands they need a lock for the bathroom door. Maybe Vixen will insist on one with her when she moves in, that would solve all of Trixie’s problems.

The last couple of days have been a whirlwind. Katya went to group with Trish, went out partying with Laganja and her other friends who Trixie can still barely put a name to. Trixie had taken some time to catch up with her course work that seems to fall by the wayside more often than not these days. Kim got back to Boston only yesterday and she and Trixie spent the day aimlessly browsing the mall, talking each other into ridiculous outfits, mulling over Kim’s future over ice cream and through the curtains at Topshop.

Today’s a Saturday: almost the end of her first week with Katya, and the day of Katya’s graduation. Three days ago, Katya asked Trixie to come to the ceremony with her, almost sheepish, admitting she had been holding on to her third ticket in the hope that it would be Trixie’s. Trixie spent the late morning sitting between an overly emotional Sasha and a downright sappy Bob and had tried to be the cool one, but when Katya smiled her blinding smile right at her from the centre of the stage, Sasha had felt compelled to offer her a tissue. The afternoon they spent at Bob’s for a little family gathering to celebrate Katya’s graduation, and while Katya has been by Trixie’s side all day, she feels she hasn’t had a second alone with her in seven hundred years.

With Kim coming back, last night was the first night after she came back from Wisconsin that she didn’t spend at the Love Shack and she’s happy she’s here again now, ready for another night of
talking until she can’t keep her eyes open a second longer, kissing Katya as much as she wants, and
the knowledge that there’s no place she’d rather be.

She closes her eyes, stretches her arms over her head – they don’t go all the way what with her
damned too-tight dress restricting her movements – and as soon as she’s relaxed into the mattress,
she imagines Katya crawling into bed with her, her skin hot and damp from the shower, ready to
heat up Trixie’s skin as well. As if trained to head straight to Katya at any given moment Trixie’s
mind wanders out of the door, across the hallway and right into the shower. They haven’t had sex
yet, not really, and yet Trixie knows Katya’s body well enough by now to imagine her under the
hot stream of the shower, has no trouble filling in the few blanks that are left to her imagination.
She’s cocky enough to entertain the possibility that Katya is thinking of her right in this moment, as
she leans back her head to face the stream, water trickling down her toned arms, falling down her
fingertips and landing next to her naked feet on the tiles with a drowned-out splashing sound.
Through the steam, she can see Katya’s closed lids fluttering lightly, her mouth slightly opened, her
hair sticking to her back and her shoulders.

Trixie hazily catches her hands wandering up her sides and teasing her breasts through her dress as
she pictures heavy drops of water running down Katya’s stomach and then she shakes her head,
dragging her mind out of the steamy shower and into the calm of Katya’s room. She doesn’t want
to work herself up too much, not when she enjoys it so much when Katya’s the one who’s worked
up.

She props herself up on her elbows before letting out a drawn-out yawn. It has been a long day and
her feet are sore from being forced into her prettiest pair of heels for most it. She gets up on her
pitiful feet anyway and takes a few steps across Katya’s room and opens the window, welcoming
the breeze on her face, feeling her mind calm down instantly. The weather’s been mild and inviting
for a few days now, and Trixie can smell spring in the air, knows she will be waking up to birds
chirping tomorrow morning. She props herself up on the window sill, just like Katya does every
morning for her morning cigarette, and watches the wind play in the treetops, black against a dark
blue sky. The longer she watches them, the more unsure she is she can make out at all where the
trees end and the sky begins; in the darkness they blur together and Trixie feels the sudden urge to
take a long walk, until she ends up right underneath the trees, can make sure they exist.

She is yanked out of her thoughts about absolutely nothing by hands grabbing her hips from
behind, and she jerks up, hitting her elbow against the glass.

“Ah shit, sorry,” Katya says, looking equal parts sheepish and amused. The skin on her face and
clavicle is flushed red from the shower, and there’s a little bit of mascara smudged under her left
eye, but not her right.

Trixie huffs out a breath of air and turns around fully, pulling Katya towards her. The scent of
Katya’s bath products is so strong on her Trixie doesn’t know how she didn’t notice her coming
into the room; her hair is soaking wet and sleeked down her back, making the light grey look
almost black. Katya softly rests both palms against Trixie’s clavicle, a move she usually makes
right before leaning in to kiss her, and that’s just what she does this time as well. With the wind
playing softly in Trixie’s hair and Katya’s hands travelling down from her clavicle to shamelessly
cup her breasts, Trixie is in lesbian heaven. She lets her hands run down Katya’s arms, covered in
the silvery silk of her bathrobe, a silk that feels so nice against Trixie’s fingers that she doesn’t
know if she wants to map out Katya’s whole body against the fabric, or if she wants to untie the
knot, let it fall to her feet. She breaks the kiss after a while, opens her mouth to say something – she
doesn’t know what, but always trusts that the words come to her right when she needs them. Katya
looks at her heavy-lidded, her pupils blown wide and taking up almost all of the bluish-green of her
irises and this time the words don’t come to Trixie.
Instead of talking by the window, with Katya blowing smoke into the night air and Trixie trying to make out all kinds of shapes and figures in the vapor as she usually does, Trixie finds herself stepping around Katya, flipping their position and crowding Katya against the window sill. There’s a challenge hidden behind Katya’s smile, and Trixie leans in to kiss her again: deeply, heatedly. She hopes the breeze isn’t too cold on Katya’s wet hair; if it is, Katya isn’t complaining. Instead, she’s breathing heavily against Trixie’s neck now, spurring her own, letting her pull down the silk around her shoulders to expose just a little more of skin she can cover in sloppy kisses.

With Katya’s hands finding Trixie’s hardened nipples through her bra and dress, Trixie isn’t sure if it’s the fact that she has worked herself up even before Katya entered the room or the enticing scent of Katya enveloping her, but she feels herself all but dripping with need, and she knows that tonight she’s not going to be the one to slow things down.

Just as she finishes that thought, Katya’s hands inexplicably leave her body and Trixie lets a rather pathetic whine escape her lips; she wants to feel embarrassed but can’t quite bring herself to. The sly grin that Katya fights back within a second doesn’t escape her. Without a comment Katya props herself up on the window sill behind her, pulling herself up on her arms until she’s sitting on the plastic ledge.

The surface isn’t big enough for Katya to comfortably sit there; only by leaning most of her weight against Trixie can she stay up there, slightly above Trixie now, once more kissing her fervently. Having decided that Katya’s naked skin beats even the silk, Trixie untangles the knot fastening the robe around Katya’s middle, sweeping the silk off Katya’s shoulders with swift fingers, and she knows Katya doesn’t care about exposing her back to the quiet street, trusts Katya knows Trixie, in turn, would mind very much, so she can only undress Trixie once they’re on the other side of the room, out of sight of the world around them.

Katya wraps her legs around Trixie’s middle then, quietly moaning into Trixie’s mouth and Trixie grabs her tight, let’s her fingers feel every bone on Katya’s naked back, her wet hair falling over her hands. Katya’s legs are strong around her middle, holding her tightly in place, her naked skin against Trixie’s dress. She’s so focussed on the way she’s touching Katya, that she only vaguely registers Katya’s fingers trailing up her thighs, and when Katya’s hand slips between them, she forgets how to stand up right for a second and her forehead painfully hits the wooden window frame.

“You okay?” Katya takes her head into both of her hands, her right hand tragically leaving its former position, and kisses her forehead.

“Mhmm,” Trixie agrees. For a second, she debates whether or not she’s desperate enough to grab Katya’s hand and put it right back between her legs, but apparently it’s Trixie’s lucky day and she doesn’t need to do anything to get Katya to do as she wants her to. She lets herself fall into Katya, her legs trembling slightly, and all but forgets to touch Katya, drowning instead in the sensation of Katya touching her teasingly under her dress.

“Bed?” Katya asks her after two or maybe twenty minutes, and Trixie lets her eyes flutter open hazily; now she can’t make out the trees at all, it’s just black against black serving as a backdrop to Katya’s skin.

Katya’s arms mirror the movement of her legs and wrap around Trixie’s neck, and she lets herself fall forward, has Trixie carry most of her weight now. She wonders for a quick second if she’s strong enough to carry Katya like this, knows she wants nothing more than to be. Katya is heavy – beautiful, trembling, loving – in her arms, and she is about eighty-four percent sure that if she gets a good grip around Katya’s ass and her thighs, she can carry her over to the bed. Eighty-four
percent sure is good enough for Trixie, and she palms Katya’s ass more firmly than she ever has, wavers slightly when Katya all of a sudden seems to double in weight, but with her legs straining and her breath going even heavier than it was before, she is able to carry Katya to her bed, with Katya doing nothing but grabbing Trixie’s hair and breathing against the top of her head.

Trixie lifts Katya unto the mattress unceremoniously, can’t help but grin at the way Katya looks up to her and seems just about ready for anything. The silver silk lies discarded underneath the window sill and Katya is naked, with her arms sprawled out above her head and her neck thrown back slightly. Katya is beautiful, all smooth skin and sharp angles, all comfortable in her nudity and welcoming Trixie.

Before Trixie is ready to give her – she doesn’t yet know what, she hurries across the room to shut the window, using a little too much force, making the blinds clutter in protest. As if on autopilot, she grabs the hem of her dress, wants to pull it over her head before climbing into bed with Katya, but then she remembers this is Katya’s job now and she lets herself fall into the mattress where Katya has made barely enough room. Katya’s body seems to radiate off heat and Trixie is ready to close every bit of distance between them, ready to do just what Katya’s eyes are asking her to.

“Trixie,” Katya says, her voice hoarse and breathy, and she props herself up on her elbow, looks directly into Trixie’s eyes as she goes on, “I am so, mhmm.” She swallows hard, seems to wrack her brain before the next words slip past her lips. “I mean, uh, I think I need a second to cool off, unless you—” The sentence lies between them unfinished and Trixie feels a screech bubbling up her throat, can barely keep in check the delight she feels at seeing Katya like this, knowing fully well she is about to give her everything and then some.

“So, do you think you can actually finish a thought or do you need me to read your wishes from your eyes?” Trixie teases, propping herself up on her elbow to mirror Katya’s position and face her, trying to sound casual and in charge when in reality she can feel her chest trembling with an explosive cocktail of nerves and desire.

Katya’s mouth, already parted, drops open just a little further, and she lets out a breathless laugh, her small breasts shuddering on her chest. “Oh god,” she says, leans in to press a kiss to Trixie’s freckled shoulder, “why are you enjoying this.”

Trixie smiles, betraying her nerves. “Oh, I plan to enjoy every second of this.”

She can see Katya’s fingers trembling ever so slightly as she catches the hem of Trixie’s dress, and she arches her back off the mattress gratefully, letting Katya free her of the fabric. A small shiver runs over her body once she’s lying there in just a lacy bra and panties, and thin, see-through pantyhose, with Katya’s heavy gaze on her.

“Did you know you’re the most beautiful woman,” Katya says, and her tone is reverent enough to push any doubts about the truth of this sentiment out of Trixie’s mind. Trixie sighs happily, kisses Katya’s lips before settling in deeper into the mattress, ready to do nothing much and for Katya to worship her for a minute, or maybe thirty. She lets her eyes flutter shut and then immediately opens them again, can’t close them to the sight of a naked Katya in front of her.

Slowly, her eyes flickering between Trixie’s face and her own hands, Katya frees Trixie of her bra, her pantyhose, her panties. Trixie risks a glance down her own body and finds the soft orange lava lamp is kind enough to her skin; it’s not smooth like Katya’s is and she doesn’t have any of the sharp angles she finds so enticing on Katya but then Katya doesn’t seem to miss those on her, seems to take delight in dipping her fingers into Trixie’s soft curves, her wide hips and her cushy stomach, tracing her fingers over Trixie’s skin in a way that makes her toes curl and the inside of her thighs dampen even more.
Barely aware of what her own hands are doing, Trixie focusses on Katya’s, revels in her touch, breathes Katya’s name without ever following it up with anything. Katya’s fingertips are dancing over her legs, from just above her knees to just below where she needs them, and then, slowly, she takes her legs by her ankles, brings them up her shoulders, settling Trixie’s feet behind her neck.

Trixie lets out a gasp that, to her own ears, sounds rather mortifying but elicits a moan from Katya when Trixie isn’t even touching her, when Trixie’s hands are currently in her own face, digging into her lips in anticipation, and then Katya bends down her head and suddenly her hot breath, her soft lips, her quick tongue are right there and Trixie arches off the mattress and into her, steadying herself on Katya’s shoulders.

Trixie thinks of herself as a self-aware person, even – and maybe especially so – in sexual contexts; always moulding her movements, words, and responses to make the other person slowly lose their mind, but now, with Katya’s tongue teasing her, she forgets to focus on herself altogether. With one hand clasped tightly around Katya’s bed post behind her and one hair in Katya’s damp hair, she is focused on nothing but the sensations Katya causes in her body, her trembling legs, her ragged breath, and, after a while, her orgasm building slowly but steadily somewhere deep inside her. Katya’s hands are grabbing her ass and Trixie is only vaguely aware of how much noise she’s making and how much louder she will get rather soon if Katya doesn’t ease up on her.

Katya doesn’t, and as if her tongue wasn’t enough to make Trixie unravel, a finger comes to her help and when Trixie feels herself steering towards the edge she locks her knees against Katya’s head, suddenly scared she’s in the mood to play games with her – if anyone is playing games, it should be Trixie – locking her between Trixie’s legs. Writhing against Katya’s mouth, Trixie’s orgasm crashes into her, heightened the presence of another person, of Katya, right there with her, and she pants into the crook of Katya’s neck when she suddenly drops Trixie’s boneless legs unto the mattress and comes up to lie on top of Trixie, waiting for both of them to catch their breath.

“Fuck me,” Trixie breathlessly babbles into Katya’s neck a couple of seconds later, nonsensically, her fingers knotting through Katya’s damp grey hair.

“Ohh, round two! Fun!”

From where she’s lying, Trixie can’t see Katya’s face, but she can hear the grin in her voice. Katya’s breathing has calmed down considerably quicker than Trixie’s.

“Round two,” Trixie confirms – not before another minute or two of doing nothing at all – and catches Katya’s face to bring her up to her lips, kissing her deeply, slowly. “Your turn.”

She pushes Katya off her then so she’s lying on her back, sprawled out and naked, her eyes sparkling and – hesitant?

“Hey, are you okay?” Trixie asks. She didn’t expect to see this look on Katya’s face tonight, and now that it’s there, wants to make sure to chase it away as fast as she can. She feels considerably calmer now, the slight trembling in her chest has given way to lighter breaths, and she cups Katya’s cheek with her palm, leaning forward to kiss her shoulder. Katya leans into Trixie’s hands with her eyes closed for a second.

“Oh,” Katya says, quietly, and seems to weigh her next words carefully, “for me things are a bit more, uh, complicated?”

Trixie feels her brows knit together; starts curling strands of Katya’s hair around her index finger.

“What do you mean?”
“I have yet to figure out to bring this up in a sexy way,” Katya sighs, and where she was strong and
determined before now she seems a little timid, as if she’s scared of disappointing Trixie, and
Trixie feels something in her chest contract; she doesn’t want to see Katya this way, especially not
when she feels she’s part of the cause. “I have some really big issues with penetration,” Katya
offers, and her eyes are fixed somewhere just below Trixie’s, her barely-defined cheekbones
maybe. “And other vaginal stimulation as well to be honest, it’s a little complicated.”

“Oh,” Trixie replies. She tries to come up with something to say to get Katya to relax, to get Katya
to smile and be happy, but then the words spilling out of her mouth are, “Do you not like sex?”

It’s an awful question, and she wants to take it back immediately, but it’s Trixie’s lucky day after
all, and the question seems to do the trick: Katya snorts, laughing into Trixie’s face freely.

“Oh, I love sex,” she says, and her voice is sultry and almost obnoxiously lascivious, a far cry from
only seconds ago, “there’s a million and twelve things you can do, and I love about a million and
seven of them.” She gives Trixie an over-exaggerated wink and seems relaxed enough for Trixie to
relax as well, pulling Katya in by her waist and aligning their bodies, kissing Katya’s temples.

“Care to show me a million and seven things tonight?” she asks against the tiny hairs on Katya’s
hairline. Trixie can’t say she has experimented much so far, but she wants nothing more than to
find out how to take care of Katya, to make Katya unravel the way Katya just did her.

Katya laughs without a sound, her body trembling in Trixie’s arms. “Maybe let’s start with one
good thing tonight?” she suggests, her voice teasing and almost gleeful, “maybe two if it’s a really long
night.”

She reaches over Trixie to her night stand, not without dangling her breasts right into Trixie’s face
in a way that Trixie doubts is unintended. With a press of two fingers against the wooden doors,
the door of the night stand clicks open and Katya retreats with a dark red canvas bag, full of –

“Is this a million and seven things?” Trixie asks, propping up on her elbows to get look into the
bag, but Katya sits up slightly to hold the bag just outside of her reach.

“It is,” Katya confirms, waggling her eyebrows, giggling to herself. She rummages in the bag for a
while, and Trixie suspects she’s taking her time on purpose, revelling in Trixie’s curiosity about
the items she hears rustling and clicking against each other around Katya’s hand.

The thing she finally pulls out is the size of her palm, smooth, red, and considerably shorter,
rounder, and thicker, than any vibrator Trixie has ever seen, and this makes sense, she realizes after
a second, if Katya doesn’t like penetration she probably isn’t going to insert a vibrator.

Katya presses a button Trixie can’t see on the smooth surface and then guides her hand to Trixie’s
stomach, letting her feel the strong vibrations coming off it.

“It’s for external stimulation,” Katya confirms, and doesn’t quite manage to hide the hesitance in
her voice.

“I like it,” Trixie says, because she does. With the vibrations against her skin and Katya’s body
touching her in more places than she cares to count, she is ready for round two to be about her,
Trixie, again. She giggles and closes her hand over Katya’s, feeling the vibrations in her fingers.
“Just tell me as soon as I’m doing something wrong, okay?” she says, and when Katya nods, she
softly pushes Katya from her side to her back. Katya’s hand leaves the vibrator and both of them
come up to cup Trixie’s face and kiss her softly.
“Touch me before you use it,” Katya whispers, her eyes closed and her body once more fully relaxed, and all of a sudden Trixie doesn’t know how she’s been this close to Katya’s naked body without touching her all this time. She drops the vibrator on the mattress between them, and reaches out to touch Katya’s thighs, teasingly moving her fingers upwards. When she reaches the damp hair between Katya’s legs, Katya shivers and brings up both arms to wrap around Trixie’s neck, breathing against Trixie’s cheek. Trixie makes sure to keep her touches light and not focus on any one area too much, unsure of what Katya needs, mapping her reactions, the way she gasps when Trixie lightly drags a nail against a part of her she hasn’t touched before, the way she ever so slightly tenses up when the tip of Trixie’s finger dips between her lips.

Trixie can feel her own skin tingle and breath quicken with the thought of being the one to make Katya pant and press against her. She slowly retreats her hand from Katya, grabbing her vibrator, guiding it to Katya, and at the touch Katya sucks in a sharp breath and moans right into Trixie’s ear. Trixie makes a mental note to have Katya try the vibrator on her next time, maybe later tonight, maybe tomorrow, or the night after that. Or the night after that.

♥♥♥

“Look who’s late.”

“One fu – one minute!” Trixie does her best to keep the swearing and the rolling of her eyes at Betty at bay as she hugs the few kids who run up to her at her arrival. “Hi peanuts, hi, hello.”

When the kids have run off again – Trixie came in right in the middle of their free play time, a time that the kids currently mostly spent in the garden, fashioning more or less fancy desserts out of sand and forcing the grown-ups to mock-taste them – Trixie flops down on the bench next to Betty. Betty has her red hair stacked up in an ambitious updo and while Trixie would never admit it, she steals a couple glances at her, admiring the way her hair stays up like that. Trixie’s would never.

“So what’s the plan for today?” she asks propping up her elbows on the garden table behind her, facing the sun. If she had things her way, she would spend today’s three-hour shift right here, bathing in the spring sun, having cute conversations with the kids every couple of minutes, daydreaming about Katya the remaining minutes.

Obviously, things aren’t usually done Trixie’s way.

“So remember this ground-breaking seminar Latrice went to last month?” It’s a rhetorical question, and her voice leaves no doubt about her disdain for the seminar. Even though Trixie would be hard pressed to remember the seminar’s name, she remembers at least parts of the booming speeches Latrice continues to give them in her office about it, about the changes she wants to make at the day care, about how there’s an artist in each and every one of these children, an artist just waiting for the perfect opportunity to be set free and paint the world.

Trixie sighs and gives Betty a slight eye roll. Betty is wearing a bright red lipstick with a myriad of tiny glitter particles, reflecting the sunlight. Trixie wishes she could ask her where she got it; maybe they have one in pink? Of course she can’t ask Betty about it, she’d rather never wear lipstick again than admit to Betty she admired hers.

“So today’s challenge is: paint your feelings,” Betty offers. She snickers, and Trixie is fully aware that Betty plans on dumping most of that so-called challenge on her while she sits nearby giving Trixie tips on how she could improve handling the children.

“Care to elaborate?”
“Girl, I don’t know. She’ll stop by and explain it to you later. I think she has some classical music prepared and you listen to it and paint the music. Or you paint what the music makes you feel? I swear I asked her about it two times and I’m still not sure. It’s supposed to awaken the kids’ inner artist, you know?”

Trixie lets her eyes drift to Suzie. She’s in the middle of trampling down Evan’s little sand castle, and as soon as Evan notices Trixie’s eyes on the scene he begins to wail, waiting for Suzie to be punished for the crime of giving his inner artist the middle finger. Trixie nudges Betty, points out the scene. If Betty wastes no opportunity to lecture Trixie on how to handle the kids, Trixie is more than happy to have her handle any conflict Trixie can’t be bothered with.

♥♥♥

“Are you gonna be okay here?” Latrice asks them, her hands steady on Dan’s shoulders, keeping him in his chair.

Trixie is unsure but Betty nods, and Latrice leaves for her office across the hallway, leaving her door wide open. They are gathered around the big table in the day care, after having spent about fifteen hours getting the kids inside, out of their outdoor shoes, into their indoor shoes, onto their chairs. Latrice has set up a CD player on a shelf near the table. She has brought about a dozen CDs of classical music, telling them they can pick whichever one they think will spark their creativity the best.

Of course, Trixie doesn’t know the first thing about classical music. Under Betty’s expectant – and probably arrogant – gaze she lets her eyes roam over the covers, pretending they mean something to her. Ultimately she carefully but randomly chooses the forth CD from the bottom of the stack. When she hands the CD over to Betty she’s fifty-seven percent sure Betty gives her a small scoff, as if she’s aware Trixie probably only knows about three songs that were produced before the 70s. Trixie scoffs back. It’s not her fault ABBA basically invented music.

“Okay, kiddos, you heard Ms Royale. I’m giving each of you one of the big sheets of paper now, and then you can use any of the colours you want to paint the music or, umm, your feelings when you listen to the music.” She walks around the table, placing a sheet of paper in front of every kid. “You can use any of the colours you want, look here, we have water colours, and finger paint, all these crayons, chalk…” While she’s running down the list, she can already picture the mess this table – and these children – will be in only a few minutes from now. Finding your inner artist has proven to be a rather messy business.

She runs out of paper before every kid has one in front of them, leaving Dan and Kameko without paper and ready to take off and do literally anything else.

“Hey Betty, I’m gonna run to storage to get more paper, okay?” she asks as she turns on her heel to head out. She’s glad for the opportunity to miss the first minute or two of painting when inevitably the kids will demand for a repetition of the vague instructions she’s just given them. Let Betty do it.

♥♥♥

Trixie likes the storage room. She likes all the barely necessary things Latrice insists they can’t possibly get rid of, and, above all, she likes it because once the door is shut behind her she can get her phone out in peace, without anybody catching her. She takes out her phone almost automatically, doesn’t really know she’s texting Katya before she starts typing. She only slept with Katya for the first time less than 24 hours ago and right now she wants nothing more than for her shift to be over so she can run into her arm again; she isn’t going to let this opportunity to text her
slide.

Trixie

*Why is work hard? :(*

Katya

*Cannot relate*

*My work is !!! Alaska called the store about the jewellery I might do for her*

*Why is work hard for you?*

*Did you accidentally eat one of the sand-deserts? We both knew it had to happen at some point*

*What do they taste like, I wonder*

Trixie

*Ahhh congrats!!*

*Please stop thinking about the taste of sand*

*It's the artists seminar thing again*

*Today we have to paint or feelings to music*

Katya

*Omg*

*I LOVE that*

Trixie

*You would*

*You're an artist*

Katya

*So are you!*

*Oh! What are you doing tonight?*

Trixie

*You're having a welcome party for Vixen, remember?*

Katya

*Ah, right!*

*I looove her, I’m so ready for the drama-conflama*

*Okay then what are you doing after the party*
Let’s paint our feelings together

Classical music, I assume? I have the best song for that, yes god, please say yes

Trixie

I’m not painting my feelings twice in one day

I’m not even convinced I’m gonna do it now! I don’t even have feelings

Katya

Stone cold bitch, Trixie Mattel

What if there’s an incentive

We’ll do it naked

I’ll be naked, you don’t even have to

Come on, let’s make art, baby

We could do that thing where you paint with your body, I’ve been meaning to try that, but it was kinda hard when I was sharing a room

I tried to talk Sasha into it once but she wasn’t having it

Trixie

I’m sure I’ll find a way to get you naked without having to make art

Katya

Oh, you will. Trust and believe, I’ll always be naked

But what’s the point of being naked when we’re not also making art

Trixie snorts down at her phone, her hand already on the door knob, aware that she’s been out to fetch paper for a suspicious amount of time now. Katya knows she’s at work, and anyhow Katya never seems to feel the need to neatly wrap up conversations, so before she heads outside, Trixie just shoots her one last quick message.

Trixie

Oh honey, it’s always art when I’m naked!

♥♥♥

“Took you long enough,” Betty remarks. She’s standing behind Dan, looking a little more annoyed than usual, and there’s a streak of red paint down her upper arm. It matches her hair quite well.

Trixie hums non-committedly, handing out the missing sheets. The music coming out of the speakers is pretty hectic, all passionate violins and melodramatic trumpets, and for some reason it seems to compel the kids to work in relative silence. The progress on the children’s paintings reflects Trixie’s unclear instructions well: Lucía has painted a bright yellow triangle and nothing else; she seems to be under the impression that she’s done and is wistfully looking out of the
Suzie is in the middle of painting a figure that Trixie recognizes as her dad. The figure looks nothing like her dad, of course, but she’s drawn him often enough by now for Trixie to recognize him. Evan has his tongue pinched between his teeth, using his finger to draw a wavy line on his paper in deep concentration. It’s probably the closest to what Trixie would do, if she were to do anything at all: She can, maybe, hear the waves in the ups and downs of the violins. Most of the kids, naturally, haven’t yet started working and are either looking at their papers in confusion or drawing on each other or the pitiful waxed table cloth.

“I’m doing one,” Betty announces, and sits down in her chair with one leg crossed over the other. “Are you?”

“Sure,” Trixie sighs. She feels her chances of getting out of painting with Katya later tonight are bigger when she paints now: Katya wouldn’t expect her to go through this twice in one day, would she? She sits down in one of the tiny chairs, rearranges herself, the chair, and the table to find a position where her knees don’t poke one of the kids. Impulsively, she dips a paint brush into a jar of water and then into the yellow water colour until the bustles are bright and yellow, the colour of some of Trixie’s favourite dresses.

She closes her eyes and focuses on the music, tries to drown out the kids chattering and Betty reprimanding Kameko for painting his own arm instead of the paper. The rush of the violins has calmed down a little and the song is much quieter, more peaceful, a string of cellos floating below a tranquil piano. She has no idea what to do with the yellow, and it certainly doesn’t fit the mood of the music, so she dabs her paint brush on the paper a couple of times, leaving some token yellow dots, before quickly cleaning the brush to try her luck with a new colour.

If she remembers Latrice’s instructions correctly she is supposed to look into herself for inspiration, and with everything that has happened between Katya and her these past couple of days – all the time spent together, all the touches, all their hopeful conversations – there’s no way she can look into herself and not find Katya there, no way she could paint feelings not coloured, not guided, by Katya.

The left-hand corner of her paper is covered in little bluish-green waves before she realizes she’s recreated the colour of Katya’s eyes, and then she follows this with bigger waves in a light grey, mimicking Katya’s open hair falling down her naked shoulders. A clumsy bright red pattern on the bottom of the page could stand for a multiplicity of things: Katya’s bodysuit, her lips, her dress when she never kissed Trixie on the landing strip at the airport, probably not her vibrator.

Maybe she could give the painting to Katya later, she thinks, this is exactly the kind of thing Katya would love. Yes, Trixie decides, she’ll do her best to make this painting a piece of art that deserves a spot in Katya’s room: there’s so much space now where Sasha’s things used to be. Trixie wants to fill up part of that space, wants to have a presence in Katya’s room even when she’s not there.

Luckily for her Betty doesn’t seem to find fulfilment in painting her feelings, abandoning the paper after covering it in a few blotches in different angry shades of red, maybe signifying the divorce she’s currently going through, maybe not. Instead, Betty humours the kids and keeps them in check, giving Trixie the opportunity to zone out and do her own thing.

“So what’s this you’re painting?” Betty asks her after a while, her right eyebrow raised towards her hair line. “Looks like a cry for help?”

“This is Love,” Trixie answers defiantly. She might not like her painting, but she sure won’t allow Betty to defile it.

“This is love!” Ava chimes in, holding up her sheet of paper for Trixie and Betty to inspect. She
has coloured in almost the entire sheet with a bright pink marker. A lovely colour, Trixie will happily admit.

Kameko looks at Trixie in confusion, dropping the piece of purple chalk in his hand. “I didn’t know we have to paint love, Ms. Mattel. I would have done it different then!” His sheet sports a misshapen bird on the left side, and a nonsensical swirl of colours on the right side.

“You’re not supposed to paint love,” Betty informs him. “You were not supposed to draw a bird either, but you were not supposed to draw love. Ms. Mattel is just a little scattered today.”

Kameko nods, as if he understands that statement, and sets his chalk to the paper again, forceful enough to make the chalk dust fly. Trixie rolls her eyes in Betty’s direction, careful to not have the children see, and immerses herself in her painting once more. She can already see the blinding smile on Katya’s face when she gives her art to her later.

♥♥♥

“Ten more minutes, guys, then we have to clean up,” Betty announces after a while and makes Trixie jump in her too-small chair, painfully hitting her knee on the too-small table. Her painting is – well, the paper is covered. There’s a frizzling ball of pink excitement and nerves she feels whenever she is with Katya. There’s spikes of yellow lines in the bottom right corner when Trixie decided she needed to pay attention to the music after all and followed the lines of the trumpets for a minute. There’s a red square when Trixie abandoned the music in favour of Katya again, drew a bright red heart only to frown at its obviousness and unoriginality. She tried to cover it up with a more unassuming, a more artistic shape: the square. Moreover, there’s an attempt at drawing a saxophone, marrying the classical music and the plastic saxophone that’s still lying somewhere under Katya’s bed. All in all, she has to admit the painting is truly ugly. None of the colours go together, and her lack of concept is glaringly obvious. Maybe this isn’t the part of her she wants to have in Katya’s room after all. Maybe she should just take a pretty selfie, frame that instead.

Well, this failure clearly isn’t on her. This task was designed to make her fail. She’s glad Latrice’s concept to coax out the kids’ inner artists strictly forbids any form of evaluation of their art work, so at least Trixie is safe from critique.

For the first time in a couple of minutes she looks around the table, taking in the artwork of the kids. After Betty continuously nagging her, Lucía has surrounded her bright yellow triangle with other shapes; there’s circles, and little flowers, and Trixie doesn’t know how this relates to the music at all but it certainly makes for a picture you at least wouldn’t hate to hang on your wall.

Suzie finished drawing her dad, has given him a wide-open mouth out of which there’s floating black lines and dots that Trixie supposes must be musical notes.

Evan’s painting speaks to her most; he has covered the whole sheet in dark blue water colour and covered this backgrounds in swirls of white and red chalk. Trixie can truly see the movement of the music: This is the kind of art she had hoped she could bring home to Katya. She squints to see if Evan has written his name on the bottom of the paper, there’s a dark smudge there, but that could be anything. Maybe in a couple of minutes when she collects everybody’s work, she could mix some things up and accidentally take Evan’s painting back to Katya’s? Much like most of the kids’ recent art work, Evan’s painting is probably bound for a long life in the day care’s storage room anyway, so giving it a chance at a life on Katya’s walls would be a kindness on her part. She’s considering the way the blue would look beautiful in the orange light of Katya’s lava lamp when Betty instructs the kids to write their names on the back of the sheets, and Evan takes a bright blue marker, scribbles the four letters big enough to cover the whole of the sheet’s backside, unapologetically ruins Trixie’s gift to Katya.
It’s a wonder the neighbours don’t complain more than they do, Trixie thinks when she walks to the Love Shack after her shift. There’s music floating down the street so loud she can hear it when she’s still five houses away, and she finds herself humming along and walking faster to join the others. Once she walks up to the garden gate she sees why the music is so loud: it’s not coming from inside the house, instead, there’s boombox set up next to the garden table. Chi Chi’s standing on one of the swings, his back to her, precariously leaned forwards, trying to fasten a banner reading “Welcome Vixen” in the branches. With the early-evening sun shining through the branches, Trixie can see where the banner is double-layered over Vixen’s name, with Sasha’s name shining through in bright orange letters.

There’s an artfully decorated red-velvet cake set on the table, a cake Trixie recognizes as Kim’s work, and the unlit candles on the table look slightly messy, can’t be store-bought, might be the result of Jinkx’s and Katya’s post-break up candle-making, when Katya spent some time trying to be good at hobbies.

As Trixie walks closer to the house she can hear voices floating through the cracked itchen window and the open front door; voices singing along to the music in the garden, Katya being the loudest – and most offkey – of them all. Apparently, they can’t hear the music that well from inside; their singing is way off, tumbling behind almost a full line of the song.

She’s about to step through the wooden garden door when her phone vibrates in the coat of her light jacket.

**Katya**

_Trixie!_

_Are you home soon?_

_Let’s make art_

_Trixie, Trixie_

_You’re my favourite_

_Come home soon_

Trixie’s grin rivals the massive orange emoji on the welcome banner as she steps through the wooden gate and waves at Chi Chi. In the light of the evening sun reflecting in the kitchen windows she can make out Katya’s silhouette in the kitchen and Trixie stops and waves at her, hoping Katya will see her, come out into the garden to greet her.

**Trixie**

_I’m home!_
thank you so much to everyone who commented last chapter, you're the ones making this story possible. feel free to leave anon comments, just put literally any made-up (or real, if you wanna read my reply) emailadress, ao3 isn't too fussy in this regard.

please let me know what you think, and i'll see you next time for the epilogue. it's katya's pov, which i think is neat!

♥
here we go, the final part of this story! :) i want to thank everyone who's been reading this and left me encouraging feedback, writing and publishing this really has been a journey for me and i'm happy to have had you with me for the ride. most of all i want to thank rosie, this story wouldn't be where it is without you, and neither would i. ♥

Katya’s thoughts are like a lake. Or rather, her thoughts are like the waves on a lake, the tiny and not so tiny disruptions on a glistening surface. The actual lake is Katya herself maybe, or her consciousness, or something bigger she only sometimes has access to. When Katya is at peace, so is the lake – and she manages to be at peace most of the time these days.

When Katya was 18 she started seeing a therapist for a while. She hasn’t seen her in years and years, remembers barley any of the conversations they had, but the image of the lake has stuck with her. In the beginning of every session, her therapist asked her to lean back in her armchair with the bright coral cushions, close her eyes, take deep breaths in through her nose, and focus on the lake. In the beginning she wanted Katya to verbalise the thoughts she watched coming and going, but after time, she left Katya to observe them quietly, on her own. The key is learning to let a thought drift by without getting stuck on it, without wanting to dig into it, to just let it come and go as a wave.

While her therapist never wanted Katya’s focus to stray off the lake, over the years Katya has meticulously created – and destroyed, and recreated – the lake’s surroundings. She likes watching the wind blow through the vegetation around the water; blue translucent flowers dancing in the wind, sometimes getting torn apart in a storm, but whole again when she revisits the scene. While the flowers are always blue, with their shade hardly varying, the colour of the gnarly trees surrounding them is everchanging. The trees carry white leaves sometime; sometimes there are no leaves at all, and most of the time there’s too much fog laced through the branches for Katya to tell. When the treetops are hidden, she likes to believe the leaves are at their most beautiful.

What Katya never told her therapist is that, after she’s watched her glistening thoughts for a while, she likes to dive below the surface of the lake, be surrounded by the water. She was always supposed to focus on the warmth in her body, but she prefers the cooling effect of the water, likes diving deep enough until there’s no sunlight coming through and she’s surrounded by absolute stillness. In the past couple of months, she has worked on travelling there during her meditation; she doesn’t always make it there, but when she does and comes up again she feels rejuvenated, revived, and like she can take on the world for another couple of days.

Right now, with the sunlight streaming in through the windows of Juju’s and Shangela’s Los Angeles home, the lake lies calm and quiet, with rays of sunlight reflecting on the surface and Katya feels no need to dive in, just idly watches her thoughts drift by.

Shangela, over an hour ago when she was fixing herself a cup of coffee before she left to start her job at the youth centre, had woken Kayta up despite how carefully she tried to step around the air mattress Katya is sharing with Trixie.
Katya doesn’t mind; lying awake and waiting for Trixie to wake up is so familiar to her now, calm and reassuring, and she uses the time to meditate or comb through her thoughts, to paint or design her jewellery, to go on walks with Sasha and bring back breakfast for Trixie.

Trixie is lying on the opposite end of the air mattress where she scooted as far away as possible to escape Katya’s body heat in the narrow and stuffy kitchen in a city that’s unusually warm for November – at least that’s what Juju claims; neither Katya nor Trixie have ever been to Los Angeles before. The rubbery material of the mattress is sticking to Katya’s sweaty back where her tank top has ridden up, and she’s been considering getting up and going for a cigarette on the rooftop for almost an hour now, but today is one of the days she doesn’t itch to jump out of bed as soon as she wakes up: today she can lie here with Trixie and happily wait for their day to start. It’s their last day in LA; they’ve been staying with Juju and Shangela for six days now and have an early morning flight to Boston to catch tomorrow. Things will be busy and crazy as soon as they get back, Katya knows: Trixie will dive right into rehearsing her new holiday musical and Katya only has a couple of days to get ready a big order of jewellery for a campy drag queen Christmas tour.

Instead of getting up she laces her fingers through the strands of Trixie’s hair spread out on the mattress between them, careful not to tug on her scalp and wake her up. Because she forgot about half of the things she was supposed to bring for their trip, Trixie is squeezed into one of Katya’s old gymnastic team shirts. Trixie has left no doubt about how much she hates having to wear this but Katya loves how the pale yellow accentuates the way her skin has tanned in just the past couple of days, and the way the short sleeves ride up to show Trixie’s freckled shoulders.

Katya likes Juju’s and Shangela’s home in the outskirts of LA. It’s small and cramped, it overheats, but it’s warm and personal in the best of ways. Katya especially likes the disproportionally big fridge with a dozen of colourful magnets showing off memories, to-do lists, ticket stubs, and a myriad of other things they probably should have thrown out a while ago.

In the center of the big cream-coloured door there’s a picture of Shangela, Juju and Kim, with Shangela and Juju in extraordinarily flashy makeup Kim caked onto their faces. Katya isn’t sure she’d be able to recognize Shangela if it wasn’t for the fact that she’s sitting in Juju’s lap. The picture must have been taken in the early summer when Kim flew out to visit them not long after she moved to Chicago.

Right next to the photograph of the three of them there’s a crumpled-up piece of paper on which Katya had scrawled one of her monster creations, which used to hang on the Love Shack’s fridge until Juju stole it away. It’s ugly and irreverent, and Katya feels warm at the thought of Juju loving it enough to defy Jinkx and steal it away to LA.

There’s a group photo that has Katya in the center, although she can’t really remember it being taken: They’re sitting in the Love Shack’s garden with the Welcome Vixen banner flying above their heads; one end of the banner has come lose and in the picture she can only make out the “xen” of Vixen’s name. Katya is sitting between Sasha and Trixie on the bench, her legs thrown over Trixie’s thighs, holding a plate of red velvet cake she is sure belonged to Trixie. Katya snorts when her eyes reach Chi Chi’s face and she could swear his grin looks apprehensive even though his arm is slung around Vixen’s shoulders.

♥♥♥

Katya likes the warm air in LA, the sun on her skin and the way her hair feels heavy with the salt of the ocean ever-present in the breeze outside. Maybe she could truly live here someday, she thinks. Trixie certainly lets no opportunity slide to let her know she feels like she’s destined for LA. She
can imagine Trixie and her living in a place like this someday, maybe, has imagined them living in
a place like this. Well, almost like this.

Trixie loves having potted plants around, has slowly integrated them into Katya’s room, ivy falling
down the side of her desk, a begonia in a bright yellow pot on her nightstand. Katya has come to
appreciate them, can’t picture their future home without them now. The only potted plant in Juju’s
and Shangela’s home is a pot of parsley fighting for survival on the window sill in the kitchen,
looking rather unhappy about the sun that relentlessly floods the kitchen in the afternoon.

If it was their home, hers and Trixie’s, the wall above the couch in the living room wouldn’t be an
enormous map of the world; instead, it would be Katya’s art, it would be Sasha’s art, it would be
the art Trixie sometimes brings from the day care. Maybe Trixie would let her hang the result of
Katya finally talking her into painting their feelings together, all colourful, abstract, and messy.
Trixie wouldn’t want it up on the wall for anyone to see, but maybe she could get away with
hanging it behind the couch, hidden by the backrest, so that no one could see but Katya would take
comfort in the fact that it’s there.

Trixie isn’t thrilled by the mess Katya creates when she designs her jewellery, the dismissed ideas
she likes to just throw into the air and watch float to the ground, the ideas she might like and
spreads out on the floor to walk through to find out how she really feels about them. Their home
would either have to have a separate room for Katya to create her messes, or Katya would have to
learn how to be less of a whirlwind.

Katya is busy painting the walls of their future home different colours when Trixie begins to stir,
presses her nose into the mattress and frowns slightly. It’s almost 8am so Juju will have to get up in
only a couple of minutes if she wants to be on time for her shift, and Trixie and Katya will take the
bus with her, spend one last day in the park.

“Hey, bambi,” Katya whispers and scoots over an inch or two, rests her forehead against Trixie’s
shoulder. Trixie nuzzles Katya’s hair in response; she doesn’t love talking right after waking up, a
fact that Katya, who is usually ready to throw a million thoughts into Trixie’s face straight away,
had to learn the hard way.

“You go wake her up,” Trixie mumbles after a good five minutes, grabbing Katya’s waist and
holding her tight as if to negate her own words. “I did it last time.”

If Trixie is a little grumpy in the mornings, Juju is an absolute nightmare. Katya suspects one of
Shangela’s favourite things about her job at a youth center is having to wake up well before her
and being out of the building by the time Juju’s alarm goes off. Of course, with them being here,
Juju has decided to not set her alarm at all, which them leaves the two of them to carefully wake
her.

“Lies and lies.” Katya grins and kisses Trixie’s cheek. Like the rest of her body the skin there is
heated up from the stuffy air in the kitchen, and Katya can start herself feeling to break out a sweat
again, but Trixie’s body is soft and wonderful enough for her not to want to let go. “I did it the last
three days, you owe me big time.”

“She’s your friend.”

“Not much longer if I have to go in there again.”

“Do it for me?” Trixie tries batting her lashes at her, but can barely open her eyes yet, ends up
looking silly enough for Katya to snort into the mattress.
“No.”

“But I love you,” Trixie argues, pouty and confident, and it’s a far cry from the first time she’s told Katya she loves her, when the words had slipped past her lips only weeks into them dating and Trixie had all but run out of the room and refused to answer Katya’s texts and calls for the rest of the day.

Katya scoots up on the mattress a little, enough to be at eyelevel with Trixie, enough to press a quick kiss to her lips. “I love you too,” she replies, and mentally prepares herself for losing this battle, for getting up and waking Juju in a minute.

“I’ve loved you longer,” Trixie quips, confident as ever that this fact should win her the argument, and then she rolls over and pretends to fall back asleep within seconds.

♥♥♥

Seeing Trixie happy is something Katya can never get enough of, and she’s rarely seen her happier than in their days at the park. While Trixie neither packed a nightgown nor sensible shoes, she did pack roller-skates. She didn’t wear them the last couple of days, not when they were going on rides and spending too much time in gift shops, since Trixie is committed to bringing back the perfect souvenirs for everyone she knows. Today, however, they’ll spend strolling through the park, hitting their favourite spots for food and watching the water fountains, and Trixie sees no issue with being on her skates.

Being the good girlfriend she is, Katya has packed a pair of shoes Trixie can change into when the skates start to be too impractical or painful.

Being the chaotic girlfriend she is, Katya has packed those shoes into Trixie’s backpack, making her carry them herself, since Katya is used to not carrying a bag and just throwing her junk into Trixie’s bag at all times.

Three hours into their last day at the park, Trixie seems to be fed-up with her skates but refuses to admit it. Instead of changing into shoes she keeps her legs still on the ground and has Katya push her along the winded, cream-coloured paths, humming along to the tacky music Katya has never heard anywhere outside of Disney movies. If it wasn’t for Trixie’s enthusiasm the never-ending stream of music following her at her every step would grind on Katya’s nerves enormously, but Trixie fills parts of the of the melody with words that Katya should know after all the times Juju’s talked her into Disney movie nights, but doesn’t. Trixie’s singing makes Katya squeeze Trixie’s hips where she pushes her along the roads, makes her wish she knew at least some of the words if only to see Trixie’s reaction.

Katya’s favourite thing to do in the park is take pictures of Trixie. Trixie loves posing for her, loves seeking out the kind of flowers that go best with her dress and find just the right angle in front of that bed of flowers, smile into Katya’s camera. Today, her dress is yellow and covered in embroidered yellow sunflowers, a dress Katya brought back for her on one of her thrifting trips with Sasha. Trixie’s flowerbed of the day is covered in dark orange marigolds, with a bright yellow tinting the edges of the soft leaves, and Katya sends one of her favourite pictures to her mom with pride. Katya’s mom first met Trixie a little over a month ago, and she absolutely adores her. Trixie’s mom, in turn, doesn’t know of Katya’s existence at all, even though they have been together for eight months now. Trixie has some vague plans of coming out to her over Christmas next month, but Katya suspects it isn’t going to happen, not just yet.

Katya’s second favourite thing to do at the park is step by Esmeralda, the mechanic fortune teller on main street. For only a quarter and a minute of her patience, Esmeralda, in her enviable satin
clothes, choppily moves her wooden hand and face around for a couple of seconds, and then a card falls out from a slit towards the bottom of the machine, telling Katya what to expect from her future.

It’s her ninth visit at Esmeralda’s, and Katya assesses her newest card with a frown. In the middle of the main road, there’s barely any shade, and Katya squints at the sunlight reflecting off the card before absent-mindedly searching her body for sunglasses. She finds a pair tucked into the waistband of her leggings, a pair Trixie got for her only yesterday when Katya inexplicably couldn’t locate any of her other sunglasses. As she pushes her regular glasses up on her forehead to make way for the sunglasses, she notices another pair already up on her forehead. Impatiently, she fishes them off her head, hands them to Trixie.

“You have little patience with conventional ways of living,” Trixie, who has a sensible amount of one pair of sunglasses that are neatly placed where they belong, reads out. “Oh wow, Esmeralda is cutting deep today.”

“She gets me.” Katya nods and shoots Trixie a grin. Over the past couple of months, Trixie has slowly come to understand Katya’s fascination and love for different ways and areas of fortune telling; she has explained to her often enough how this is a lens she likes to see the world through, she uses to make sense of her character and the events around her. Luckily for Trixie and their relationship, Katya doesn’t mind Trixie teasing her about it.

“You have a love for the fine arts,” Trixie continues, then looks up from the card in mock seriousness. “Do you think Esmeralda ever tells this to someone who doesn’t give a shit about the arts and then turns their entire life around?”

“Oh, definitely,” Katya answers. “That’s Bob Ross’ origin story, didn’t you know? I think this is my favourite card. Or no, wait! My favourite one is the one that said I’d be rich, like, filthy rich. Hang on, I got that one yesterday when you were at that musical show with Juju.” She rummages through her wallet to find the right card. “Here: You will own a lot of property later in life.”

“Aaaah!” Trixie grins, holds up her hand for Katya to give her her wallet, so Trixie can put it back into her backpack. “I hope it’s that castle!” She points towards biggest fairy-tale castle in the park, all white and purple and shiny, and Katya nods.

“I hope it’s a haunted house. But I’ll also own some castles, probably.”

♥♥♥

Their last day at the park is Katya’s favourite of them all. Having tallied up all promising rides over the last couple of days, today they can avoid most of the crowded queues that make Katya want to crawl out of her skin, and with her skates getting into the way Trixie doesn’t even try to talk her into going into more of the shops. By noon, they head towards a half-circle of benches near the fairy-tale castle where they’re meeting Juju for lunch.

Juju is sitting on one of the benches in the shade provided by big palm trees rustling in the breeze, and she has spread out her light-green princess gown to cover the bench, signalling the worn-out tourists in need of a bit of shade to try their luck elsewhere. She’s typing away on her phone, something Katya knows for a fact she is never supposed to do as long as she’s in costume, and she tucks her phone into her cleavage as soon as she spots them.

“Oh,” she grins, and does her best to gather her tulle to make space on the bench. Trixie flops down next to her with a sigh, spreads out her legs in front of her. Katya sits down on the edge of the bench, cross-legged, facing them both.
“We’ve brought lunch,” Katya announces, and presses a big paper bag into Juju’s waiting hands. It’s stuffed to the brim with cream puffs, and she knows Trixie and Juju will empty it in no time. Katya herself has gotten an overpriced sandwich and a bright red slushie.

“Don’t tell Shangie.” Juju stuffs the first cream puff into her mouth whole. “Somebody at the center keeps talking nutrition at her and he’s beginning to rub off on her. She wants to sign us up for a cooking class, can you believe?”

Trixie sympathetically pats the tulle where she must suppose Juju’s knee to be.

“Just tell her you won’t marry her if she keeps prioritizing your health over your disgusting food preferences,” Katya suggests, giving Juju one of her sweetest smiles. She’d love to take a cooking class with Trixie, she thinks, or maybe she should take one on her own, surprise Trixie when she suddenly knows how to cook all her favourite meals. Maybe Kim or Jinkx can teach her some stuff over skype. She only hopes she remembers those plans once they’re back home.

Katya feels a slightly worn-out from pushing Trixie around under the sun all day and a row of less than ideal nights in Juju’s kitchen; she leans forward a little, rests her forehead against Trixie’s shoulder and closes her eyes. Katya’s action comes in energetic outbursts: she can go miles and miles one moment, and then she’s still a moment later. Trixie puts her arm around Katya’s shoulder, hugs her to her side and traces little patterns on her naked upper arm while she’s chatting with Juju, Katya drifting out of the conversation that revolves mostly around Juju’s elaborate wedding plans.

“What do you think, Katya?” Trixie asks after a couple minutes of Katya being focussed on nothing at all, cutting into her thoughts and poking her arm lightly.

“Huh? Yes, a hundred percent.” Katya has no idea what Trixie’s asking, but she’s looking at her expectantly, her eyes glistening, and Katya knows from experience it’s probably a hard yes.

Trixie knows fully well Katya hasn’t been listening, and is kind enough to repeat her question: “You want to go to the beach one last time? We could meet Shangie there after work.”

With Juju going back to walking the winded paths, smiling and taking pictures with kids, Katya and Trixie say a drawn-out goodbye to the park. Katya is nothing if not a nostalgic person, and even though she wouldn’t say she loves the park, it does feel a little sad to know she’s not going to be here tomorrow, she’s not going to be able to spend all her time with her favourite person in the world, she’s not going to feel Trixie’s strong hands on her shoulders every hour as she rubs sunscreen into her skin. It’s an unusually warm November month, with the afternoon sun bathing them in 80-degree air, and yet Trixie insists Katya doesn’t actually need that much sunscreen, claiming Katya’s insistence on putting on lotion in short intervals stems either from the fact that she watched a disturbing, half-baked documentary on skin cancer on youtube, or that she enjoys having Trixie rubbing in the lotion too much. Both of these things are true, Katya knows. When they’re back home tomorrow, she’ll just have to find another lotion and another excuse for Trixie to use it on her.

The last thing they do before leaving the park is go on Trixie’s favourite ride one more time. The ride has Katya sit opposite Trixie in an old-fashioned, neatly painted tea cup, spinning, spinning, spinning, with Trixie’s screeching laugh ringing in her ears and Trixie’s eyes jumping from shamelessly staring at Katya’s arms where she spins the wheel between them, and taking in the world blurring into a whirlwind of colours around them.

They leave right after the ride, Trixie a little wobbly in her knees from all the spinning, the skates finally stored in her backpack. They’re headed to the beach with a couple of hours to spare before
they’re meeting Shangie and Juju; Katya might not be a romantic, not really, but there’s something about watching a sunset at the beach that never fails to draw her into the scene. The sun sets around 5pm this time of the year, so she’s dragging a giddy Trixie out of the park gates at three, walks all the way to the beach with her.

♥♥♥

The water playing around Katya’s body is cool and comforting, or freezing and unwelcoming judging by Trixie’s expression. Trixie hasn’t gone into the ocean deeper than her calves, she’s standing behind Katya, with her feet buried in the sand, has taken off her sundress in favour of a floral bathing suit but Katya knows she isn’t coming in, has given up trying to convince her.

Katya swims out into the open ocean until she can’t read Trixie’s face anymore and Trixie is a blur of floral print and thick long curls, Katya swims until she can feel her heartbeat in her ears and she’s surrounded by nothing but blue, until she can dip her face under water and not see the ground anywhere.

When she comes back to the shore, Trixie is still standing there, with her hands behind her head and a small smile playing on her face, effortlessly being the most beautiful woman in the world. Even though she refuses to go in, Trixie fell in love with the ocean the first time she saw it a couple of days ago, has fallen deeper in love with the idea of the ocean ever since, and Katya knows she already can’t wait to come back here in June, for Juju’s and Shangie’s wedding.

Katya starts walking only when her knees scrape the sand below her, and as soon as she’s standing upright, she starts shivering in the afternoon breeze. She hurries to get out of the water, can’t resist to give Trixie the clammiest, wettest hug as she rushes past her to get to her towel and wrap herself up.

Once Katya’s skin has mostly dried, the air is warm and welcoming again, and she changes back into her leggings and black crop top, puts her favourite earrings on – almost every pair of earrings she’s designing herself these days are her favourites, but she’s really feeling this pair today: one side is a half-moon set with blue and translucent stones, with a little star dangling from the tip, the other half is a sun, ornate, set with similar stones, mostly purple.

Trixie has already put on her dress again, right over her bathing suit that, besides Katya’s wet hug, didn’t see a drip of water today. She’s sitting in the sand propped up on her elbows behind her, far enough that the waves are threatening to tease her naked feet, but won’t. Katya sits down between Trixie’s open legs, her back against Trixie’s chest, ready to be enveloped in Trixie’s warmth. Within a heartbeat, Trixie’s arms are around her middle and her lips on Katya’s neck and Katya can’t even fathom ever getting up from here, ever boarding the plane. Trixie’s breath on her neck makes her stomach tingle, and she buries her finger deep in the sand, warm on the surface, cool just below.

“Is this what your mind looks like?” Trixie asks her after a while, and Katya can’t remember ever having told her about the lake, but reckons she must have, on one of her tangents.

“Mhmm,” Katya hums, “my mind doesn’t have those fancy sailboats in the distance though.”

Trixie huffs and Katya turns her face enough for Trixie to kiss her cheek. “Maybe that’s what’s been missing,” Trixie speculates. “Maybe the sailboats carry everything you need.”

“What could I possibly need? Are you saying I’m not the epitome of the perfect human woman?”

“I’m saying the sailboats wouldn’t hurt. Ask me what my mind looks like?”
“What does your mind look like, bambi?”

“What?” Katya can’t see Trixie’s face, but she knows exactly the way Trixie’s eyebrows scrunch up, just as she knows Trixie is making this up as she goes, “It’s a castle, I think. Is that allowed?”

“I allow it.”

“Thanks.”

“Was that image at all inspired by castle over there?” Katya vaguely gestures into the direction of the park where they could see the castle’s towers in the distance if they turned around.

“What? No.” Trixie sounds indignant. “My castle isn’t like that castle at all. If anything, that castle over there was inspired by mine, mine’s far superior. The floors are made of clouds, but they’re solid, so you don’t fall through.”

“I love that. Solid clouds. Solid concept. What’s the different rooms?”

Trixie thinks for a moment, her lips on Katya’s shoulder, not moving. “It’s an open-floor plan,” she decides, “no rooms. Nowhere to hide in the mind-castle.”

“Scary shit,” Katya comments. “What if there’s something you have to hide?”

“Like what?”

“Like a raccoon, or a cursed harp.”

Trixie scoffs. “Where did I get the raccoon and the cursed harp?”

“I gave it to you for Valentine’s.”

“I see.” Trixie squeezes Katya’s middle, and Katya’s hands curl around Trixie’s for a moment. “I’ll just dump that stuff into your lake.”

♥♥♥

With both of their faces turned towards a calm and dark green ocean, they don’t see Juju and Shangie arrive; it’s only Juju’s “Hello lesbians,” that tears Katya out of their moment. Given Juju’s voice is around the level of an airhorn, Katya is glad they are almost alone on this stretch of the beach. She’s mentally preparing herself for Juju dumping a handful of sand down the back of her top any second now, squeezes Trixie’s arms to indicate her to hold her extra tight for their final moments of peace. She wants to lock this moment in her memory, wants to keep it as one of her favourite moments to store in her mind, hidden away between the petals of the flowers around the lake. There’s a memory of an eight-year old Katya eating ice cream with her parents, wearing a tracksuit over her gymnastics suit and the medal of her first successful competition around her neck. There’s a memory of her moving into the Love Shack, the welcome banner spread across the kitchen, Jinkx jumping through hoops to make her feel welcome and spending Katya’s entire first night curled up with her on the living room sofa. There’s Katya’s twenty-eighth birthday a couple of months ago, when Trixie arranged for a mysterious outdoor activity she had to cancel last minute since the day was drowned in rain. Instead, Katya spent the day with Trixie at her place, with Trixie painting her nails and finally watching Contact with her. Katya spends a moment looking at the ocean, the sky, and the sand beneath her extra hard, to make sure she’ll be able to recall this moment as well as she is those other moments.

A benevolent god – or Shangie – must have let Juju know Katya isn’t ready to get up quite yet, and
when she opens her eyes she sees the two of them setting up a little picnic a little ways down the shore, far enough for the ocean to drown out their noise. From where she’s sitting she can see Shangie has brought real food, healthy food, including fruits and vegetables, and after a week of living off mainly fast food, Katya’s body thanks Shangie in advance. Apparently, so does Trixie’s:

“Come on, let’s get up, I need to eat something that doesn’t have a cream filling.”

When Katya gets up, she can feel her joints aching from sitting in the hard sand for too long. She has barely done any working out or stretching in the last couple of days and can’t wait for rehearsals with Laganja two days from now, or to let Chi Chi and Vixen drag her to their gym as they do more and more often now.

Trixie rolls her head to stretch her neck, rubs her cheek with her palm. Her cheek, previously clean, has little grains of sand stuck to it now, and Trixie squints downwards, as if she can catch their shadows on her skin. In the setting sun her lips sparkle in a dark orange colour, a colour Kim has talked her into and has provided her with in a package full of makeup she got Trixie for her birthday, products she would never have been able to splurge on if it wasn’t for the discount she gets on some major brands now. Kim’s new job has sparked what Trixie likes to refer to as her ‘makeup-journey’, with different colours on her eyelids and lips almost every day. Katya loves almost all of them, loves when Trixie ventures into something different and unexpectedly arrives to a night out with lips so dark they almost look black in the flickering light of Adore’s club, loves when Trixie puts on light golden eyeshadow and pink lips; a classic.

With the sparkling orange on her lips, Trixie fits right into the scenery of the setting sun reflecting on the water, and Katya will take hold of some of the shapes and impressions of this moment and put them to paper later, a Christmas gift to Trixie maybe, or just another painting to shove into her folder under the bed.

When Trixie has gathered Katya’s towel, a novel Trixie hasn’t opened once the last six days but has brought with her everywhere, and two pairs of Katya’s sunglasses into her backpack, Katya steps a little closer to her, rests her palms against her collarbone.

Trixie smiles at her, crooked and beautiful, and Katya leans up a little, digging her feet deeper into the sand. She loves having to get on her tiptoes to kiss her, and Trixie’s lips are warm and familiar on hers, her hand on her waist firm and reassuring. Shangie must really want them to have this moment, because she can’t hear Juju yell at them at all. All she can hear is the rush of the ocean, and Trixie’s hand moving on the nape of her neck.

It’s Trixie who breaks up the kiss by pouting against Katya’s lips.

“I can’t believe we have to take that plane tomorrow,” she sighs, “Why are the coasts so far apart?”

“I believe it’s what they call the Midwest.”

Trixie presses another soft kiss to Katya’s cheek, her nose brushing against Katya’s, then sighs dramatically.

“I know,” Katya agrees, “Who wants it, who needs it?”

“Did you know seven hours on a plane are forty-six hours in real life?” Trixie asks, taking Katya’s hand and turning towards where Juju and Shangie are sitting in the sand and have already started their dinner, the sun setting right behind them, reminding Katya of the tacky desktop background pictures her mom thinks of as the height of art.
“It’s okay, bambi. I’ll give you my garbage plastic sandwich and I’ll let you blame all of your bullshit on jetlag for a full eleven days, what do you think?”

Trixie nods seriously. “Eleven days,” she repeats, “that’s a lot of days.”

“Everything you’ll do the next eleven isn’t your fault, it’s the Midwest’s fault. My gift to you.”

“Amazing.” Trixie giggles. “That’s true love.”

Katya grins. She likes to believe it is.

♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥

Chapter End Notes

GO LOOK AT THE MOST AMAZING PIECE OF FANART FOR THIS EPILOGUE HERE! it makes me so happy, i hope you'll love it! ♥

this is the jasmine masters leave-comments-on-fanfics-challenge! anon or not, long or short, coherent or incoherent, let the writers know what you think!

i'll miss you ♥

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!