The Time of Our Lives

by hlnvet
Clara intentionally let her phone ring over and over again. She tossed the little device inside her purse angrily, snapping it shut. It must be him, one particular persistent person whom she met at a wedding.

Once!

Just that once!

Okay that was a lie. She’d seen him before. And that night was their first official encounter. He didn’t know her before that night, or at least that’s what she’s sure of.

Yet, she still has no idea how he got her private cell phone number.

‘He is out of your league. Get a hold of yourself, girl.’

The last bit was her best friend’s advice. But indeed she has to get hold of herself, before she fell deeper into trouble. She wasn’t seeking for new love; she wasn’t ready for another relationship to be exact. And she was sure that he isn’t a guy who’s interested in long-term relationship. He was probably got interested in checking her out because she was playing hard to get. Every girl – married or not – who attended that party, seemed to like the idea of throwing themselves at him apart from her. That must be why.

She shouldn’t come to that party. No cancel that thought, she had to be there. She had a job to do. She should just set the dessert table and go straight home.

Well, he has the right to be there as well. He was the best man. He had to be there. The only problem was: she shouldn’t have made eye contact with him. He won’t even notice her there and she will live in peace.

Clara knew his name, hell, who doesn’t? He was named as the Star of the Year, best striker in the great state of New York – if not in the nation. Not to forget the title of being most wanted bad boy in New York. He is famous, totally different from her. She might not into gossip, but Shallie has mentioned him more than a hundred times since his love life, with many different celebs, always managed to be on a page – or four – of the gossip magazine.

The phone rang once more. It might have been the twentieth for the night, which, of course she would ignore that one as well. He would give up eventually. There were so many ladies to chase and manipulate out there. He would get tired of calling her or get tired of being rejected and move on.

‘And I sure do need to move on as well!’

She locked the door to her bakery, took the wheel and followed her usual route home.

0o0

“Shit.” He muttered.

Sebastian pressed the ‘end call’ button on his phone screen. It was his thirty-ninth attempts on calling her that night. He was done for the day. He will just try again tomorrow. No, he will just show up at her work tomorrow.

He reviewed his schedule.
06:00 – 10:00 Training

11:00 Brunch with Christian

14:00 – 15:30 Team meeting

16:00 – 17:30 Sponsorship event at Hanover

19:00 Gala dinner at Lincoln Center

He could make it to her work before going to the team meeting. It wouldn’t take that long for a brunch with Christian. And he could make some excuse to get out of the brunch meeting.

He knew it, all too well, Christian would love to discuss about his future with the team.

He hasn’t decided on whether or not to take the multi-year deal with the team again. The bosses will use Christian to convince him into that deal.

However all he has on mind is that girl, Clara Spence. Clara Estelle Spence.

She turned his world upside down. He never believed in love at the first sight until that night at Jenson’s wedding. Her sparkling hazel eyes captured his, mesmerizing him, sending some kind of mysterious spell deep inside him. All he knows is that he wanted her. Not only to warm his bed but for the rest of his life.

‘Dammit!’

He felt his phone vibrating in his jeans’ pocket. He quickly retrieved the device and his heart skipped a bit when he saw the name on his screen.

‘Clara. What? It can’t possibly be.’

It tickled him that the only possible thing that she will bring up is to quit calling her. Giving up isn’t like him, at all, especially for a girl like Clara. She’s totally worth his time.

‘There might be something going on with her?’ Sebastian shook his head. ‘Yeah right, the first person she will call isn’t likely to be me then.’

He slides the screen and connecting the phone call. Instead of an irritated female voice, he heard a deep male voice.

‘Double damn. She has a boyfriend now? Am I going to getting a warning call or something?’

“Uhm, Mr. Sebastian? I’m sorry to interrupt your evening, but I found Ms. Spence, the owner of this phone, fainted at our store earlier tonight. I have no one to contact but you since you’ve trying to reach her for a while now, I believe.” The guy from the other end took a deep breath before continuing. “I couldn’t get into her phone because it’s locked and I couldn’t get any contact number but you…”

“What’s wrong with Clara?” Sebastian panicked. He stood from his couch, where he had been sitting comfortably for the last twenty minutes or so.

“The doctor told me she has anemia but I’m not quite sure what else. If you don’t mind would you help me by contacting her family, I’m pretty sure it would be better for them to talk with the doctor in person.”
He gave the suggestion a thought. The only one he could call was Shallie, one of her bakers, who actually gave him her digits. “Where are you now?” He asked as calm as possible.

The guy named one of the hospitals in Brooklyn. It would take him around thirty minutes to get there from his condo. Before he hung up and grabbed the jacket he initially threw away when he first entered the house, Sebastian did remember to thank the guy for calling and asked for his name.

‘This is going to be one hell of a thirty minutes ride!’

000

Sebastian made it to the hospital in less than twenty minutes. He slammed on the gas pedal as soon as he merged into the empty highway. His heart was racing. It still is.

He thought of calling Shallie, but he wanted to know for sure that Clara was alright before starting to inform the others.

“I’m here for Clara Spence.” Sebastian said once he reached the reception desk.

The middle-aged nurse who sat behind the desk took a simple glance at him before smiling widely. Of course she knows him.

“She’s in room 307, third floor.” She answered.

After muttering a simple thank you and smiling politely, Sebastian ran for the elevator. Once the door opened, he burst out and looking for direction.

‘307... 307... 307...’

He saw a guy standing in front of the door. That must be the convenient store’s owner, Rafael. He smiled politely before taking his hand, simply thanking him for helping his Clara. His… What is she to him? He could lie, but hell she would get mad at him.

At that moment, he didn’t care. He pretended to be Clara’s boyfriend. It would give him the information he needed, he could easily check her condition without the restriction of being a family member.

Rafael asked whether he had contacted Clara’s family or not. He improvised, telling the older man that her family was on vacation.

He knew a few things about Clara from his PI. Clara moved to Brooklyn from Batavia ten years ago. She spent most of her time inside her little bakery in Lower Manhattan. She is two years older than him, an only child and currently single. He was still unsure with the last fact, since there were times when his PI saw her with two particular men.

A female doctor walked out from the room, reminding Sebastian the reason why he was there. She smiled. “Are you her family member?”

“I’m her boyfriend. Her family is currently on vacation.” Sebastian answered.

The young doctor nodded before asking him to follow her to her office.

Sebastian took a quick glance to Rafael who said that he will leave in a few minutes. At least he has done his part. Sebastian thanked him once again before started moving towards the door where the doctor disappeared into.
They bought the lie, which was a good thing yet surprising. How could they? Really? Haven’t they read the gossip magazine lately? But that wasn’t important anymore. He needed to know what was wrong with Clara.

Once he walked into the spacious office, he stopped. There is a familiar smell. It gave him a chill and he shivered.

“Mr. Vettel, are you okay?”

He felt his soul creeps back into his body.

’No, not that. Dammit. Not right now.’

Though, he managed a little nod to reassure the doctor.

“Please have a seat.” She gestured.

He took the seat right across from her. He glanced at her name tag, dangling around her neck. Veronica Lucas. Should he call her Veronica or Ms. Lucas? He has no idea.

“Please call me Ronny.” She smiled. He smiled back. “Has Ms. Spence ever brought up her anemia with you?”

“No.”

“She must have over worked herself then. Her blood pressure is too low. I can’t take the risk of letting her out before making sure that she stays for at least a night so that I can see her progress.” She paused. “You don’t have any objection regarding that, do you, Mr. Vettel?”

“Please call me Sebastian. And no I don’t. Please do what you think best for her.”

“Very well.” She nodded and gave him a little smile. “It should be alright for her to have a visitor. And you are welcome to stay with her if you like.”

“I plan to.”

000

“Have you tried to call her phone?”

“I did. I’ve tried everything, home and cell. No one answer.”

He walked back and forth through the cramped living room. They really need to find a bigger apartment – or house – A S A P.

“Dammit. Where is she at?”

“Calm yourself, Will.” Stanley grabbed his partner’s wrist and pulled him to stop.

“She promised me she would call once she got back home. I can’t do this. This is killing me. I’m going back. Sorry, Stanney, do you mind if I stay over tomorrow instead of today?” Will grabbed his jacket and his keys.

“I will drive you back.” Stanley stood from his seat.

“No I will be fine, I promised.” Will smiles, reassuring.
“Call me when you’re home?”

“Will do.” He kissed him good night and slid behind the wheel of his car.

He shouldn’t have left her alone, not after knowing the amount of sleep she got in the past week. She’s bound to fall, soon or later.

000

When he got back to her room, Sebastian heard a ringtone from her purse. Curiously he searched for her phone. That must be the cause of the loud noise.

Nine missed calls. All from WP.

WP? Those initial totally didn’t help him much. If it’s started with S, he could think of Shallie. But W?

He took the risk and dialed the number back. Someone picked it up on the third ring.

“Honey, where have you been?” There was a sigh of relief from the other end.

“Uhm, sorry, but who are you?” Sebastian asked.

“Who is this? Where is Clara?”

Of course, her friend, or might it be her real boyfriend? Should he tell him the truth? He thought for a second. “I asked you first.”

“I’m not playing games with you. Where the hell is Clara?”

Sebastian could tell he was worried from his voice. “She’s fine. I’m at the hospital with her.”

“Dammit. Are you sure she’s okay? Dammit dammit dammit. Where are you now?”

Sebastian named the hospital they were in. Whoever was on the other end of the phone muttered a thank you before ending the phone call.

000

Ten minutes later, a guy in a simple jeans, white shirt and leather jacket opened the door wide. His gaze fell right on to the bed where Clara was laying.

He barged in and looked around. Sebastian could tell his worry was real.

Is this Clara’s boyfriend? The real one of course. He doesn’t look like one. But who knows…

“What are you doing here?” Sebastian froze at how cold the voice and harsh the voice was. Well, it wasn’t that surprising with the fact that the man knows him.

“I got a phone call, telling me that someone found her lying on the floor in their convenient store.” He answered.

“They should have called me.” The man glared at him.

Sebastian knew that he had to fight, fight for Clara. Because whoever this guy was, seemed to be a very important person to her. Damn he called her ‘honey’ over the phone; there is no way he wasn’t!
He smiled and answered, “The owner couldn’t find a way to contact anyone but me because I was calling her for the past few hours. It wasn’t possible to hack into her phone.”

The guy seemed to accepting his explanation. “Thank you for helping. I will take care of everything from here.”

‘Trying to get rid of your competitor I see. Too bad I’m determined to stay.’

“I don’t even know your name.”

The guy looked through him, sending a light shiver. “Will. William Patterson. Anything else?”

“Okay, Will. But I’ve decided to stay even before you get here. I couldn’t possibly leave her alone.”

“She’s not alone now. You can go. Thanks for helping her.”

“Still, I’m not going anywhere.” He insisted.

Will hesitated. “Look, she will be alright from here since now I’m here with her. You should go.”

“Why? Because I have no relation with her?” Sebastian raised his voice a little.

“That and she will be terrified if she knows you’re here.” Will answered.

“Why?”

“I don’t have time to explain why.”

“I have the whole damn night for it. I’m not leaving until I know the real reason why would I terrify her.”

Will let out a sigh, felling defeated. He should have known that Sebastian is a very persistent person. He should have learned from how many times he called Clara within one week – hell no, one day!

“Fine you can stay. No matter what I tell you it wouldn’t be a good enough reason for you to leave anyway.”

“You’re damn right.” Sebastian grinned.

000

Sebastian swept the room with his eyes for the zillionth time that night. He couldn’t make himself to sleep. All he could think of is calling Payton first thing when the sun rises, cancelling all of his meeting and staying here with Clara. And Will.

He still wasn’t sure what Will was to Clara. But from the gestures he made and everything, Sebastian knew they can’t be more than friends, which really is relieving.

He stood up and made his way to the door. The light was dimmed. He looked over to the patient details board for the room next to Clara’s, but he couldn’t make the data.

He couldn’t focus on anything else but Clara. Everything has been centered on her ever since… ever since Jenson’s wedding.

“Can’t sleep?” A whisper brought him back to reality.
“Ah yeah, never really liked hospital.” Sebastian admitted.

“I told you, you could leave.” Will said.

“Nah. I will be fine. So what are you?”

“Jealous?”

‘One-o for him. He reads through me.’

“Sort of…”

“I’m her best friend. I met her ten years ago. I was working part-time with her.”

“Ah. Where at?”

“The bakery she owns now. You don’t know anything about her, yet you chase her like there’s no tomorrow, why?”

“I would love to give you an explanation but I don’t have one. I just know I want her, ever since I met her.”

“Have heard that somewhere before.” Will smirked. “Maybe we should go get some coffee.” He pointed out towards a vending machine.

“No, for real. I mean I really don’t know why. She’s just different.”

“I just have to warn you this, don’t ever hurt her. She has gone through enough.”

Sebastian threw a questioning look to Will, but apparently Will has more interest on choosing his coffee instead of the pep talk. And he chose to let the matter slip. There would be another chance, maybe once Clara recovered.

“I’m surprised that you decided to stay. Don’t you have any other lady to impress?” Will let a mocking smile drawn on his face.

Sebastian grinned. “I’ve actually been single for a while now.”

“How long? A day?”

Sebastian smiled. A worried friend, he can understand that. “A month.”

“That’s not what Us Weekly said.”

“And you’re going to believe that rather than what’s coming from my own mouth?”

“Good point.”

They both sat at the nearest bench.

“Shit!” Will muttered.

“What’s wrong?” Sebastian concerned.

“I forgot to call my boyfriend. I was supposed to stay over at his until I couldn’t get hold of Clara. She hasn’t been sleeping or eating right lately, I was worried.”
“That’s explains everything. Do you know why?”

“Why she hasn’t been sleeping? Duh it’s almost…” Will stopped.

“Almost what?” Sebastian prompted.

“She has big project in two weeks. She spent most of her time planning on the next wedding cake instead of sleeping.”

Sebastian wasn’t quite satisfied with Will’s answer. There is something he’s hiding, again.

0o0

She found herself shielded from the cold with a thick hospital blanket. As she thought, she was bound to fall any day now. She just didn’t think it will be this soon.

Two more weeks, she has two more weeks to the eighth years and the wedding for the senator’s daughter. She wanted something grand.

And out of all the bakeries in town, she had to be the one that was chosen. How could she compete with the well-known Carlo’s Bakery? She had no idea.

She knew one thing for sure, her Devil’s food cake and red velvet are killers. So no surprises when Emily chose red velvet as her wedding cake flavor. Plus she also ordered twenty-five dozens of her push-pop tiramisu, another one of her specialty.

Clara looked for the nurse button. She needed to know when she wouldl be able to go home. She still hadn’t quite nailed the idea for the cake. That has to be her priority now, not lazily lying on a hospital bed.

A young woman in blue uniform knocked on the door before entering the room. “How are you feeling, Ms. Spence?” She asked.

“Much better. I probably just needed some sleep after all.” Clara answered.

“I bet you did. Should I call the two gentlemen in?” The nurse points something to her right.

‘Two? Well looks like Will is here to the rescue.’

“Yes please. Thank you.”

The nurse nodded and left. A few minutes later she was back with a clipboard, pen, stethoscope and two gentlemen following right behind her.

Her eyes were focused on one of them.

“Oh god.” She growled.

0o0
He could tell that she was surprised to find him in there. Not to mention with her best friend. She must have felt betrayed. Maybe…

“Hold that thought, he got informed first. I told him off, he didn’t listen.” Will explained. “How are you feeling, Ellie?”

“Hm… Okay I guess. By any chance, do you know when can I leave this smelly room?” Clara asked.

“Doctor said you should stay for at least a day.” Sebastian added.

“I didn’t ask you.” Clara said.

“Sorry, Darling. He was here first. He met the doctor, not me.” Will informed.

“What? How?”

“Surprisingly calling you all night and leaving a few missed calls had actually helped me to help you.”

“What happened?”

“You fainted at the store, the owner brought you here and called me.”

“That was when I called and he told me you were here. He helped. Well, sort of.” Will grinned.

Now when she was finally able to connect the dots, Clara trusted both men. They met here accidentally, unplanned.

“Could you please take a deep breath, Ms. Spence?” For a second, all of them had been ignoring the nurse who supposed to be checking on Clara. She did as she was asked.

Why would he stay? Hasn’t he got anything better to do? Like seriously, there must be someone waiting for him at home!

“By the way, Sebastian?” Clara put on her warmest expression, she really means the thank you. “Thanks for telling Will and sorta helping. But you can go home now.”

Sebastian lifted his left eyebrow. Was that a hurt gaze she saw crossed his blue eyes? Had she hurt him?

“You really want me to go? Like that badly?” Sebastian asked in a low voice. She could hear the hurt within.

Silence took over the room for a few minutes. It felt so awkward to all three of them.

“She didn’t mean it that way, Sebastian. She just…” Will tried to explain.

Clara interrupted. “Sorry. I didn’t mean it that way. You can stay if you like.”

“Are you sure? I will go if you want me to go that badly.” Sebastian repeated himself.
“It’s okay. Stay.”

“What changed your mind? If you’re pitying me, I’d rather go home.”

“No! I was… I just didn’t expect you to be here.”

Will helped Clara on getting out of that conversation. “By the way, Ellie, do you want me to open the store tomorrow? You really could do some rest for a day or two.”

“Please?” Clara answered.

“Only if you bake me peanut butter cookies once you’ve recovered?”

“Will do, mister.”

0o0

There was so much absolution arises between them. What are they now to each other? Friends? Or what?

Sebastian couldn’t wait to find out more. He wanted to know what had happened to Clara, who broke her heart, who created the scar too deep to heal.

She couldn’t even trust anyone but her best friends, a very exclusive few.

“I want to trust you, in fact I already like you. But please don’t ever break her heart. She has suffered enough for all I know, too much for her lifetime.”

It was what Will said to him, before they got called by a nurse saying that Clara was awake.

Is it really going to be that hard to help her? To gain her trust?

So far it really was.

He hadn’t sleep for even a second, when the clock pointed towards six-o-seven. He retrieved a small device from his pocket, speed dialed number three, Payton. She was the only one who could help him at the moment. She could handle everything. Everything.

She answered on the third ring. She didn’t question much, but he knew he better come up with a super great excuse the next time they meet. His manager never let him loose. Not after the incident a few months back in Baltimore.

Paparazzi caught him in act; drunk and pissed off. He almost got onto probation at that time. Thank god for Payton. What would he do without her, really?

“You should sleep.” A soft voice reminded him, that he wasn’t alone in that room.

“I’m okay. How are you feeling?” He said, reaching for a glass of water from the side table.

“Much better, thank you.”

Will left an hour ago and slept for two hours tops. But he has a bakery to run for his best friend’s sake.

Now that he had the time alone with her, he was determined to find out as much information about her as possible. Directly from the person herself.
Sebastian handed her the glass, which she took a sip from and held it with both hands after.

“Why are you so persistent on staying?” She questioned. “Don’t you have better things to do?”

With a little smirk drawn he said, “I do have better things to do, convincing you that I am here for you…” ‘As your boyfriend if possible.’

But of course he left the last bit to himself. She didn’t need to know that right now. All she needed to know is he will be there for her, like it or not.

“Not that. I mean… you must be busy, why are you here?”

“I don’t have anything to do today.”

“That’s a lie.”

“No, well, not really. I just cleared up my schedule so now I’m free and I can hang out with you the whole day, while your best friend is running your bakery.”

Was that amusement or pain in her eyes? He couldn’t tell, but there was something gleaming and reflecting in her eyes. Something deep.

“I seriously think you could use some sleep.”

“And so could you.” Sebastian smirked. “You shouldn’t force yourself.”

“But I ha…”

Sebastian raised his pointer, silencing her.

“I know but you should also know that you are not superhuman.” He smiled.

Clara couldn’t believe what she saw. The smile was so genuine, so gentle. She saw that smile once, ages ago. Thirteen years ago to be exact. The last time she saw Jack smile that way to her, full of love and gentleness. Was he really in love with her?

‘Yeah right… I bet Sugar Delight that he is fooling around with me…’

“You’re still questioning why I’m here, aren’t you?” Sebastian asked with a smile still lingering on her face.

Clara jumped slightly. He read through her, which was surprising and pleasing. Or maybe she was just that easy to read.

They heard a few knocks on the door before it flew wide open. Shallie stood still, holding a laptop bag and a few papers.

“Jesus Christ, Clara! Were you this pale when I left you last night? I shouldn’t leave you alone. God sake, what should I do now?” She said within one breath.

Clara smiled slightly. She still felt weak somehow. Maybe weakened by Sebastian’s smile? Who knows?

0o0

He took that as his cue to leave the two alone for a moment.
Will did tell him that he will send Shallie down to get Clara’s laptop and all her planning. She insisted on having the work done, even during her bed rest.

She said she will die of out boredom if he didn’t let her work at least a few minutes – more like hours, he knows.

“Alright then, I will grab a bite to eat. Any cravings?” He said, looking towards Clara on her hospital bed and Shallie who still standing by the door.

“Oh hey Seb! I’m okay though, I grabbed a few muffins before heading here.” Shallie said, started to move closer to the bed.

“And you didn’t even get some for me?” Clara protested. Shallie smirked.

“Well, what can I get for you?” Sebastian asked directly to Clara this time.

“I’m good.”

“No you need to eat something. Brownie or muffin?”

“She would rather starve then have any of them.” Shallie answered, which got a questioning look from Sebastian. “Get her a fruit salad. She loves those. And yes, I owe you a story later.”

When Sebastian finally stepped out of the room, he was determined to get more than fruit salad for Clara. Something good, maybe a big breakfast will do. She needs a hell lot of nutrition.

0o0

“Of course, you’re the one who gave him my number, aren’t you?”

Clara straightened herself on her bed. Shallie smirked; she was a fool to think that she would get out of this easily.

“I want to say I hate you but you know I can’t.” Clara started.

“You need me.” Shallie added.

“That isn’t true.”

“Looks like you do at this very moment.”

Clara shook her head. Well he had her number now, helped her during her short stay, and now he might as well get her something to eat.

As always, hospital menus were never a good one to choose from. There was nothing that interested her when one of the nurses handed her a menu for breakfast, lunch and dinner. She was hoping that she didn’t need to stay that long, but it’s useless. She had to stay until tomorrow, the very least.

For now, she just needed to bear with it, take it as some vacation days that she deserved and work from hospital. Thank god for Will! Otherwise she would have to worry over her bakery.

“So tell me, are you going to date him?” Shallie asked, frontally.

“Date? You know I don’t date. And come on, we are talking about the Sebastian Vettel, the very one that you like! Won’t you be jealous if I date him?”
“So… you do want to date him, don’t you?”

Damn! “That’s not what I mean… I mean…”

Shallie pulls out her mischievous grin. “What do you mean then?”

“Where is my laptop?” Clara purposely changed the subject.

“Easy tiger, I won’t give it to you if you don’t tell me how you feel about him.”

Double damn! “He’s fine.”

“That’s it?”

Clara knew it was useless to hide from Shallie. She was being stupid for even trying.

“I’m not dating material anymore, okay?” Clara exclaimed.

“If he doesn’t think so, it doesn’t count. Give him a chance. He’s a good guy.” Shallie said.

“Well that’s surprising, remembering that you always complain about his love life.”

“Let’s say I had a nice chat with him, heart to heart.”

“You did not!” Clara almost jumped from her bed. Whatever Shallie had said to Sebastian, it better not involved her love life, especially Jack.

“Not that part.”

000

“Not what part?” Sebastian interrupted. He stood by the door with a brown bag full of fruits and god knows what.

“I thought you went to get fruit salad, not robbing the whole store.” Shallie joked.

“I couldn’t find fruit salad. So I thought real fruit would be better for her.” He emptied the brown bag. “Which one do you want?”

“I’ll pick one myself.” Clara answered.

“Apple. She loves it.” Shallie added.

“Do you want me to cut it for you?” He offered.

“I just fainted, not become physically impaired.” Clara said, annoyed.

Shallie nudged Clara’s shoulder. “You don’t have to.” Shallie took an apple, wash it and handed it to Clara.

The three of them grew silence. Sebastian clearly got the message that he wasn’t welcomed at all during the conversation. Hell, he wasn’t even welcomed ever since he met Will last night!

But whatever it is, he was determined to find out, whatever it would take. Because it might be the key to get close to Clara.

000
It’s been four days since Clara got released from the hospital. She was back to the bakery, the minute she got out.

As well as Sebastian…

He has been hanging around Clara ever since. He was probably gone for an hour or two, and then he was back talking to Will or Shallie or now that he knew all of part-timers, he would pretty much talk to everyone but Clara.

Was she avoiding him? Maybe.

But she had a job to do. And before that’s done, she wouldn’t be able to do anything else. She had to concentrate. This is her chance to shine, might as well be her only one.

And she was determined to do it big.

“Clara?” Sabrina, one of her four part-timers, slightly lifts the curtain dividing store to the kitchen.

Clara looks up to her from her notepad. “What’s wrong, Sab?”

“Oh yes, they want to see my sketches. Damn it, I’m not quite ready. Tell them I will be out in five.”

Clara starts collecting her sketches.

She had two sketches to show. A six-tier red velvet cake covered in fondant with two colors, blue and white. Each tier will have a scene or symbol or anything related to the bride and groom during their six years of relationship.

Second sketch is three-tier squared cake, still red velvet. It will be divided into two sides, diagonally. Side one will represent Emily, the bride, with all her girlie stuff. And the other will be Stefan’s.

Clara enjoyed planning for Emily and Stefan’s wedding cake. They pretty much let her do whatever she wanted. Unlike some brides who want specific items on their wedding cake and willing to go overboard to get it, as much detail as possible.

The meeting today was purely to show them her ideas and let them choose.

She took one last glance to the mirror planted by the fridge before walk out to the dining area of her bakery. To her surprise, Clara found Sebastian sitting at the same table with her clients. He looked comfortable talking with Stefan, the soon-to-be groom.

“Here she is. I will take my leave then.” Sebastian emptied his seat, pulling it out a bit so Clara can take it.

“Please let us know if you can make it! I know I’m looking forward to see you in our wedding, right Em?” Stefan smile, looking over to his bride.

“Yes! Who would have known that we would meet you here. I’m sure your gang would love the surprise.” Emily agreed.

“I will let you know, for sure.” Sebastian smiled.

“Oh and you are welcomed to bring a partner.” Stefan added.

Clara claimed the seat adn readied herself for the meeting. She had a lot to explain, yet she wasn’t
sure whether the couple will focus on her and their cake ideas or Sebastian Vettel.

Great! “So, hey guys. How have you been?” She said, trying to get the couple’s attention.

“I just want everything to be over soon. I’ve gone beyond crazy! Clara, darling, when you come to planning your wedding, make sure you have at least a year to plan.” Emily’s horrified expression did add up some drama onto the table.

Clara smiled. Planning a wedding. It does bring back some memories. And…

She shook her head, refusing to go further than that. “I don’t think I will have a wedding but I will take note for the next brides.”

“Very good. So what do you have for us?” Emily asked.

Clara explained her ideas into the tiniest detail possible. The couple loves both ideas. But they had to choose one. Clara couldn’t possibly do both even when she wanted to.

An hour and a half later, they came up with the decision of mixing both ideas into one. A six-tier red velvet cake with two sides, red and blue, where red will represents Emily and blue for Stefan.

Emily and Stefan added some more details on what they wanted on the cake, so it could tell their story. The relationship they maintained for the last six years.

Thirty minutes and four blank papers later, they decided to end the meeting and wait for the surprise Clara would give them on their big day.

0o0

“Do you have a minute?”

Clara was about to turn the open sign off and start cleaning when Sebastian popped his head from the dividing curtain.

“You do realize this area is for employees only, right?”

Sebastian grinned and walked into the kitchen instead. “So I guess I will just have to talk when you finish cleaning. Or actually I can help.”

“No it’s okay. Make it fast.”

He smiled, knowingly. “Will you be my plus one to Stefan and Emily’s wedding?”

“What?” Clara couldn’t hide her surprise with his directness.

“You heard me.”

“Then you do know the answer.”

“Come on. I know you will have to be there anyway, I can come by early and help you with anything, lifting, setting up the table, whatever.”

“No. I’m perfectly fine doing it myself.”

Sebastian didn’t stop there. He has a trump card to use. “Remember when you said you owed me one for helping you after you get out of the hospital?”
Shit! “What’s about it?” Clara knew where this lead to. But she still wouldn’t admit defeated.

“Well you can thank me by going with me to the wedding?” Sebastian grinned, he knew he was going to win this mind game.

“I’m not going to go with you. And I will think of a way to compensate that.”

“No. I want you to compensate me this way.”

He had a clear point. And Clara had no other choice but to go along with his little plan.

“Fine. But after that, stay away from my bakery forever. I have a lot of work to do and you’re distracting my employees.”

“They don’t think so. I can promise you I won’t be around for two days max. We have a match in Raleigh on Tuesday.”

“No, forever.”

“I’m afraid I have developed a bond with this place, I cannot not come here anymore.” Sebastian said, still with a grin on his face.

“Whatever. It’s not my fault if you gain weight.”

“I don’t mind if I get to see you every day in exchange.” He smiles, teasingly this time. “Is that a yes?”

Damn! “No.”

“It is, isn’t it?”

“Ergh… whatever!”

“Do you need help cleaning up? I will see you home.”

“I’m ca…”

“I know you’re capable of making your way home, but I want to see you home.”

“Whatever.”

000

He really did what he said. Meaning, he really waited for Clara to clean her kitchen at her little bakery, lock the door and ready to take the wheel to her lovely car.

“Give me your keys, I will drive.” Sebastian said.

“Excuse me?”

“I will drive you home.”

“You have your own car, go home!”

“I do have a car, which isn’t with me today. So I will drive you home and wait for a cab.”

“What game are you playing?”
Bingo! “No game. I’m not playing anything. I just want to see you home, safe and sound, with my own eyes.”

“Yes but you usually followed me with your own car. Where is it today?”

“Do you want to go home or discuss about my car at ten thirty at night, outside your bakery?” Sebastian points out.

“Will I ever be able to win an argument with you without you being a prick like that?”

“I suppose not…”

Clara handed him her keys. Sebastian unlocked the car and opened the passenger door for Clara. She stepped in, defeated.

How many times a day would she feel defeated by this one guy whom she couldn’t really tell whether she liked or hated? Who knows…

0o0
Days went by faster than she thought it would be. Emily and Stefan’s wedding is just round the corner.

Sebastian did come by every day, *EVERY DAY*.

Who knows how he does that… He might be skipping his trainings or meetings or any programs he could possibly have for being an athlete. He might as well gaining weight, remembering how many cupcakes he consumed on daily basis. Well, as long as he doesn’t blame it on her, she will be fine with it…

But what really took most of her attention was Jack.

Clara shook her head, brushing the thought out of her mind. *It’s not the time.* Today is all about Emily and Stefan; and her date with Sebastian.

Date? Is it really a date? No, Clara refused to see it in that perspective. She doesn’t date. She isn’t a date-material anymore.

Five hours to go and she still have twelve dozens of tiramisu push-pop to do. No time for debating whether it’s a date or not…

0o0

By the time Clara finished with all the orders for Emily and Stefan’s wedding, the clock was ticking mercilessly. She has to make the usual half an hour trip to fifteen tops if she wanted to shower and put on a fresh shirt - if not dress.

Shallie had promised she will handle the store and close it for her tonight.

It wasn’t that surprising when she found out all of her part-timers know her schedule, one being Sebastian’s plus one tonight. It felt like a set up. Maybe Sebastian actually works alongside them, forcing her to go, even before she said yes.

That guy has seriously invaded her life within two short weeks. Very impressive.

If only she can open her heart once again… If only she can actually date someone again…

Clara wouldn’t dare to dream. No, her life is complete; loving parents, a few best friends to rely on, Sugar Delight, and a few wonderful co-workers. She couldn’t ask for more. Her dreams have been fulfilled, and she isn’t thirty yet.

Once everything successfully cramped inside her car, a limo stopped just a few feet away from her parking spot. Sebastian climbed out the limo in his suit.

*Oh, god, help me.*

Even with the suit barely hiding all the builds he has. Not quite a Greek god but close. It has to be illegal being that gorgeous.

“I thought you might want a ride home to change into a formal dress.” Sebastian said with a cheeky grin drawn on his face.
“I…” Clara couldn’t find the right word. “I have the cake and everything else inside the car, I couldn’t leave without it.”

“Will said he will take care of it. We were actually going to volunteer ourselves to help you set up the dessert table.”

“You don’t have to…”

“We wanted to.” Out of nowhere, Will came out and gave her a sideway hug before taking over the keys from her hand. “I will take care of it. Now get to that car and go change! Something cute. Maybe that blue cocktail dress will do.”

Clara smiled. It’s no surprise when Will knows what’s inside her wardrobe. And of course he knows the blue cocktail dress; he was the one who bought it for her.

She muttered a simple thank you, before entering the limo and welcomed by Sebastian’s cheeky grin.

0o0

Forty-five minutes later, Clara sat in the same limo wearing a simple make up and her blue cocktail dress. She opted a gold clutch and ballerina shoes to complete her do. The look from Sebastian made her believe that she did the right thing, wearing the right dress.

Jesus, why did I agree with this silly game anyway?

But it’s rather too late. The limo started to move, finding its way through the crowded street. Hey, it’s New York City, what do you expect? A day without traffic? Yeah, dream on!

“You look beautiful.” Sebastian said. He played with his fingers. He couldn’t be nervous, could he?

“You know what’s funny? I feel like we’re going to prom or something.” Clara said, trying to lighten the air. “But thank you. You look… uhm…”


“Different.” Clara settled with a ‘safe’ word.

Sebastian giggled. Maybe he knew that Clara purposely choose the word.

“Why did you rent a limo?”

“Who told you I rented it? It could be mine.”

“First of all, that will be a wow for you to have a limo. Secondly, as far as I know you live alone, you wouldn’t need limo. It doesn’t suit you anyway.”

“Oh yeah? How did you know what suit me or who I live with?” Clara can hear the teasing between his words.

“Have you even ever heard of Google? You can find anything in there. It’s really useful.”

“Ah… Are you stalking me now?” Sebastian smiled triumphantly, like he won a bet or a million dollar lottery.

“Actually for the fact that you live alone, I know it from Shallie. If you haven’t realized, she’s a big fan of yours.”
Sebastian giggled. “I do know that. I bribed her my autograph to get your digits.”

“I never know the word ‘bribery’ does exist within your head, Mr. sport-man.”

“There is so much about me that you don’t know.” Sebastian smirked. “The real me.”

“I will keep that in mind.” Because you will be gone before I know it…

0o0

“I never expect to see my husband’s favorite soccer player will eventually fall in love with the baker in charge for my wedding dessert table!”

“Emily!” Clara tried to hide her emotion, but it seems that all of it is written all over her face. She wore her heart on her sleeve and this is something that she should expect to happen. “We don’t have that kind of relationship.”

“Sorry but I believe what I see missy. And I’m sure this one is going to get real, one of this day.” Emily winked.

“You know its bad luck to see your wedding cake before your reception?”

“What? No! It’s my wedding! It’s not fair!”

Clara smiled. When she entered the room, Will and Shallie has finished the dessert table for her. All she has to do now is convincing Emily to get the hell out of the room so she can at least surprise her with the final product.

“I want this to be a surprise when you walk down that door. So do me a favor and stay the hell out of this ballroom!” Clara’s smile widens when she sees Emily walks away towards the bride and groom’s waiting lounge. She looks around trying to spot her best friends.

Her first thought after spending a good ten minutes inside without any result was to look at the kitchen. Of course they will be nearby it, by the gigantic size, walk-in fridge for sure. That was where she kept her final product of Emily and Stefan’s wedding cake last night.

Her high-low cocktail dress really marked out her curvy body lines. She didn’t do much for her hair and makeup. The less makeup she wore, the better.

Now that she has been around for quite some time, she almost forgot who she came with for the night. Sebastian was also out of her sight. But for some reason it was the least of her worry.

Taking a flight down the stair, Clara made a left turn and bumped into someone, a stunning young lady with supermodel body. She must have stepped out one of the fashion magazines with her inviting and tight red dress, which for sure also what’s hot now.

“God’s sake! Are you out of your mind? Can’t you see someone standing in front of you?” The lady yelled with a thick British accent.

“I’m so sorry. I was looking for someone and wasn’t pay attention. I’m so sorry.” Clara bowed down a bit, admitting her fault.

“Clara? I was looking for you.” Sebastian voice reached her ears. Was he with this lady earlier? She couldn’t remember that detail.

“You know her?” The lady asked. “You must be joking! Have you knocked your head or
“Megan, please stop it. We are done. I’m moving on. I don’t need to get your permission or even your evaluation over my love-life.” Sebastian annoyed. “Clara, were you going to the kitchen? Let me go with you.”

“Ah it’s okay. You can finish your business with this lady and I can go alone.” She was about to turn around when she felt a warm hand caught her wrist.

“I’m done here, I will come with you.”

Clara shrugged her shoulder and followed Sebastian. They walk down a hallway leading to the kitchen, leaving the lady behind.

A smirk draws on her pretty face. “It won’t be that easy to get rid of me, Sebastian. You will pay for what you have done to me.”

000

She has a million questions floating her brain but she didn’t have the heart to bring it up. The walk to the kitchen was full of silence. Clara felt she knows the lady from somewhere. She does looks like a supermodel. What if she is one?

Will was waiting for her to arrive. The wedding cake has been unwrapped from its box and currently sitting nicely on top of a white and silver table-clothed rolling table.

Her first thought was to bring the cake later when the couple is inside the ballroom. While accepting the guests, friends and family, Clara will roll the table herself and present her latest masterpiece. However, since now she is one of the guests, she couldn’t possibly do that. So she put Will in charge.

With the questions still lingering around her brain and the silence expression she got from Sebastian, Clara decided to do some touch up. Fixing a few broken pipings, straightened a few miniature designer bags made out of fondant on Emily’s side, making sure that nothing is wrong with the cake. Her bakery reputation is at stake. If the couple doesn’t like the cake, she won’t be able to get more customers from them. And she’ll have to give up on her dream of opening a second bakery.

“Why so serious, Romeo? Nervous being with my pretty girl friend?” Will said, teasingly. He managed to get a smile from Sebastian but that was it. Nothing else.

“Will, leave him alone. I need you here. You know what to do later, right?” Clara tried to take over Will’s attention.

“Yes mum. I know what you want me to do. Roll this heavy looking cake to the ballroom when you text me an ‘ok’. Easy enough.”

“Don’t screw up okay!”

“You know I never fail you, Ellie.”

“That I know… Thanks.”

Her focus was back to Sebastian. He was very quite after they met on her way to the kitchen. Her heart screaming to spill the beans and dig for some dirt, yet her brain stopped her and her mouth. It wasn’t the appropriate time – more like she doesn’t have the right to do so. Sebastian is a free man.
He can date whomever he wanted, or in this case talk to whomever he wanted.

She has to find a way to get it all out of her body. Somehow.

000

The night was a success for Clara and her bakery. Everyone loves the final product, her cake design. At least a good twenty well-known people came up to her, asking for her business card. Everything sounds promising. She could actually see herself researching for the next Sugar Delight. She also happened to thought of the name for her second store, Sugar Delight Too.

Although over all happiness and pride swelling her heart, Sebastian turns into a very quiet man that night, forcing her to believe that there was something wrong. He might – no, he obviously has some kind of history with the lady they met earlier. And Clara was sure she had interrupted their conversation somehow.

The ride home was torturing. She wanted to say more, however she stopped herself. She knows herself too well. If she opens her mouth now, there is no way she wouldn’t ask about what had happened. It wasn’t her business after all. Staying quiet was her only choice, so she did.

A friendly kiss on the cheek and a simple goodbye later, Sebastian was off to his own home on the other side of the bridge.

000

Keeping everything to himself was the right decision, or at least he thought it was. He couldn’t ruin Clara’s night with the news. Hell, he could barely grasp it himself, let alone Clara.

It might be true that they haven’t been on any official relationship yet. But the possibility of a relationship was there. Was. It’s long gone now. He would stay out of her way. With the match being held in North Carolina, he could use it to stay away from Clara from now on.

She couldn’t possibly miss him. Whether it’s now or later, he might have to let her go.

It’s hard. He knows it would be. Except this is the only choice for him, to let go…

000


She couldn’t help but asking for more information from Shallie. She must know something. There was no way Sebastian didn’t show up for no reason. Well, he did show up for no reason and she did ask him to leave her alone after the wedding… That couldn’t be, could it?

Only no one knows where Sebastian has gone to or the reason behind his absent from her bakery. Not even Shallie or Will, who seems to made more contact to him than her.

Don’t get her wrong, she did notice him sipping a cup of cappuccino and enjoying her black bottom cupcake whilst talking to her employee or Will.

Has she started to miss him? She refused to acknowledge that feeling. They don’t have any relationship. She could be one of his toys and now he has done playing with her. Or might as well give up, since she never really showed him that he could stir her heart in a way no one but Jack had.
Ten years ago, she moved from Batavia to New York City with him. At the age of eighteen, she made the decision to move right after high school. The thought that she will make her dream comes true in the city lured her. Big city with her boyfriend of four years, that sounds big and promising.

She guaranteed her parents that she will try to get into NYU in a year, settling her roots in New York. So when she did manage to get in with full scholarship, Jack threw a party for her. He was so proud of her he had taken the day off for her and went celebrate in one of their favorite café. It was one of the special moments they shared in the six years of their relationship.

Jack was a firefighter. He got accepted to one of the academies in Brooklyn, which lead to his departure and Clara’s big decision. His love to help others in need made him forget the danger that could cost his life. And it did.

The night of his birthday, his twenty-second birthday, she was waiting for him to come home with yet another big surprise and a cake she baked herself to celebrate with him.

Tragically, he never came home. Never knew about the big surprise. Never tasted her new recipe. Never came back to her arms.

Eight years and two weeks later, there she was still thinking over that night. The night she lost both of her love one, Jack and their unborn baby.

Tears started to form. She wiped them reluctantly.

If this was the right way for her, to be alone after Jack, than be it. It wasn’t like she needed a man by her side anyway. She used to do everything alone. Being alone made her stronger every day.

Actually she wasn’t alone. She has her mom and dad. She has Will and Stanley. She has her loyal part-timers. She has her dream bakery, with a second one on the way.

What she doesn’t know is that she has lost her heart again to the man who is gone for two weeks from her sight and most likely not coming back.

0o0

“WHAT THE HELL!”

“What’s wrong babe?” Stanley nearly jumped off his couch when he heard Will screaming in front of his laptop.

“This bastard! I should’ve known he was after something. I should’ve known that he was playing with our Ellie. I will kill him. Just you wait!” Will answered. His anger heard crystal clear. No, he was furious!

Surely Stanley never expected coming home to a drama. But hey the night can’t get any worse.

He stood up and heard a vibrating sound by the coffee table. He took a glance towards Will’s phone lying on top of it. The little device flashing Sebastian’s name, indicating him as the caller.

Well. It could get worse, actually.

“Will, you might want to take this phone call.” Stanley brought the phone to his partner. He was walking away to the kitchen.
He needed a beer to clear his mind. Hopefully it could also help blocked his hearing.

“YOU BASTARD! DIDN’T I WARN YOU NOT TO PLAY AROUND WITH ELLIE?” Will’s tone stay the same – if not higher than before. He was still furious. How could he not?

“I see you’ve read the tabloid. I can explain.”

“I don’t need your explanation. Just make sure you never show your face around Sugar Delight ever again or I will make you regret for coming near it.”

Will was about to disconnect the call when he heard a pleading tone from Sebastian. “Will, please let me explain.” He made an eye contact to his partner who was nodding towards his phone.

He stayed on the line and press speaker. “Make it quick. And it better be good.”

“I know it sounds so bad but it wasn’t exactly like what it showed on the tabloids. I found out about the baby two weeks ago. Megan made me believed it’s mine. We took paternity test earlier this week. It isn’t mine.”

They heard nothing from the other end before what sounds like a deep breath. “Please tell me Clara hasn’t found out about this?”

“You were just in time. I hadn’t said a word. In fact I just found out before your call.” Stanley claimed the empty seat next to Will. “You have to come tomorrow, explain everything to her yourself.”

“I will.”

“She misses you. She just doesn’t want to admit it.”

“I can assure you of that, too.” Stanley convinced Sebastian on the other side of the line. Silence took over their call.

“Thanks guys.”

“And let me know if you need help with Ellie, I happen to know how to make her calm down.” Will added.

“I sure will.” Except Sebastian doesn’t sound too sure to convince the couple when he ended the phone call.

“You know I was thinking…”

“I know what you’re thinking, Will. And yes I will take the day off so we can help them.” Stanley said with a smile drawn in his face. Will smiled.

0o0
Clara had been in for a good two hours. She loves waking up early and get the baking done. So the only thing that's left when the girls comes by was decorating and moving it to the show case.

Her iPod was echoing her favorite songs. She danced the length of her bakery kitchen, forgetting the fact that her employees were due in a few minutes; or the fact that Sebastian still hasn't contacted her.

Maybe she was a toy after all. Since she played hard to get, now he has moved on to someone else. Good for her - or was it really? Clara decided not to over think the sting she felt inside. He was done and so was she. Period – exclamation mark.

"I can't believe he did this to you!" Clara smiled. Shallie barged in.

"Good morning to you, too."

"Morning, darling. But have you seen the news?" She said in an irritated tone.

"If it's about the gas price went up or the government shutdown or the presidential campaign fund or..."

Shallie shook her head. "Not that news!"

"What is it then?" Clara knew exactly what she meant but it's always interesting to watch Shallie struggle to share her hot gossips.

"Sebastian! That damn boy! I'm gonna kill him if he ever show up around her ever again!"

"Sebastian. I haven't thought about him." She lied.

"Has he tried to contact you ever since the night you two went out?" Shallie asked, curiously.

"No."

"And don't you feel it's odd or something?"

"Why should it? I was the one who asked him to stop bothering me if I be his plus one."

Shallie dragged a barstool in front of computer closer to the steel working table. "I know that... He laughed and said he probably be gone for two days for his match. He should be back in by the following Wednesday, at the very least, but he didn't come back. And the magazine did tell us where he went off to!"

She dropped a gossip magazine. The cover showed a picture of Sebastian with the lady Clara met at the wedding. They both wearing sunglasses but she was sure it's them. Yet the one that caught her attention was the title, all in capital letters: WONDER BOY HAS HIS NEXT MISSION – FATHERHOOD.

Clara couldn't hide the shock inside her. That's why she was sure she had met the lady somewhere. Megan Fitzgerald. The Belgian supermodel. How could have she forgotten?

"Is that?"

Shallie nodded. "Sebastian. The article explained that he went to her appointment. They're having a baby together."
She felt a sting in her heart. It's all over and it's rather too late. Will she survive this one? She wasn’t sure of herself…

000

He triple checked his attire. Nothing fancy, it was a bakery after all. But Sebastian would do just anything to beg for Clara’s forgiveness. Sure it was before they get together. Or are they together now? Last time he checked they're still on their own.

He had all the ammunition he needed, from flowers to chocolate. He wasn’t sure which would please her most but wasn’t it all about the thoughts?

It was rather early when he pulled in to Sugar Delight's parking lot. They hadn't even turned the open light on yet. However you could smell the rich cupcake flavor from miles away. He couldn't wait to chew down specials of the day. How he missed his routine to have coffee and cupcake whilst talking - or digging - about Clara. The more he found out the more interesting she was to him.

He spotted Shallie jumping out of her SUV, clutching a gossip magazine with him on the cover. Of course! The words always travel fast - at least on the rumor side. Sebastian practiced the lines he had thought about last night. Shallie would drop the bomb any minute now and all he had to do was fix it by telling the truth.

*Easy enough,* he thought.

He turned his engine off, pushing the car door open and jumped out of it. Flowers and box of chocolate in hands.

This is it; his only chance to explain everything after two weeks of being absent from her bakery. If he wasn't successful today, he didn't know what else to do. He hoped that Stanley and Will would make it in time. Or else he would have to fight his own way out of the battle field a.k.a Clara’s Bakery.

He pushed her bakery back door open, only to find Shallie with furious eyes and Clara... Wait was that tears in the corner of her eyes? Was it possible for her to like him, too?

"I know this looks bad but I can explain!" He said, walking towards Clara. He put both things on top of the steel table. He grabbed Clara's hands which she refused to be hold.

"There is no explanation necessary. You and I aren't dating. You can go now." Her voice was eerily calm, too calm for his nerves.

"And don't ever come back because you're not welcome!" Shallie added.

"I'm not going anywhere before you hear me out..." Sebastian insisted.

Once again the door opened, this time Sebastian let out his breathe that he unknowingly held. Will smiled before he greeted everyone inside, easing the tension between him and the ladies. Stanley followed behind him with a mysterious box. Sebastian’s mind was full with Clara and her forgiveness; he couldn’t possibly think of what was inside the box.

"Ellie, darling, why don’t you sit down and have a little chat with Seb. I will take care of the icing. You know I'm an expert at this..." Will sabotaged a bag of cream cheese icing from her hand and push her towards the dining area. "And you, my dear, stay here and help me pull organize the trays of cupcakes before we open." He added towards Shallie.
"William Andrew Patterson, I really don't have anything to talk about with Sebastian. In fact, I've trays of cupcakes to decorate. So do me a favor you can take the little chat and go away from my kitchen or help me with this." Clara replied, disgruntled.

"Darling, go, now!" Clara was about to open her mouth but Will put his hands up and say "You always told me to listen to what people has to say first before judge them. Now, you do me a favor and do just that..."

"Seriously, Ellie. I will help Will to get everything ready. You go on and have a little chat." Stanley added once he managed to get rid of the box.

Defeated, Clara started her short walk to the dining area. Sebastian followed her. She stopped a few feet away from the nearest table to grab two empty cups and poured some coffee in it.

"Just sugar, thank you." Sebastian said when Clara glanced up from her pot of coffee. She added a few spoonful of sugar and dumped the spoon inside the cup before doctoring her own.

Clara could see what was coming. More lies. He really shouldn't have to waste his time on giving an explanation to her, she didn't need it. In fact, she couldn’t careless whether the story was true or not.

*Okay that was a lie… she thought.*

And curiosity got the better of her. She wanted to know more and she wanted it to be somewhat false, that she has the chance with him. Or does she?

000

"I know you read the magazine. I might have to explain the reason I stayed away from you for two weeks now..."

"Technically I did not. Shallie did. But please go straight to the point, I still have quite a lot work to do."

Sensing that this might be his only chance, Sebastian took a deep breath before starting his explanation. "First of all, I'm sorry for not showing up this past two weeks, I've been spending times..."

"With Megan, the supermodel. I get it. As I said, it's not like we're in any kind relationship anyway. No hard feelings."

"Could you please give me a minute to explain everything first before cutting my sentence?"

Sebastian raised his voice, which made Clara jump slightly. He was clearly irritated with Clara’s attitude.

She tried to hide the fear from her gaze. No one ever raised their voice to her.

"I'm sorry… But… okay. I did spend some of my time with Megan because I wanted to make sure whether it really is my child or if she lied to my face, again."

Clara stilled in her seat. But her mind and her heart worked alongside each other, calculating her next move.

"The results came out two days ago. The child isn't mine. She did pull out this lie before. Only that time she wasn't pregnant. So I had to straighten out everything first before I got back to you. I'm sorry I didn't tell you back at the wedding. I'm stupid for keeping this from you and you having to
find it out from the media." He heard Clara exhaling loudly, as if she was holding her breath before. "Can you give me another chance?"

He held his gaze, focusing only on her. Taking all of her, making sure he had her engraved to his brain and heart. Oh how much he missed her. Every time he was about to call her, he stopped himself, believing that he might not be worthy for this relationship, that he might a father to a baby.

"I wanted you to know; by giving you another chance doesn't mean I'm willing to be your girlfriend. I'm not girlfriend material anymore. Especially not yours."

"I can still change you." He grinned, full of confidence.

Clara couldn't help but to giggle. "You and your confidence!"

"Always..." His smile softened. "Is that a yes?"

"Is what a yes?"

"Are you or are you not giving me a second chance?"

"Will you stop pushing me to be your girlfriend?"

"Never..."

"Then no."

Sebastian lost his smile. Clara's face revealed nothing but lines of seriousness. It couldn't possibly be...

"But I real..." He stopped when Clara burst into laughter. He blushed. She fooled him.

No more words got exchanged but he knew he had the chance to regain her trust, which wasn't easy to earn.

“Now, that you two love birds have made up, I have something to show you.” Will interrupted.

“Could you please stop snooping?” Clara yelled before start laughing all over again.

000

What a usual morning. Everything was too usual for Clara, getting up, brewing a cup of coffee, shower, getting ready for the day ahead of her at her bakery, and other similar rituals. However, there is one particular person who would be capable of brightening her mood, day by day. She couldn’t help but notice the change in her heart. Slowly but sure part of her is taken away by the famous NYRB leading man.

Clara was organizing a rack full of cupcakes when she heard the front door bell chimes. She glanced up to the wall clock. It was three hours before her store opening and there is only one person who comes in this early from the front door. All of her employees won’t come in until an hour before the opening time. Sebastian always made sure that he has at least an hour alone with her. Not today. He came two hours early.

A hint of smile started to form on her lips anyway. “You do realize I do have coffee machine in here right?”

Sebastian grinned after being caught red handedly sneaking two cups inside. “I didn’t say its coffee.”
“What is it then?” Clara reached over for a bag of cream cheese icing.

Sebastian handed her a cup without telling its contain. Clara stopped for a second a grab it. “Let it sit for a bit. I asked for steaming hot so it could survive the drive.”

Curiously Clara peeked into the lid and saw milk foam topped her cup. What the hell! To her surprise, the creamy drink inside came from her favorite coffee shop in New Jersey. And here she is across the bridge from the store, which makes it a little over an hour drive in regular traffic. Her smile grew wider. Sebastian amazed her, again.

“Thanks. But how?”

“How did I know?”

“How could you be up so early and go on a trip to get me this? Not to mention its still hot enough. You didn’t break any rule coming here, did you?”

His cheeky grin answered her latest question. “I might have connections to make it possible.”

Clara pulled the nearest barstool. Sitting down and let the conversation flows whilst still doing her job.

Maybe she needed the company after all, someone to talk to in wee hours before store opening.

“I was just wondering if you have any plans for this Saturday?” Sebastian asked.

“Well I do.” Clara answered before pulling out a tray of chocolate chip muffins. “I have bakery to run, remember?”

Sebastian smile in relieve. “Of course. But you close at four and I have a match at six. You think you can make it there?”

A date. Well technically he would be playing in the field and she would be watching but after… who knows.

“Yes. I can make it.”

0o0

She wasn’t sure what to wear, whether it was necessary to wear dress up a little more than her normal t-shirt and jeans but she goes with a blouse and a skirt anyway. Clara took another look at her reflection on the full-body mirror inside her room.

“You look great darling, but don’t you think it’s a little much for a soccer match?” Will standing by her door suggested.

“That’s what I thought as well.” She took a glance towards the clock; she has exactly nine minutes if she wants to make it for the match.

“And you were the one who said it isn’t a date.”

“WILL! Go, now!”

Will giggled and left his post, leaving Clara frantically searching for the perfect outfit.

*Should I or should I not?*
She touched the fabric. It’s Jack’s favorite blouse. He bought it for her as their first anniversary gift. She pulled the blouse and found a dark pair of jeans. She slid right into the jeans. No time to think. She wore the blouse anyway.

0o0

Biting her bottom lips, Clara wasn’t sure on where to go or who to look for. Sebastian told her someone would come get her out front. Except there are five entrances to the stadium, and she wasn’t sure whether she went through the right one.

She checked her phone again, still no reply. He might be busy preparing for the match with his team. She knew it was a bad idea to come after all. She should have asked Will to come along. Perhaps with Stanley as well, since he knows a lot about soccer.

“I’m sorry, are you Clara?”

Startled, Clara took a step back before turning her head. A pretty brunette stood behind her with a killer smile. Gorgeous wasn’t enough to describe the lady. “Yes, I am.” Clara responded.

“Hi. I’m Payton Brooke. Sebastian’s manager. He is waiting for you inside. Come on follow me.” The lady – Payton – navigates their way through the crowd. She never thought it could be this crowded. It became obvious that New York Red Bull soccer team was pretty big. And Clara needed to open up herself, out of her usual safe-zone.

Payton stopped in front of her. “Here, wear this. Make sure you have it on at all times. The securities can be a pain sometimes.” She handed Clara a laminated card with blue lanyard. She also put a neon green bracelet on Clara’s right wrist. “Scan this bracelet at the door to get into your seating area. I will show you where it is later.”

Clara nodded, unsure on what to do. She followed Payton after they went past a metal detector and a forty-foot iron gate. Payton opened a glass door after scanning her card. “Stay close to me if you don’t want to get lost.”

Unsure, Clara followed Payton inside. It must be the arena because she notices a few people walking around with ‘crew’ and ‘sponsor’ printed on the back of their navy polo.

“Sorry.” Payton stopped for a seconds. “Where are we going?”

Payton smile politely. “Meeting Sebastian, of course. He should be at the team lounge area right now. Don’t worry, I will not send you to the changing room, unless if that’s what you want me to send you to.” She winked. Clara blushed. “I’m just joking! Come on. You have exactly fifteen minutes before he has to go.”

Examining beyond the glass separating her way and the rest of the fans, Clara noticed they all come in proper soccer fan attire. Some even have giant flags with them. The spirit they radiated somehow calmed her pounding heart.

“Here we are. I will be outside. I have a few things to take care before the match. You don’t mind to go inside yourself, do you?” Payton inquired.

“Will you sit with me later? I kinda don’t know anyone and even nothing about soccer.” Clara admitted.

“Sure I can do that. But I’m sure you know a few of them. I think Jessica is coming.”
Relieved, Clara let out a sigh. She knows Jessica. And Jenson. They were the ones who introduced her to her mystery man, Sebastian. They just didn’t know that.

“Now get it, I will see you in a bit.” Payton walked down the hallway and disappear towards another door.

Ready or not...

000

Every pair of eyes inside the lounge stopped at the door. They paused from their conversations to see who was standing there.

Jessica stood from her seat and headed to the door. “Clara! How have you been? I’m glad you made it. Sebastian told me that you’re coming but he wasn’t sure if you can make it in time or not after hearing a traffic blocking the bridge.” She took Clara’s arm and guided her back to her seat.

“I’ve been better. I didn’t know that watching a soccer match could be this overwhelming. I mean there are so many people out there. It was too chaotic to me.” Clara replied.

Jessica focused on Clara’s wrist. “Good we have the same box. You can sit with me.”

“Great! I know no one other than Payton.” She smiled.

“Hey Clara!” Jenson greeted her and sent a look towards Sebastian who then shifted from his seat nervously.

“Hey there.” She greeted back before sitting next to Jessica and Sebastian.

“Glad you made it. I thought you changed your mind.” Sebastian leaned closer to Clara.

“I made a promise.” She answered.

Sebastian introduced Clara to his teammates, who were at the same table as them. When he says she’s a good friend of his, she sensed a few meaningful smiles.

Well for now they are friends. And it would definitely change.

Soon...

000

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!