You Gotta Be...

by Frosty

Summary

Beca doesn't have much hope for this whole College thing, but life has its way to make things interesting

Notes

I know the summary is not very exciting, just a fancy way to say, this is my take of Pitch Perfect 1.

Hope you'll enjoy :)

Frosty

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

You Gotta Be…

By SoFrost

‘You gotta be bad, you gotta be bold, you gotta be wiser
You gotta be hard, you gotta be tough, you gotta be stronger
You gotta be cool, you gotta be calm, you gotta stay together
All I know, all I know, love will save the day’

Des’Ree

Part 1

From the ten minutes it took her to get out of the cab, get her belongings and walk to her dorm room Beca Mitchell had concluded that she had landed into a madhouse passing off as a University. She had been ‘jumped’ on by an over enthusiastic girl (she suspected her to be on drugs, so much euphoria could not be natural) talking a mile a minute about she didn’t know what (since she had tuned the girl’s voice out) when a car had stopped next to her and a dopey guy had ‘air-guitared’ (quite awfully so, she might add) the Kansas song blasting from the car stereo; her attention got back on the girl just in time to be handed her ‘official BU rape whistle’ (because everyone knew that it was the ultimate weapon in that situation).

The walk to her dorm had proven to be a long way downhill from that point on, stressed students, stressed parents (the combination of which gave lost people); a girl who had raided a stuffed animals store (her mind had failed to find the right adjective to qualify that); five guys sitting on long chairs giving notes to any girl walking by (officially taking the douchebaggery up to eleven), people blocking the way like bovines (why did people who needed to find their way always stopped at the most inconvenient spots such as in front of stairs or better yet in the middle of it?); crying people (apparently not everyone had cut the umbilical cord); people screaming like they had been released from prison or a mental institution.

In short, it was bedlam.

She was currently trying to communicate with her roommate. “No English?…Yes English?…just tell me where you’re at with English…”
By the time she registered that the glare of the young Asian did not mean ‘I-don’t-understand-a-word-you-say’, but rather ‘great-I’ve-been-roomed-with-a-moron’, it was too late.

“Keep your side of the room clean and we’ll be fine,” Kimmy Jin’s reply came monotonous and flat but it translated disdain just fine.

Beca was left standing in the middle of the room thinking that thanks to her outstanding social skills she had (in a matter of seconds and less than five sentences, that had to be a record) bombed the bridge of communication with her roommate.

Awesome.

She had barely finished setting up the essential (namely wiring her computer and her music work station, anything beyond that was meaningless) that her father had decided to come around, as if her day needed any help to slide up the scale of suck.

The interaction had been as unproductive as usual. She didn’t know why she was surprised, the man had stopped paying attention to anything she had to say when she was eight in favour of listening to the sound of his own voice. He acted like she wanted to be here, trying to sell her how awesome an experience this whole thing would be.

Let things be clear, she had been coerced into University; she couldn’t care less about a college degree. She was far from bad when it comes to school but it simply bored her to tears; her parents had been smart on that one though – probably sensing that she wouldn’t go to College on her own accord, they had made sure she couldn’t access her funds until she get a degree. That’s right, all the money she had ever earned was sleeping on an account she couldn’t access.

At first she had thought that it was a great thing, at least she wasn’t spending it on trifle things, but the reality of it all – it was nothing but a (very important) bargaining chip – had only dawned on her when it was too late.

Sure she could have moved to L.A (such was her original plan) and start from scratch, but the time she would spend to get on her feet and have enough money to live by would be precious time taken away from her working on her dream, and that was unacceptable. Besides, she had earn that money, it was hers; she had pulled shift after shift in burger joints, and baby-sitting gigs and lawn mowing and DJ at parties and what not; she had sweat for every single dollar, sacrificed summers, holidays, week-ends and every moment she could, to prepare her big move to L.A.; there was no way she’d leave that hard earned cash behind. No, Sir.
So here she was, stuck at Barden University for the next four years. She would have to be strong and grit her teeth as she went through the whole thing.

Four fucking years.

She wasn’t worried about the whole getting a degree thing; she was good, excellent even, on the academic level. She had been a straight A student in high school (she’d lie if she said she had broken a sweat for that) not because she enjoyed school but rather because her parents would get her anything so long as she was academically good; and let’s face it good music equipment didn’t come cheap (they owe her that much considering everything they had put her through). Also, and that was the best part of it all for her, as long as she fitted her parents’ standards as far as education went they would leave her be.

Lucky her Kimmy-Jin had provided her an exit (out of exasperation or pity, she didn’t know and frankly didn’t care, she was just grateful at this point) when she mentioned the activities fair and she all but fled the room leaving her father behind.

As they walked out of their building (although it looked more like Kimmy-Jin was running away from her and she was trying to catch up) Beca tried to smooth things over, after all they were about to share the same space for quite a long time.

“Listen about earlier, I’m sorry, I was…” she wanted to say that she had been a jerk, but in all honesty she hadn’t meant to be rude, the blank stare had just thrown her off, leading to assumptions and a great moment of solitude. “I’m sorry,” she just repeated deciding that in a way they both were at fault.

Kimmy glanced at her with an expression between exasperation and disinterest, sighed and kept walking toward the fair. She did slow down her pace so they were actually walking together, and Beca took this as a sign that her apology had been accepted.

While Beca didn’t see anything that caught her attention, Kimmy-Jin found a booth of interest in a total of two minutes (and for a second there Beca envied her roommate).

She passed stall after stall, to the sound of frat boys callings and so far the best part of it all was some eye candy peek at the water polo team representatives. Then she saw it, her sign, right next to the Quidditch team (Quidditch, seriously?!): a DJ stall.
…too bad ‘DJ’ stood for Deaf Jews and not Disk Jockey, her hope turned into disappointment at
the speed of light. On the good side she did interact with a funny Australian girl, if only for a few
seconds.

She was still looking around and was seconds away from giving up and going back to her dorm
(her father would be long gone by now), when someone thrust a flyer in her hands.

“Hi, any interest into joining out a cappella group?”

Several things came into Beca’s mind: first that flyer was lame, second ‘competitive a cappella
group’? Lamer.

“Oh right, this is like a thing now,” she stated.

The redhead mistook her reaction as enthusiasm and went on. “Oh totes, we sing covers of songs
but we do it without instruments, it’s all from our mouth.”

“Yikes,” Beca couldn’t help herself, she thought a cappella was lame but the redhead made it
sound dirty (in a bad way).

Undeterred by her reaction, the redhead went on and presented her with the groups around. Beca
zoned out, truth to be told she would have walked away but the redhead was sweet, really, with her
smile, her soft voice and her peps, and her baby blue eyes (good heaven those eyes…); the least
Beca could do was to allow her to finish her sell.

“So are you interested?” the redhead caught her attention again.

Sure Beca was into a cappella singing, it was on top of her fun-things-to-do-list right after setting
her hair on fire and gauging her eyes out. She didn’t say that though and just settled for a soft let
down.

“Sorry… it’s just…it’s pretty lame,” the big smile she was sporting was probably not the best
expression at the moment, but it was still better than laughing.
The blonde, who had stayed silent so far almost bit her head off (with a smile). The redhead tried to smooth things over but only managed to make the whole thing worse. That’s when the blonde dropped the name of some Art Centre (like that was impressive) and then called her a bitch (still with a smile).

Beca was caught off guard by that, she was amused more than anything though; there was something pathetic about getting onto high horses about something that was intrinsically risible; she had a few chosen words in retort but didn’t get to reply when the redhead stepped in again, asking (begging, more like) Beca to help them make their dream come true.

“Sorry, I don’t even sing,” Beca lied (she’d be caught playing Quidditch in broad day light before being caught dead in an *a cappella* group.) “But… it was really nice meeting you guys,” the sarcasm of her last statement was most likely lost but she didn’t care and walked away from the girls.

Finally she found her stall, the real one this time, an internship at the University radio station, at least there was a silver lining.

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Beca was pissed. She had prepared herself like crazy for her first day at the radio station; she had worked on smooth ways to mention her mixes and her desire to learn and prove herself in the booth. She was supposed to be confident and cool.

Nothing went as planned. First she got so caught up admiring the booth she didn’t see Luke, the station manager, come out of it and he clearly thought she had been admiring *him*; then she had stepped in the booth only to be shooed out, and finally dopey air guitar guy (Jesse, was his name) had finished ruining the whole thing for her.

As if that wasn’t bad enough, Jesse was a chatterbox and thought he was amusing comparing everything to a movie.

Needless to say, it all sucked. The radio station was her only chance to make this whole college thing bearable, but instead of that she was stuck stacking CDs with some idiot.

She was actually glad when the shift had ended, and since it was a clear day she decided to enjoy
the rest of it outside. One of the great things about Barden (possibly the only great thing at the moment) was the green spaces, it allowed a lot of place to isolate oneself without appearing antisocial.

Beca was bobbing her head along some mix she was making on her laptop when unexpectedly one side of her headphones was pulled from her ear. In a split second she had her left fist balled and ready to fly in the fool’s face (one had to be to touch her headphones), insults on the tip of her tongue. She did neither however when she saw who had dared bothering her.

“Wow, easy there, Rocky,” the words came with a light chortle. It was the redhead from the fair.

“Never touch the headphones,” Beca heard herself reply.

“Got it, sorry,” the smile on the redhead seemed to melt Beca’s irritation away; there was just something about this girl…

“I'm Chloe Beale,” the redhead continued. “We met at the activities fair?”

“Yeah, *a cappella* chick,” Beca nodded. “You and ‘Bitch’ girl tried to recruit me,” she added with a smirk.

“Her name’s Aubrey, she’s not a bitch, she’s my friend and I’ll ask you never to talk about her like that in my presence again,” Chloe’s voice stayed soft and her grin didn’t falter but there was no doubt that going against her warning was not an option (except for idiots, which Beca was not)

“Relax Red, I wasn’t calling her a bitch, I meant that she had dropped the b-word on me.”

“Fair point…” the redhead conceded. “She kind of malfunctions when she’s under stress.”

“I see.”

The redhead sat next to her without asking if Beca minded her company, invading her space (any closer and she’d be on Beca’s lap) “So, it would seem that I still don’t know your name,” she pointed out brightly.
Beca guessed (rightly so) that the notion of personal space was lost on the other girl; there was something about the redhead that made it hard to be harsh about it though and that was the only reason Beca refrained from biting her head off.

“I'm Beca Mitchell.”

“Mitchell, uh? Any relation with Professor Mitchell?”

“Yeah, unfortunately the man is my father,” Beca sighed before turning to her attention back to her computer, saving what she was doing.

“He’s a good teacher.”

“Everybody’s bound to be good at something eventually,” Beca retorted with unconcealed bitterness.

“What were you doing?” Chloe chose to change subject feeling that the brunette’s father wasn’t a topic she liked to discussed.

“I was messing around with some songs,” Beca shrugged, then closed the window of her musical software.

“A music junky, cool.”

“Who said I was a junky?”

“The music software is a good clue but the expensive headphones are kind of a dead giveaway. Face it, music is your poison of choice,” she winked at Beca.

“You got me, Red,” Beca smirked.
“Not yet,” the redhead replied with a mischievous smile. “Unless, I can talk you into trying out for the Bellas.”

“I still think it’s lame and I still can’t sing, so save your breath.”

“You’re underestimating my craft,” the reproach came with an amused snort.

Beca failed to hold a derisive laughter. “Your craft… it’s a cappella singing, you and your friend are taking this way too seriously.”

“You don’t get to belittle something you don’t know anything about,” Chloe chastised her lightly, her smile still firmly in place, swatting her shoulder for good measure.

How could someone smile so much? Not that Beca minded, at least not with the redhead but still…

“So there’s really no talking you into it?”

“Nope, sorry, Red,” Beca pursed her lips. “Why being so adamant about it? I’m sure there are plenty of people you could convince.”

“You’re the only one I’m interested in at the moment,” the redhead replied matter-of-factly. The statement took the little brunette aback and for the first time she didn’t find anything to say, worse, staring at the vivid blue eyes she felt something akin to a jolt of electricity running down her spine. “Anyway, I let you off the hook, for now; but be advised, I’ll charge again with better arguments,” she added with a flirtatious wink, standing up. “Bye Beca, it was nice meeting you.”

Beca couldn’t help staring at the other girl as she departed. There definitely was something about her.

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“Beca?” Graham Mitchell entered his daughter’s room (he had knocked for the form but hadn’t waited for any invitation) and found his daughter sleeping on her bed. He poked her “Beca, wake up.”
Beca was startled out of her slumber by a sharp finger in her thigh and the sound of her father’s voice. She looked over her shoulder and sure enough the man was there, invading her space. He looked around the room “Funny, this doesn’t look like you’re intro to philosophy class,” he pointed out.

Oh for Pete’s sake. She was pissed; she was here against her will, a point in itself that was bad enough without having her father breathing down her neck.

“I’m asking myself an important philosophical question: if I don’t actually go to that class, will it still suck?” she smiled sardonically.

Kimmy-Jin actually stopped working and almost turned toward Beca (the only sign that she had found her roommate’s reply funny)

Graham Mitchell, however, was not amused. “Beca, you’re here to get an education. You agreed.”

No I didn’t, you twisted my arm into agreement, Beca thought bitterly. “Yeah I know and unlike you or mom I keep my word,” she said with an even voice, she was boiling inside though.

“All I’m saying is, just because you’re in college doesn’t mean you can let your grades slip up.”

“When have I ever?” she asked with narrowed eyes. She kept repeating herself to breathe and not lose her temper, she couldn’t give the man any kind of satisfaction. “Don’t worry, I wouldn’t want to tarnish your good professor's name with bad grades.”

Graham sighed “Beca…” he paused. “Look, College is… great,” he went on. “You get to create memories here, I see it every day. You just have to give it a chance.”

Beca ignored his hard sell and went to her closet to get ready for a shower. “You’ve been here, what, a month now? Do you have any friends?”

Beca didn’t know how many times she’d have to explain to her father that she didn’t need friends, she was fine on her own: no drama, no awkward moments, no pain.
“Kimmy-Jin is my friend,” she replied just to make a point.

“Nope,” Kimmy shook her head and Beca glared at her and cursed inwardly. Sure they were not friends, and it was fine by her, but they were somewhat friendly in spite of their crappy start and her roommate must have picked up on the fact that she couldn’t stand her father; the girl just didn’t want to bother with an effort today.

“You’ve got to get out there, Beca. You’ve gotta try something.”

“I got a job at the radio station.”

“Uh that place. Yeah it’s dark and dirty and has like, those three weirdoes who work there?”

Of course anything that Beca enjoyed was put down by the man, like always. Graham Mitchell had a mould for everything and anything that didn’t fit those was not worthy. He never minded that she liked solitude, or that music was her passion, nope, it was only about what he wanted and liked.

“Well, four now,” she pointed out. She was tired of that conversation as it was so she decided to bring it to a close. “Listen, as you put it so well this is my college experience, mine, not yours, therefore I shall enjoy it the way I see fit. Now, I’d appreciate it if you quit spying on me,” she turned to her closet again.

“Oh and another thing, this is Kimmy-Jin and I’s room, you don’t get to come and go as you please. If you want to see me, you give me a call and if you knock on that door you don’t come in unless invited,” she added as an afterthought.

Graham knew better than to argue. Their relationship was so damaged that it was hard for them to have simple conversation, and the last thing he wanted was to fight. He had made many mistakes when it came to Beca, and there wasn’t a day he wished he could turn back time and change decisions he had made, but that was impossible. That being said he still wanted to mend their relationship, he wanted to be a good father (something he had failed to accomplish in the past), he wanted her to forgive him and give him a chance, and more importantly to make a little place in her life for him.

“Beca,” he was using that soft tone she hated, the one making it sound like he actually cared “All I want is for you to try and get the best College experience because I know firsthand that there’s
nothing like it. Do something…”

She was about to remind him that she was doing something by working at the station. He probably felt it so he beat her to the punch “Something that involves interaction with other students, something out of your comfort zone, with real people,” he amended.

He knew that his daughter wouldn’t follow through if only for the simple fact that he was the one asking, so even if he hated the idea, he decided to offer her something he knew would get her attention. “I want to see you really trying and if by the end of the year you’re still not happy, you can quit College and I’ll help you go to L.A. settle down, meaning getting you a place to live and even support you financially.”

“Wow, the deal was that I’d get my money,” Beca immediately got defensive sensing a trap.

“And you will,” Graham assured her. “I’m just saying that I’ll provide nonetheless.”

She looked at him suspiciously. This was too good to be true, she just knew it, but the man did look serious. “Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously, but I really need to see you try, no half assed attempt,” he warned her. “This is College, join in,” he added before leaving. He hoped that she’d find something good enough to stay, that she’d meet people who would make her open up and see everything she’d miss out on if she didn’t give this a shot.

Beca took a deep cleansing breath, talking to her father was always draining. She was trying to process what he had said, analysing every angle just so she was sure there was no loopholes in his offer. She hated to admit it, but that was a golden deal, one year instead of four, she’d be stupid to refuse. That being said, the simple idea to play by the man’s rules made her skin crawl.

Well, she’d have to grit her teeth through it all.

She sighed and took the rest of her things, heading to the showers.
Better arguments.

In all fairness Beca had been warned, Red had said she would charge again, in those exact terms no less.

Here’s the thing about warnings though, they were supposed to help one prepare. Admittedly, Beca had taken the ‘threat’ lightly, because really save from her oblivious way when it came to personal boundaries Chloe did strike her as inoffensive.

Now, even though she had a good imagination, Beca could have never foreseen Red’s charge (then again one had to be insane to foresee something like this). The worst part was probably the fact that Beca unknowingly brought the whole thing onto herself (not like she could have known that singing in her shower was like painting a target on her butt).

There she was mortified, vulnerable, scared and… a bit horny (this was not a cool mix of emotions)

Mortified because she was naked (but she was in a shower so it was supposed to be a normal thing. What was a little less normal was the naked redhead standing in front of her with a smile… well the fact that the redhead had come uninvited was the ‘not so normal’ part of the situation).

Vulnerable, she was naked for goodness sake!

Scared, because she had obviously overlooked the fact that Chloe was probably a psycho, not the ‘always-perky-it’s-cute-and-creepy-at-the-same-time’ kind, no, the full on ‘will-murder-you-with-a-smile-on-my-face’ kind. There was a fine line between ignoring the notion of personal space and walking into someone’s shower when not invited like it was a perfectly sane thing to do.

Horny well… she was only human and Chloe (mental stability aside) was gorgeous, Beca could give her that.

“How high does your belt go?”

Beca’s mind was going a thousand miles a second (how high…her belt… what? Seriously!?)
Chloe seemed completely unfazed by the situation and kept on about auditioning for the Bellas and Prince and the size of his butt, at which point Beca dropped one of the items she had at her disposal to cover (…well almost nothing) of course her first reaction had been to bend down and reach for it (not the brightest idea of the moment all things considered); now she knew that Chloe’s hair colour was natural (not that she had wished to have that answer).

Oh and yeah; she now also knew Chloe’s… ‘lady jam’.

Beca’s brain was seconds away from complete meltdown; between those new information to process, the fact that she was still naked and wishing for a hole to open up under her feet so she could crawl into it to safety, and Chloe’s nakedness and enthusiasm… the whole thing was too much.

On the bright side Beca was convinced that this couldn’t possibly get any weirder.

“Can you sing it for me?”

Nope, wrong, it could.

Evidently she didn’t get any more success with her protests than when this whole experience started, but at least Beca tried, before admitting defeat and indulging the redhead’s request.

Then it happened.

A moment.

Beca had always known that music was a high like no other, but nothing could have prepared her for the rush she felt hearing both her and Red’s voice mingling perfectly. She was blown away by the moment, losing herself in the sound and those baby blue eyes, so much so that she forgot she was naked.

Alright, she was ready to admit that she might have judged *a capella* hastily, it did sound great.

Beca couldn’t help the smile tugging at the corners of her lips, at least until her eyes drifted down
on Chloe’s body again, this time when she averted her eyes it was more because she didn’t want to come across like a pervert (she wasn’t immune to hotness, and hot, Red certainly was).

“Oh yeah, I’m pretty confident about all this,” Chloe stated the obvious motioning her body.

This time Beca couldn’t help taking another peek at the gorgeous girl in front of her. “You should be,” she confirmed.

Just when the brunette was about to file that whole thing as ‘funny after all’, a very naked guy appeared out of thin air (really?! Was she the only one to understand the concept of modesty?). “You have a lovely voice,” he declared with an appreciating smirk before turning his attention to Chloe.

Beca, quickly adding two and two, was split between disbelief and amusement; she would have said that things couldn’t go any weirder but she reconsidered having that thought at all because it seemed like the international boarding pass for the Twilight Zone.

“See you at auditions,” Chloe called out before walking away.

Audition?

What the hell?

Ah crap.

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What the hell am I doing here? Beca kept thinking over and over again.

She didn’t want to be part of an a capella group. It was competitive a cappella for goodness sake! How low had she sunk to resort to that? Plus, being part of a group meant she had to be social, and the fact that it would be an all girl group made it even less appealing.
So, yeah, her voice mingled well with Chloe’s and the girl did stir her curiosity but still…

Think about L.A…. Think about L.A. Beca repeated to herself, her father said that if he saw her really try this whole college thing he’d help her make her move to L.A. after the year. One year instead of four, that was a hell of a deal, one too good to pass up.

So here she was, about to sign up for something she had no interest in, something that would take precious time from her, time she could spend working on her music and developing her skills.

Think about L.A…. Think about L.A….

Damn it!

The brunette took a steady breath and walked on the backstage of the auditorium. Several persons were there, one of which was the funny Australian girl from the fair, Beca stayed afar still trying to convince herself that this was a necessary evil.

“Fuck…” she muttered to herself when one after the other the people there sang Since You’ve Been Gone by Kelly Clarkson. Of course there was a song to prepare, Chloe hadn’t mentioned anything about that.

Thinking about it, Chloe might have told her that, but her brain probably blocked everything saved from their state of undress at the time.

Brilliant.

Way to start at a disadvantage.

She turned her heels ready to get the hell out but for some unknown reason the redhead popped in her head; she couldn’t say why but the idea of letting the redhead down felt utterly wrong. Just as the guy who was in charge of the auditions was wrapping it up she made herself visible. It didn’t take long for her eyes to fall on Chloe and as soon as the redhead spotted her she lit up the room with her smile.
Beca ignored the sudden flutter in her stomach and just advanced on stage. “I didn’t know we had to prepare that song,” she admitted.

“Oh, it’s okay,” Chloe immediately assured her. “Sing whatever you like.”

Beca figured that Chloe was already in her corner, she had heard her first hand, all she had to do was to convince Blondie, the one person that she had mocked openly just a few days ago.

Yeah, Karma was a bitch.

The brunette opted for something fun, beating the rhythm on a yellow cup, a couple of times she locked eyes with Chloe and that thing they shared in the shower was still reflecting in those baby blue.

When her performance was over the redhead’s smile broadened (if that was possible), Blondie was clearly unconvinced though. Oh well, at least she had tried.

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A week went by without any word from the audition, Beca figured that despite winning Chloe over she had failed to reach Blondie’s standard. She was bothered if she was honest not so much because she had some deep unavowed wish to be part of an *a cappella* group but it was the notion of failing she despised, even more so when it was something that involved music.

She was on her way to her dorm when she spotted Chloe at the entrance of her building. “Hey,” Red smiled.

“Hey,” Beca greeted her nonchalantly. The last she had seen the redhead was at the audition, oddly enough she felt glad to see her again.

“Don’t panic,” Chloe quickly added with a wink.

A flat ‘what’ was all Beca could reply, she was not given the time to make sense of that statement or register the Cheshire cat grin on Chloe’s lips as her head was covered by a cloth mere seconds
She protested and resisted on pure instinct but a steady and soft hand rested on her arm. “Beca, try to relax, trust me,” the redhead tried to calm her.

Ten minutes later, when the cloth was lifted from her head, Beca found herself inside a heavily candle-lit auditorium (the perfect setting for a goat sacrifice which at this point wouldn’t have surprised her if it happened); she was asked to drink ‘blood’ from passed sisters (not really, thanks goodness, but just the thought of it... eww), and swore allegiance under the threat of vocal cords ripping wolves (oh yeah, everything was perfectly normal).

All the groups were now gathered in the atrium, beer was flowing as well as laughter and enthusiasm. Beca took everything in warily.

“I don’t know what I’m doing here,” she declared honestly to Fat Amy. Beca was glad the funny Australian girl was in the group as well, she was at least a familiar face.

“I’m just living the dream. I can’t believe they let my sexy fat ass in,” the blonde quipped which only made Beca smirked, something told her that things wouldn’t ever be boring with the Aussie around. “Alright, time to party!” the Aussie walked away to get herself a beer.

“Becaw! Becaw!”

“Wow…” she snorted upon seeing Jesse.

“Becaw!” Jesse called her again sounding like a… bird?

Jesse was kind of annoying, sweet and funny, but annoying, and since they were stuck several hours a day stacking CDs at the radio station Beca was starting to get used to his presence.

“Do my eyes deceive me or are you a Barden Bella?” he asked with an amused grin. “Face it, you’re one of those a cappella girls, I’m one of the a cappella boys and we’re going to have aca-children, it’s inevitable,” he nodded as if he was giving her some wise truth.
“Wow, you’re really drunk right now,” Beca actually chortled.

“I’m not drunk, you’re just blurry,” he countered.

“Yeah, could you pass a sobriety test?” the brunette asked pushing him.

“Yup, see how I come right back?” he rocked on the balls of his feet and Beca pushed him again. “Aaaand I come right back,” he blinked drowsily. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“Sure.”

“You need to get on this level,” he added before going to get the offered drink.

The young DJ was still chuckling at Jesse when out of nowhere, she was pulled by her wrists. She found herself almost (and quite literally) nose to nose with Chloe.

“I’m really glad that I met you,” the redhead pulled her closer, so close in fact that Beca’s heart started to pound frantically in her chest. “I think that we’re gonna be really fast friends,” Chloe smiled.

For a few seconds Beca was lost in those blue eyes, and those lips were so close to hers…

“Yeah?” Beca recovered quickly and played it cool. “Well you saw me naked, so…” she winked with a smirk.

Chloe didn’t step away, she just stayed were she was. “I told you I’d convince you.”

“That, you did.”

“I’m going to get myself a drink,” the redhead announced, finally stepping away. “This ginger needs her jiggle juice,” she shook her ass, slapped it and snapped her fingers as she walked away. “See you later.”
Beca couldn’t help smiling (and she briefly wondered if Chloe’s smile was contagious). Whether she was aware of it or not, the redhead was casting a powerful spell and Beca wasn’t immune to it.

The night went on, Beca felt a bit like a fish out of the water. She was a solitary kind of person and she enjoyed it, people made her feel uncomfortable because they were too unpredictable and had too many expectations and were not always genuine and generally looked at her like she had an eye in the middle of her forehead or something.

She did enjoy the music and let go enough to move a bit (bobbing her head and swaying slightly from side to side couldn’t be referred to as ‘dancing’). Eventually she had considered sneaking away, but every time she was held back by Chloe (the girl had a spider sense, seriously).

In fact the redhead had stayed at her side almost all evening, only leaving when her date would look for her, or to have a little word with everyone (always asking Beca to wait for her to be back), she made sure to introduce Beca to people or to involve her into the conversations going on.

When everyone was calling it a night, Chloe followed Beca after bidding her date goodbye.

“So… did you have fun?” the redhead queried.

“Unexpectedly yeah…” Beca admitted.

“Good.”

They walked silently for a few minutes when Chloe suddenly grabbed her hand to stir her away from the path leading to her dorm. “What are you doing?”

“Come on, the night is still young,” Red winked, all but dragging Beca along to an unknown destination.

Chloe led them to a diner opened 24/7 called The Lighthouse, ordered a chocolate cake (assuring Beca that she would love it). They talked (Chloe talked, Beca listened and found out that she enjoyed listening to the redhead) for almost two hours, before Chloe called it a night for good this time.
When she finally lied down on her bed, Beca thought that things could be worse all things considered.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Howdy everyone, thank you so much for the kudos and feedback, it is much appreciated.

This is about that point where I start taking liberties with the characters and a bit with the plot. Just roll with it. Anyway, on with Part 2.

Enjoy,
Frosty ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part 2

The first rehearsal was… interesting to say the least. Two girls were lost to the wolves (may their vocal cords rest in peace); their songs set list was from last century (even worse, they were rehashing an old routine); and to top it off Aubrey, their captain was uptight, subject to serious vomit eruption when stressed (that was one visual Beca could have done without), and above all dictatorial (that last trait caused friction with Beca from the get go).

They had ran too many laps around the bleachers (Beca felt cheated on that one, nobody had mentioned anything about cardio!), they had to walk around in heels, oh and the choreography… was about as boring as the songs they were performing. By the end of practice she was spent from all the running, irritated (scratched that, she was pissed) at Aubrey, and seriously wondering what the hell she was doing there.

The only positive point was that the other girls were kind of fun in a quirky way. They had seen pictures of the Bellas passed and compared to them, they were a bunch of ragtag misfits at best, but at least those girls were real and fun, Beca mused.

“Beca, wait up!”

The brunette was just about to put her headphones over her ears when Chloe called out to her. The redhead strutted to get on Beca’s level then hooked her arm with Beca’s like it was a natural gesture between them. Once again Beca surprised herself with not snapping at the other girl, she did give her a ‘what the hell look’ but the redhead didn’t register it, or simply didn’t care.
“So, what did you think of your first Bella rehearsal?” Red asked, that smile of hers still in place (did she ever stop smiling? Beca wondered).

“Let’s see, I thought this was going to be fun and I was spot on, I mean cardio, heels, fly attendant choreography, you guys know how to give a girl a good time.” Beca commented with a smirk. “And Aubrey is so cool, I think her and I hit it off well,” she added with a nod.

“Are you always that sarcastic?” Chloe chortled, not the least offended by the brunette’s comments.

“I don’t know Red, do you always disregard people’s personal space?” Beca replied with a question which only made Chloe smile a little more. “Oh and by the way, in my opinion you should consider changing our group’s name. Don’t get me wrong, Barden Bella sounds nice but The Dead Songs Society is way more fitting.”

The redhead laughed before bumping her shoulder with Beca’s, then she dragged her back to the diner they had shared a chocolate cake the night prior, talking excitedly all the way through, and even though Beca had originally intended to go back to her dorm and work on her music to make up for the time wasted in rehearsal she had to admit that she didn’t mind so much spending two hours in company of the redhead.

xxxxx

It was one hell of a boring afternoon. Beca was sitting on her bed reading the needed material for a future paper, or at least she was trying but Kimmy-Jin apparently made it her mission to drive her insane. The Asian girl was also sitting on her bed, her back against her wall facing Beca, reading some mathematics textbook but most of all she was munching on green peas. Every time she reached into the small packet, the aluminium would crumple noisily, then to round the whole ritual the sound of crunched peas would echo in the room like explosive bullets. Beca was on the verge of sanity, she gave herself another ten seconds before giving into the urge to kill her roommate.

Beca sighed deeply and glared at Kimmy as she had just reached out in to the packet. The glare was powerful enough for Kimmy to feel it on her and look up. They stared at one another for several seconds. Kimmy looked at the wasabi-covered pea in her hand then back at Beca, then without a word she raised her hand as if she was about to throw the small treat at the little brunette (she figured that her roommate’s annoyance might be due to the fact that she was hungry – she had noticed that for some reason Beca always seemed to be hungry). As if on cue Beca straightened up and caught the pea in her mouth (Kimmy did have a good aim).
Beca was surprised by the burning sensation on her tongue and almost choke but recovered quickly. She looked up and saw Kimmy smirking, she just narrowed her eyes at her which clearly meant ‘shut up’. Not offended one bit Kimmy took another pea and prepared it for launch.

Textbooks were set aside as they simply kept sharing the treats in the same fashion for the next fifteen minutes. In fact they only stopped when there was a knock on their door. They both looked at the entrance of their room, then back at each other. Kimmy-Jin shrugged as if to say that she wasn’t expecting anyone, neither was Beca for all she knew but the petite brunette relented and stood up to find who was on the other side.

“Hey there,” Chloe greeted her with one of her dazzling smiles.

“Hey.”

“There’s a party tonight, so I came to get you.”

“It’s only six,” Beca only pointed out, knowing that she wasn’t given the option not to go to the party anyway.

“I know, but we’re pre-gaming with the other Bellas.”

“Pre-gaming?”

“You know, getting in the party mood before it starts,” Chloe stated matter-of-factly.

“I need a few minutes,” Beca announced, inviting the other girl. “Chloe this is…”

“Kimmy Jin!” the redhead stated with enthusiasm. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your roommate?”

“I uh…” Beca started but Chloe continued.

“I’m so glad to meet you again, you made a big impression at the workshop the other day,” the
redhead turned to Beca as if hearing her silent question. “We both have mathematics class with Professor Wilkinson, and he loves to make workshops that gather students of every year.”

Beca returned her attention to her bed sorting out her notes and textbooks, she hurried up, anxious about the interaction between the redhead and Kimmy Jin. Her roommate wasn’t bad but Chloe was… well Chloe.

When Beca finished Chloe was still gushing about their teacher and his workshops while Kimmy-Jin was looking stunned.

“Oh my… this is perfect!” Chloe exclaimed, jumping with excitation. “Every week on Thursday, a few of us have a little workshop of our own, there are even four post-grads with us. We debate, we have math games and we even take a crack at different theorems, there are challenges, it’s just awesome! You have to come!” the redhead could barely contain her excitation.

“Is that your phone?” Chloe asked pointing Kimmy’s phone. “May I?”

Kimmy was still trying to process what was happening (interacting with a hyper Chloe felt much like being hit by a truck or a freight train), she let the redhead take her phone and put her number in.

“There, you have my number and now I have yours. I’ll text you the details for Thursday. I’m so excited!”

Before Chloe could add anything her phone came to life. “I got to take that. It was great meeting you again Kimmy. Beca, I’ll wait for you at the entrance,” she winked and left.

Beca turned to Kimmy-Jin who was staring at the door, she blinked then looked at Beca as if to say ‘what the hell?’.

“She cornered me in my shower to coerce me into auditioning for her a cappella group,” Beca stated as if it explained everything.

Kimmy looked at her and just blinked again. “Fine, you won,” she finally said.
“It gets better,” Beca offered then started to walk to the door then stopped. “No, that’s a lie, it doesn’t.”

She had been hanging around with Chloe for a little while and Chloe still managed to knock the wind out of her most of the time. “You just learn to go with it.”

The horror look on Kimmy-Jin almost made her crack a smile. “Perkiness better not be contagious, or I’ll kill you,” the Korean threatened.

Beca chuckled then left her room to join Chloe who was waiting for her at the entrance of the building.

xxxxx

Days went by and Beca slowly got used to Chloe’s constant presence; it was simple, Beca could hardly remember a day when she hadn’t spent time with the redhead. She also accepted the permanent invasion of her personal space. She tried to explain the concept to Chloe and the other girl would back off for a grand total of two minutes straight before being touchy again; Beca figured that she might as well get used to it since trying to keep Chloe out of her personal space was like trying to wipe the spots off of a leopard: a lost cause.

Beca had always enjoyed her ‘me and my music’ time, but she found herself hanging around with the other Bellas quite a lot (save for Aubrey, it was a small miracle that they didn’t kill one another at every rehearsal).

She had had no intention to interact with the other girls outside of practice, but they just happened to cross paths a lot when getting out of classes (Beca did go to one or two when she felt in the mood), sharing some classes, at the cafeteria, on the quad, or Beca just happened to be around when one of them would propose a gathering.

Truth to be told it was unsettling to interact with that many people regularly, but the girls were fun, really. Beca didn’t participate much to the conversations, but she never felt excluded either. What Beca liked the most was that none of them was crazy (well, the jury was still out concerning Fat Amy). Okay, maybe crazy wasn’t the right word.

The thing was that Beca had expected a lot from an all girl group: jealousy, competition, constant bitching, drama and mass hysteria. None of her expectations were met, the girls were chilled, not
into drama at all, always in a good mood, trying to enjoy themselves and laugh as much as possible. They all had their quirks and over all were very different from one another, yet they got along just fine or maybe that was precisely why they got along so well.

Right now, Beca was in her dorm, alone, working on one of her mixes. Kimmy was out so it meant that she could work without her headphones when she needed a melody with her clavier, sing ideas out loud or just mess around with sounds until inspiration struck.

The only upside of the Bella business (let’s face it even now Beca still felt that singing songs from last century to awful choreography sucked hard) was that Beca was on a constant state of musical frustration. It was an upside because it fuelled her with a new energy, an eagerness to find musical release through her own creation. In fact, she only made it through the practices because her mind was relentlessly firing ideas, it kept her up and alert.

Aubrey had been particularly tough today so here she was venting out with rhythms and melodies, without having to mind someone else’s comfort. Today her room was a sanctuary, it had been all afternoon and would be for the entire night.

It was the second time that she had the room to herself this week. First there had been math Thursday or whatever the thing Chloe had invited (coerced?) Kimmy-Jin to attend was. Even though Beca was reluctant to admit it she had been a bit nervous about the whole thing. She knew Kimmy had gone because Chloe had stopped by to pick her up. Chloe was a handful not in a bad way but she had rather stellar personality and Kimmy… well she was closer to Beca’s temper and perhaps a bit more closed off.

She needn’t have worried though because it was Chloe and the redhead could literally talk a chicken out of its feathers and onto an oven, the whole thing with a smile on her face. Kimmy didn’t give any details but they did have a little exchanged that let Beca know that the Asian girl had had a good time and enjoyed Chloe’s company.

The young DJ was in the midst of bobbing her head vigorously to some beat she had just put together when the door opened. Within seconds she had saved her worked and cut the whole thing (she had practiced that combination of moves so many times she could do it in her sleep). There was something wrong about having people listening to her stuff while she was in the middle of the creative process, it was even worst when people heard her thing when she hadn’t invited them to do so in the first place.

She found herself staring at Kimmy and two other people she didn’t know – a girl and a guy.
Shit.

She mentally cursed. She tried to remember if her roommate had mentioned anything about coming back with company, but concluded that if Kimmy had said something she had not paid attention.

This sucked because she had been in her groove and now she’d have to leave. It’s not that Kimmy-Jin would chase her (it was her room as well after all) but she couldn’t be in her work zone with so many people around. Talk about having the rug pulled from under your feet.

The silence was just about to be awkward when Beca recovered from her initial surprise. “Hi,” she said as enthusiastically as she could. “I’m going to give you guys space,” she announced unnecessarily.

As she was standing to gather her belongings the boy came to life. The next thing she knew, he was in her personal space his hands finding her console. The protest was on the tip of her tongue (protocol dictated that she’d issue a warning before letting her fist fly in the intruder’s face) but then he spoke.

“Reloop DJ controller…” he whistled. “Sweet,” he smiled in appreciation. “This is the second generation right?” he briefly glanced at her before returning his attention to the black and red panel. “I have the Hercules 4 MX, it’s not bad,” he shrugged. “Now, I have my eyes on the Pioneer Pro DDJ-SR… it’s just… ugh just thinking about it makes my head spin. It has…”

The boy was speaking Beca’s language and as he launched into a detailed description of the wonderful features of the DJ console, she was about to swoon.

She was a music junky who drooled in front of music equipment. It was dorky and she didn’t give a damn.

“We’re going to get pizzas,” the flat tone of Kimmy-Jin’s voice cut through the boy’s raving rant.

Right. That was her cue.

“What topping do you want?” the Asian added.
Beca wasn’t offended to be politely chased out of the room. She hadn’t meant to linger, really, in fact she would have left two minutes ago if it hadn’t been for the boy.

“I’m talking to you,” Kimmy persisted.

Beca frown when the boy didn’t respond, then looked at Kimmy-Jin who was staring back at her.

Oh…

Two possibilities, either Kimmy didn’t want to be rude in which case Beca should come up with something and make her exit or she was actually inviting her to stay. The thing was, they were not friends. They were cordial at best. Friends? No. It didn’t help that the Asian girl’s facial expressions were still a mystery to Beca (most of the time changes if they ever occurred were so subtle that they could only be seen via a microscope, seriously)

Beca was aware that the longer her silence lasted the more she looked like an idiot. She had just been caught off guard by the whole thing. She didn’t want to upset her roommate who certainly hadn’t planned on running into her.

A light chuckle erupted from the boy’s throat. “It’s not rocket science.”

Right.

Beca shook her head to jumpstart her brain. “Uh… I’ll have a Hawaiian.”

She decided that it would have been rude to make an excuse to leave. She would apologize later if need be.

“I’m Dae-Jung by the way,” boy extended his right fist in her direction. Beca looked at him in surprise, still trying to wrap her mind around the current situation. “DJ’s fine,” he smirks.

She couldn’t help the lopsided grin at that one. “Fitting,” she bumped her fist into his.
“Call it destiny,” he winked.

“I’m Cho.”

Beca’s attention shifted to the girl standing next to Kimmy-Jin, she gave her a small wave. She was as expressive as Kimmy but Beca was certain to see a very subtle grin on the girl’s lips.

“Beca,” she replied glancing alternatively at the two new acquaintances.

“Nice meeting you,” Cho nodded.

“We’ll be back in a few,” Kimmy announced then turned around and left with Cho.

“So what we heard coming in sounded good, could I hear some more?” DJ called back her attention onto him.

“Meh, it’s rough stuff,” she shrugged.

“Protective, I see. Fine by me,” he chortled. “What’s your creative poison?”

“I like to mash songs together,” she answered then with a few clicks she played one of her old mixes.

“Wait, do you mind if I listen through my headphones?”

She shook her head and noticed only now the big headphones around his neck (amazing how she had managed to miss them in the first place)

DJ listened with rapt attention, and Beca watched him anxiously. It was always nerve wrecking to have someone’s opinion on her music. He was frowning moving his head slowly to the sound, but his expression stayed serious like he was listening to some philosophy lecture.
He pushed his headphones back around his neck when the song ended and turned to Beca. “Okay, the mashing is flawless,” he beamed. “I’d have deepened the bass and add some reverb at the climax to make it explode a little more. I loved the…”

He started deconstructing her work and talk about how he would have done it. Beca was baffled to say the least. She had never met anyone like DJ, someone as passionate as she was about music and who could talk about it on a technical level.

“…dude, you have to come with me the next time I’m going to my cousin’s. He lives 40 minutes from here and he made a studio out of his basement, live instruments, crazy equipment, the perfect place to let your creativity go wild.”

The boy barely breathed when he spoke, Beca followed easily though (she had had some training with Chloe). “He’s the reason I chose Barden. My parents want me to have a degree, but there was no way I’d put music on hold for four years, no sir.”

“You sound like me,” Beca smirked.

“I plan to take the music industry by storm, producing the new sound that will revolution our time.”

“That’s also my plan.”

“Awesome,” he beamed. “Alright, let’s challenge those skills of yours.”

And so their evening began. She and DJ kept raving about music, they talked about their favourite sounds and concerts they had been to or their influences. He challenged her to mash songs that were so diametrically different that she couldn’t see any mash up happening (‘that’s the best way to learn how to think outside the box’ DJ asserted).

When Kimmy and Cho came back they ate, DJ and her kept on with music while the girls talked, then they played some video games all together. DJ and Cho left around 2 a.m., the night had been unexpectedly good for Beca and she was glad to have met the other two.
Beca and Kimmy-Jin were getting ready for bed and the short brunette decided to apologize to her roommate. Sure the night had been cool but she knew that she had probably ruined Kimmy’s original plans.

“Listen… I didn’t mean to intrude, I’m sorry if I messed up your plans.”

Neither of them was looking at the other but that was fine, most of their conversations (well, interaction was a better word really) was done in an offhanded way. “Thanks for letting me stay.”

The Asian laid down on her bed, hands crossed and resting on her stomach, her stare fixed on the ceiling. Beca didn’t take offence of the lack of reaction. At least she had given a genuine apology so their cohabitation should stay on cordial ground.

Beca got into bed as well then turn off her light, plunging them in darkness.

“It was fun.” The three words were spoken as flatly as anything that ever came out of her roommate’s mouth.

“Yeah,” Beca agreed.

She was about to put on her headphones (she had always enjoyed twenty minutes of music before sleeping) when Kimmy spoke again.

“I had fun.”

This time Beca grinned a bit at the admission. “Me too.”

They didn’t wish the other goodnight but they both knew that they didn’t have anything else to add.

On the first day they had met Beca had thought that they would have a difficult time cohabiting. Mainly because she had very poor social skills and they had started on the wrong foot (courtesy of those said skills or lack thereof), but as it turned out, things went easy between them. They were both women of few words (they could literally share the same space all day without exchanging a
word). They stayed out of each other’s business. They both were very thoughtful regarding the other’s comfort (Beca kept the noise to a minimum when she was working on her music, Kimmy-Jin switched to paper when she worked late and Beca was trying to sleep – her machine gun like typing style was unbearable at night).

Ultimately they were great roommates. Sure the night had been fun, but it didn’t change anything between them. No that was a lie. Things had changed tacitly now instead of being cordial strangers, they were friendly acquaintances.

It wasn’t a bad thing, Beca thought. It wasn’t bad at all.

xxxxx


Beca let out a breath. Aubrey was particularly rough today, grilling them like this was a freaking military boot camp.

Why did they have to wear heels? Seriously this was torture. And those stupid songs…

Beca had to constantly remind herself of the end game in order to go through every iteration of Turn the beat around or other lame song.

“No offence Becs, but you sounded kind of awful,” Cynthia-Rose quietly stated.

“That’s because I’m not singing, I’m hollering in pain. Stupid heels,” Beca winced.

“You did sound like a dingo in agony,” Fat Amy pointed out with a smile.

“I’m too in pain to be offended by that.”

“She’s in a killer mood,” Stacie stated referring to Aubrey.
Beca snorted. “When has she not been in a killer mood?”

Lilly’s lips moved and they all tried to guess what the Asian girl said but failed although one or two words had made it to hearing level.

They were rehearsing for some event at a frat house in two days. It was like getting pigs ready for the slaughterhouse (because this event was about to be a slaughter, let’s face it). Since it was a static performance (or rather more static than the usual one) they had a different selection of songs from the one they were preparing for the ACCA competition.

It didn’t matter what they sung, really because there was a complete lack of unity in the group. They sung together as in singing the same song at the same time, but other than that they could have been in different rooms for all it mattered.

Beca felt cheated, because when Chloe had cornered her in the showers, something had happened. There was harmony and just… a freaking spark (the redhead had lured her with excitement and now Beca was just stuck in the land of boredom, talk about a trap).

There was no harmony in the group, it was like everyone was fumbling around trying to figure out what they were supposed to do, but at no point did everyone’s voice converge to find a common ground.

That upcoming gig was nothing but a disaster about to happen. They were not ready, they all knew it. It was obvious, but Aubrey, rather than calling it preferred to wrap herself in the thick coat of denial.

If possible the end of rehearsal was worse than the beginning. The evening rehearsal turned out to be just as grilling and the next day, Aubrey just took her dictatorship up to eleven.

It was hell. So when Beca was finally back to her dorm for the night she was happy. She decided to work on mixes so she’d distract herself from the upcoming humiliation she was about to suffer the next day.

She didn’t pay attention to time, the only time she had lifted her eyes from her screen was when she caught Kimmy-Jin coming in from her peripheral vision, she had greeted her roommate with a nod then return to her mix.
She knew she was about to work all night, after the last two days this was a needed breather. She was craving good music, meaning music that excited her. She needed to create something like she needed to breathe, it was as simple as that.

She was listening to the first part of what she had done (one of DJ’s challenges) when her focus was broken by her phone vibrating in her pocket.

Out of reflex she looked at the time. It was almost 1 a.m., she had completely lost track of time, it didn’t help that Kimmy was apparently also pulling an all-nighter (usually she could guess that it was late because her roommate would turn her light off).

Checking the message she was astounded to find it was from Chloe.

‘In the hall of your building, on my way to The Lighthouse, could use some company. C’

She didn’t have time to respond before the next text came.

‘If you’re not around in 10 I’ll assume you’re already in Zzzland.’

Beca chuckled. Once again the next message came before she could do anything.

‘…or that you don’t want to go… which would be totally normal considering the hour.’

The young brunette didn’t make it to the door before the next text.

‘…or option 3, you want to take a break from seeing my face. Not offended at all, if it’s the case.’

Beca didn’t bother replying, she just grabbed her hoodie and exited the room. She took the stairs as fast as she could without actually running, and found the redhead in the midst of sending yet another text.
“My average texting per ten seconds is way below subpar, sorry,” she smirked at the redhead.

“Right,” Chloe blushed a bit. “I realized that my impulse had probably not been the best as seconds ticked by…” she trailed off and shook her head. “I didn’t wake you up did I?”

“Nah, I was mixing.”

“I hope I didn’t disturb Kimmy.”

“Nope, she’s working.”

“Oh, okay then,” the redhead nodded.

Beca frowned at the other girl but didn't say anything as she followed the lead when Chloe turned her heels to head out.

Something was off.

Thinking about it the brunette realized that she had noticed the oddness earlier this week. She had noticed little moments when Chloe would zone out or look preoccupied. She had put it on the account of pressure for the upcoming gig, and the fact that the Bellas weren’t doing so great. Also not being a people person, she didn’t want to seem nosey so she hadn’t asked anything.

Now that they were alone though, she felt a bit awkward. As inept as she was when it came to social interaction, even she knew that she probably should try to reach out to the redhead now that they were alone. That being said the question regarding how to achieve that simple task remained unanswered.

There were only three other customers in the café, two students quizzing one another (undoubtedly trying to cram as many information as they could for some upcoming exam) and another one reading in the far corner of the place (probably just making insomnia as profitable as could be).

They sat at a table near the bay window, Chloe asked for a hot cocoa and Beca followed.
“I have yet to hear any mix of yours,” Chloe mused out loud, her voice lacking the usual enthusiasm.

“Soon maybe.”

“What are you working on?”

“A challenge from DJ.”

After a few seconds of silence Beca could see that Chloe had no intention to say anything more, mostly because she seemed lost in her own thoughts. The brunette not knowing how to reach out – and sensing the need for distraction – decided to fill the silence the best she could, first elaborating on DJ’s identity, then on the challenges, then on music in general.

Chloe looked at her while she spoke, making little remarks here and there, but Beca could tell that her mind was elsewhere.

After ten minutes Beca ran out of things to say to distract the redhead so they both shared silence. She felt like a crappy friend (were they even friends? How did one know when they were in the friend zone? She obviously had neglected to learn the social cues and protocols... oh well, she’d have to wing it)

“So... do you want to talk about the reason why you were wandering around campus well past midnight?” Beca decided that a blunt approach was the way to go.

Chloe stared at her a few seconds. Those piercing blue eyes were barely concealing anguish, but Beca pinpointed the moment it was decided that she wasn’t trusted enough for a confidence. It stung.

“I couldn’t sleep,” the redhead shrugged.

Beca took the rejection for what it was and her defence mechanisms shifted into gears immediately. The wall she had partially let down ever since meeting the redhead went back up at the speed of light.
She was of the opinion to leave it at that. She had offered to listen, but Chloe didn’t want to talk, at least not to her. Beca had never been one to push, she never liked minding people’s business (that saved a lot of drama).

She figured they’d finish their drink in silence and call it a night, nothing wrong about that.

That was that.

Only it wasn’t.

The thing was, Chloe looked down. To Beca, ‘down’ and ‘Chloe’ was a bad word association, so against her better judgement she spoke again.

“You smile a lot, like, that’s your thing,” she began, not sure of what she wanted to say or how to make her point. “I admit that I believed you were on acid or some other drugs for a while because I’ve never met someone as bubbly and radiating positivity as yourself. Don’t get me wrong I don’t think it’s bad, it’s just… surprising because in your case it’s genuine” now she was ranting.

Her left hand started to play absentmindedly with one of her piercings. “… it’s scary at times but hey, that’s part of your charm too… I thought it was annoying that you’d always be so happy about everything, but I came to like it…” she paused and tried to gather her thought. “The counterpart of it all being that when you’re down it feels like the whole world was spinning backward… I guess” Chloe’s expression was hard and lacking in warmth. Now, that felt utterly wrong.

“Well, sorry to disappoint but I’m not always on ‘happy’ mode,” the senior replied flatly “As a matter of fact it’s not my setting by default,” she snorted with disbelief. “Here’s a secret, sometimes I’m moody, and brace yourself for that one, I also get angry. Shocking, I know, but true.”

The sharp words made Beca feel stupid. She wasn’t dumb, of course she knew there was more to Chloe than perkiness. “I know that… I wasn’t…” Beca trailed off with a sigh because she was not good at expressing herself.

This was the very reason why she liked solitude, because at least everything was always crystal
clear between her and herself.

“It’s just…” she tried again. “You’ve always been a little bubble of happiness… around me at least…”

“Well that’s how you make me feel, what can I say,” Chloe replied casually like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Beca mentally stumbled backward before falling on her ass. The words had come like a swift punch, their meaning lost in the shock of it all. She stared at the redhead blankly, experiencing a major brain fart.

When Chloe realized her slip and Beca’s inability to process it, she decided to take pity on the brunette and opt for a change of topic. “Did you just call me little?” she asked. “Seriously, have you measured yourself recently?”

Beca finally recovered from her mental glitch and rolled her eyes, she tilted her head and narrowed her eyes. “Aren’t you hilarious, smarty pants?”

Once again silence settled between them.

Chloe had wanted to talk to Beca, thinking that voicing her fears, her apprehensions would make things better. Aubrey was the first person she’d turn to under normal circumstances, but the blonde was way too wound up because of their gig the next day and if Chloe was honest her best friend’s nervous energy was exhausting.

Now that she was with the brunette though, she couldn’t bring herself to talk. She didn’t want to bother the other girl. Things happened, that was life, no need to self pity or to whine about it.

She just needed the distraction, or rather her Beca fix. It was selfish, but she was serious when she said the brunette made her bubbly. Sure, she was a naturally high spirited person, but the brunette gave her a boost. She had been pulled by the gravitational force that was Beca Mitchell since that day they met at the fair. There had been something about the brunette that had stirred her interest immediately, but more deeply than that she had felt the urge to get to know her.

The redhead couldn’t deny that she was also attracted to Beca. She soon would be forced to admit
that she had a soft spot for tough as nail, dark and broody personalities. Case in point, she had harboured feelings for her blonde best friend during their two first years of college.

Aubrey, to her eternal credit, had given Chloe a real shot. There had been six dates, some hands holding and there even had been kisses and four making out sessions, but the blonde hadn’t felt the same romantic feelings (sure she loved Chloe unconditionally but it was purely platonic). They had left things at that, if anything they had grown closer afterward.

Chloe had known Aubrey since they were eight but it wasn’t until they started to share the same roof that she had developed a crush for the blonde. Aubrey had a complex personality, she was hard to get to know, but underneath that rough, demanding, over exigent, tight up exterior, there was a soft, caring, generous, funny girl begging to be let loose. There was a vulnerable girl who needed support but couldn’t bear the idea to ask for it.

This is why Chloe knew that beneath her armour Beca was a softy. In that aspect the brunette and Aubrey were very much alike.

Now, she wouldn’t say that she had a full on crush for Beca, but she wouldn’t deny that she was tiptoeing the line.

She scrutinized the brunette in front of her, and she felt a twinge of guilt for being defensive when Beca tried to reach out and made her best to provide what she had been looking for in the first place, distraction.

“It’s a matter of putting things in perspective, and things aren’t bad for me, I have no reason not to be happy or enjoy my life the way it is,” she explained.

Beca frowned, but understanding quickly dawned on her. She finally had the secret of the redhead’s usual good spirits. “What changed today?” she dared to ask.

Chloe looked through the window. “Fear is one of those emotions I don’t handle well,” she stated pensively.

Damn, Beca thought, Chloe was really not going to make it easy for her. Normally she would be an opened book, but right now she was a bundle of cryptic answers.
Beca was lost about what they were talking about, so she pushed further “What are you afraid of?”

“Losing,” she knew it was purely in her mind but Chloe could swear that she felt her throat tightening painfully.

Beca was dumbfounded. She had known that Chloe took the whole *a cappella* competition seriously, but to be so anguished about it was something she didn’t understand. Sure she hated losing, but she’d survive if the Bellas failed.

It seemed to Beca that the redhead was ironically unable to keep a good sense of perspective about the whole thing.

She didn’t want to offend Chloe though (after all who was she to judge?), so she opted for a neutral response. “Isn’t everybody?”

“I suppose so,” Chloe shrugged, looking at the brunette again.

She didn’t feel like talking anymore, and since she could sense more questions coming she yawned.

“Morpheus is calling,” Beca pointed out the obvious.

“Yeah.”

Beca looked at her watch and saw that it was a little after 2 a.m.. The off campus apartment Chloe shared with Aubrey was on the opposite side of campus and it would be forty minutes to take Chloe back (there was no way she’d let the redhead walk alone) and return to her dorm.

This talking thing had drained the energy she had possessed when she was working on her mixes, also she wanted to go to bed, so she made a bold decision. “We’ll be cramped but you’re welcome in my bed.”

For the first time since they had met in the hall of her dorm, Chloe’s face lit up a bit with amusement. “You know, I like to think that chivalry is not dead,” at Beca’s frown she continued.
“I’m a lady, therefore I like to be properly wooed before being propositioned.”

Beca quickly cleared her throat, trying to ignore the heat rapidly rising to her cheeks. Chloe clearly enjoyed making her embarrassed. “Shut up, let’s go,” Beca countered with as much detachment as she could.

When they arrived back at her dorm, Kimmy’s light was out, but the young Asian had had the thoughtfulness to keep Beca’s light on (she had rightly assumed that her roommate would be back soon).

As she got rid of her hoodie, Beca only now took note of the fact that Chloe had come to her dressed with pyjama bottom and a long sleeves shirt. She smirked at the absurdity of it all, then her smirk turned into a grin because it was typically Chloe, not caring about what people thought for a second.

Within the next thirty seconds they were both lying down in the dark. Beca’s bed wasn’t that big, yet there was space between them. Beca couldn’t explain her next move, but she did it on instinct as if a small voice had told her that it was what the redhead needed.

She tried to spoon Chloe into a hug, but it was awkward to say the least. She didn’t know if it was the lack of experience with that kind of things (why had she initiate this again?) or the angles or whatever, the whole thing was just not right.

“Wow… you are genuinely bad at this,” Chloe stated flatly. “You’re one terrible cuddle buddy.”

Beca tried to break the contact altogether, but it proved to be more difficult that it looked. “I’m trying here, but if you’re going to criticise my technique…” she protested with a pout (that was stupid because the redhead couldn’t see it, firstly because it was dark and secondly because she had her back to the brunette).

“Here’s a tip, I’m not some explosive device,” Chloe tried to conceal her amusement (she would never say it out loud, because she knew she’d earn the ire of the brunette, but she found Beca quite adorable right now). She was touched that the brunette had initiated the hug when she knew that physical contact didn’t come as naturally to the younger girl as they did for her.

“You know what? There’s the floor as a second option if her highness isn’t satisfied,” Beca replied petulantly.
Chloe sighed and turned around so that she was facing the other girl, she hadn’t meant to upset Beca. On the contrary she had figured that humour might help the girl relax.

She rested a hand on Beca’s cheek, effectively ending the other girl’s agitation. “All I’m saying is ‘relax’, you’d think I was radioactive or something,” she explained softly, all amusement gone.

“Do shut up or I’ll murder you both in your sleep,” Kimmy-Jin’s monotone voice seemed ominous in the dark room.

“Oh Kimmy, you always say the nicest things,” Beca didn’t bother with diplomacy. She was tired, and her efforts to be nice were not appreciated at their full value. To top it off the redhead kept confusing her. No, that wasn’t true, she just kept doing and saying things that Beca couldn’t process properly which frustrated her. Needless to say her mood was plummeting down quickly.

“Actually I’ll only murder you, midget,” Kimmy didn’t back down.

“The hell? She’s the one fussing around!” Beca protested.

“She’s not my roommate, she has immunity,” Kimmy clarified.

It was amazing to think that this exchange was probably the closest thing to a conversation two roommates had had ever since they knew one another (that evening they had spend together with Cho and DJ was included in that count).

“And who are you calling a midget? You barely have inches on…”

Though clearly amused by the little exchange Chloe felt it was her duty to step in to put an end to it all. She delivered a soft, brief kiss on Beca’s mouth. The effect was immediate. Beca was stunned into silence.

“Sorry, Kimmy,” Chloe apologised. “We’ll be quiet now.”
Kimmy didn’t respond but the fact that the statement had come from the redhead satisfied her.

“Here, turn over, let me show you how it’s done, amateur,” Chloe smirked and waited patiently for Beca to comply.

Chloe’s moves were smooth and precise so within seconds Beca was the little spoon in a perfectly fitting embrace. The redhead didn’t let go or loosen her hold even though she could feel the girl in her arms tensed. Beca slowly relaxed and the last thing she remembered is a soft kiss on the crook of her neck then she fell asleep.

She briefly woke up at the crack of dawn when she felt movements, she turned around but before she could process anything, Chloe was crouching in front of her, thanking her for the night and kissing her forehead before disappearing.

They were booed of stage after three lines of Turn the Beat around chorus.

Beca was pissed. She knew the gig would be bad but that was beyond humiliating. As if that hadn’t been bad enough, they had also been insulted by the frat boys hosting the gig.

Aubrey was surprised (…and she was the only one) and furious because they wouldn’t have funds for their travel expenses; then while she was in the midst of telling them how much they had sucked, Chloe revealed that she had vocal nodules.

That was about the moment Beca had felt dumb.

Of course the redhead hadn’t been scared of losing the a cappella competition or having a bad gig. What an idiot had she been the previous night to even think that the older girl was that vapid. She could grasp the gravity of the situation by the fact that Aubrey’s concerned had overridden her irritation instantly.

They had parted with the promise that future rehearsals were going to be tougher. The two seniors went their ways and Cynthia-Rose offered a get together to lift their spirits up (once they had changed out of their ridiculous outfits of course)
And so there Beca was in Cynthia-Rose’s dorm listening to the other girls having a laugh. She wasn’t paying much attention to the new tale of Fat Amy though because her mind hadn’t left Chloe since the redhead’s announcement.

She felt like she should call or something, see how the other girl was doing. She also felt irrationally angry that the senior hadn’t told her about the medical tests the previous night.

Beca excused herself and went in a corner. She picked her phone and typed: ‘You could have told me’ but then deleted the message immediately. That was petty, Chloe didn't have to tell her anything.

She sighed and gave it another go: ‘I’d have gone with you this morning had you asked.’

Once again she deleted the message, just like the previous one it sounded like a reproach to the redhead. Chloe was probably already feeling bad without her adding to it.

Beca was about to give up (this was the very reason why she didn't hang with people, she was terrible at providing comfort or whatever).

Do you want to go to the Lighthouse?

She sent the text before she could change her mind. It was a simple invitation to distraction, if Chloe wanted to talk she'd be there and if not, they'd just share a hot beverage.

The answer came quickly. ‘Can't right now. Bree needs cheer up time after today's fiasco’

Beca snorted. If Aubrey had taken her head out of her ass there wouldn't have been any fiasco to begin with. And really, shouldn't Aubrey cheer Chloe up right now? Something about her supposed best friend having vocal nodules and the possibility for her never to sing again?

Whatever. Beca didn't care. She didn't care if her attempts to reach out were rejected.
Right?

If that's what she got for trying then…

Her phone came to life again. 'Can we go later?'

…maybe she just needed to be patient and learn how this friendship thing worked.

Beca went back to her dorm about two hours later, by eleven she was still working absentmindedly on mix when her phone vibrated. 'Are you still up?'.

The brunette grinned but didn't bother with a reply, she just saved her work and grabbed her hoodie before exiting the room.

Just before she reached the entrance hall of her building she slowed down and took a deep breath. There was no reason to be over excited, this was nothing they hadn't done before.

"No need to send another text, I'm here," she said to announce her presence to Chloe.

"Sorry, it took so long," Chloe grinned sheepishly.

"It's okay," Beca shrugged. It's not like she had been holding her breath or anything, waiting for signs of life from the redhead. Sure she had checked her phone regularly all afternoon but that was only because she didn't always feel her phone vibrating and she didn't want to miss a text when Chloe was in a time of need.

They stared at each other for a few seconds then Chloe just turned around and lead them away to the Lighthouse. There they shared hot chocolate and unlike the previous night they talked (well as per usual Chloe talked while Beca listened).

Two hours later they were back at Beca's dorm hall. The brunette felt bold and decided to go with the flow before over thinking things.
“They say practice makes it better, I know I suck at it but you’re welcome to criticise my cuddling all night long if you want since Kimmy’s out.”

“You sure could use the practice,” Chloe smirked.

And with that they went back to Beca’s room. Within five minutes they were lying down and settled.

“So I know this is your area of expertise but shouldn’t I be the big spoon seeing as you’re the one who had the roughest day?”

“You’re not ready to be the big spoon,” the redhead stated wisely.

“Hope it has nothing to do with my size because if it does I’ll never be ready… just so we’re clear,” Beca wisecracked.

“Very funny smarty pants.”

“Alright, alright,” Beca sighed. “Enlighten me then, O wise one.”

“It’s about providing the feeling of safety and comfort and affection, it’s about making the rest of the world disappear. In order to give all that you need to know what it’s like to receive it.”

“You make it sound like a serious business.”

“It is a serious business,” Chloe chided. “Being the big spoon is no joke, it’s a big responsibility. I’m convinced that 80 per cent of the world’s problems could be solved with hugs and cuddles.”

“Now you just sound crazy.”

“That’s because you don’t appreciate the true value of hugs yet.”
“Fine, I’ll give you the benefice of the doubt, you’re the expert after all.”

“You got that right,” Chloe grinned in the dark.

There was a long silence. Chloe was lost in thoughts, Beca was trying to adjust with physical closeness. When she felt the petite brunette finally relax in her embrace several minutes later Chloe spoke again.

“I trust you, Beca,” her voice was just above a whisper. “Like I said, I don’t handle fear well, and it was overwhelming last night, that’s why I didn’t say anything. I don’t want you to think I didn’t say anything because I don’t trust you.”

“I wouldn’t blame you if you didn’t.” Beca shrugged. “You barely know me if at all.”

“Well, I do trust you.”

Beca felt something in her chest flutter as well as confusion. She was at a loss as to how someone could be so easily trustful, even more with her. She didn’t feel worthy of such a blind trust, but she knew she’d never give a reason to Chloe to think that her trust is misplaced.

“I never know the right thing to do or say… so I wouldn’t have been of much help if you had told me,” Beca confessed.

“Yet you were.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“How?”

There was a pause then Beca felt a soft kiss on her shoulder. “You were there.”
A comfortable silence settled between them for several minutes before Beca spoke again. "This is actually nice."

Chloe chortled. "Of course, I'm a professional cuddler."

"Is it me or the bed shrunk? Oh no… that's just your head taking more space."

"Hush, smarty pants."

Beca leaned a bit more against Chloe and dared to cover the arm Chloe had wrapped around her waist with her own. She didn't know if that how every cuddle felt or if it was just something about the redhead, but she knew she enjoyed it greatly which was quite odd because she really was not one to be fond of physical contact of any kind.

"Chloe?"

"Hmmm?" the redhead was one the edge of sleep.

"Goodnight," Beca whispered.

"'night," Chloe replied with yet another kiss on the brunette's shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I condone pineapple on pizza (I know, I know, I'm a deviant… sue me :P)

Thanks for reading
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Howdy everyone! Thank you very much for the reviews and the feedback and your kind words. Here’s the new update. Once again I’m taking liberties and digressing a bit but just trust me and roll with it.

Enjoy,
Frosty ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part 3

"...I like the way you work it... No diggity... I got to bag it up..."

There it was.

The spark.

That spark she had glimpsed in the shower with Chloe, it was finally catching up with the entire group. They were in synch, for the first time they were a group. It was truly perfect and powerful enough to be communicative because the next thing Beca noticed was everyone else joining in.

She had instantly loved the concept of the riff off, thinking quickly on their feet and battling it out with the other groups. However what she had liked the most was the idea that finally, finally, they were loose from Aubrey's musical dictatorship.

They were brilliant, even more they were brilliant together.

"...we out!" Beca finished with style and she was ecstatic at their performance.

...at least until Justin decided that they were cut off for some dubious reason. Beca was pissed but she decided to focus on the most important part of the past few minutes, they had found their voices. Her mind was working overtime just thinking about all the potential Aubrey was adamant
not to tap into.

Of course Aubrey only focused on the loss and from the look of it she blamed Beca for it.

Lucky for Beca though, the rest of the Bellas had seen the glimpse of greatness, Beca could satisfy herself with that for now.

xxxxx

"So…" Jesse let the word linger.

They were stacking CDs at the station while Luke was in the booth. This was getting old and fast. Beca wouldn't mind the CD staking so much if she'd get an hour or two in the booth. All she wanted was to have fun with music, and get some air play.

If she could get some of her mixes on the air she could be acknowledged and if people liked it then she could slowly start to make a name for herself. WBUJ was not a big radio station, but people listened to it outside of College ground so if she could have a go at the booth she could gain a certain momentum.

It was frustrating to be so close from one goal and yet so far. She had been handing Luke mixes she had worked on since day one. She wasn't stupid, she knew he was probably just stacking her flash drives somewhere but she wasn't about to give up. Eventually he'll get curious enough to listen to one.

Until that happened, she was… cleaning up after the guy.

"…Do you want to go out, say tomorrow?" Jesse finally let out.

"Are you asking me out on a date?" Beca demanded a clarification.

"Yes, indeed."
"Ah, well, no can't do then."

"Why not?"

"The wolves dude, the wolves," she replied with a smirk.

"Oh come on, that oath isn't serious."

"Trust me it is, two Bellas served as example after hood night," she faked a shudder. "That was a traumatic day."

Jesse sighed. He had immediately liked the brunette. It had been like a movie really, an original introduction (i.e. him singing and playing air guitar for her) then a chance encounter (what were the odds of them signing up for the same activity?) and like a cherry on top they were in a friendly competition through *a capella*.

"No one would have to know," Jesse shrugged.

Beca mentally cursed, she wished she didn't have to spell it out. "Listen Jesse, you're sweet and even though you are annoying as hell most of the time you're kind of fun to hang out with. That being said, I don't see you that way so this is not going to happen."

"I get that you can't visualise it but all I'm asking is for one chance."

"Oh please, do not be that guy who can't take no for an answer," the short brunette sighed.

Jesse knew they were meant to be. She was *the* girl and he was the sweet goofy guy that was overlooked for three quarters of the movie before the girl understood that he was the one. He knew he only had to work for it.

Jesse chuckled. "All I'm saying is, until you give me a chance you can't know for sure that we're not meant to be. I accept the rebuff, but that doesn't mean I'll stop trying to win you over with my charm," he smirked. "I believe in perseverance."
"As you wish, but be advised that when I run out of patience because you keep pushing, and trust me I don't have much patience for this in store, I'll punch you in the face," Beca warned seriously.

"I take my chances," Jesse smirked.

xxxxx

"Drink up, bitches!" Amy exclaimed.

The Bellas – well minus Aubrey and Chloe, were at a party at Stacie's sorority. The house was packed, there was good music, Amy was taking down frat boy after frat boy at some drinking game, so Beca was having a lot of fun.

It still surprised her how she had been more opened socially, she liked hanging with the Bellas there was no denying that, sure they didn't share much but they shared enough.

Beca wasn't a huge fan of parties (something about having too many drunk people in one place) but she made an effort now and then. Plus Stacie had insisted for her to come (the petite brunette had escaped the past couple of parties) arguing that they needed to unwind after their week (Aubrey had worn them out as a punishment for the Riff Off). Beca had agreed and now that she was there she was enjoying the whole thing.

"Our girl's on fire," Cynthia–Rose cheered.

"I'm getting drunk just watching her drink… I swear I can hear her liver screaming for help," Denise chuckled.

"The crazy part is that she never gets a hang over the next day," Ashley pointed out.

"That my friend is because she usually sweats it all out by morning," Beca smirked as they watched Amy dragged one of the frat boys to the dancing area.
"The girl is bad," Cynthia–Rose started.

"The girl is dangerous!" Beca finished before they wiggled their fingers together and snapped them.

It was their inside joke, after hanging out regularly they found that, party or not, Amy could charm any frat boy, actually any boy, within forty minutes (or your money back).

"Come on, let's dance!"

Beca's protest fell into deaf ears as Cynthia–Rose pushed her to the crowd in front of them. The good thing was that even though she was a terrible dancer the other Bellas belonged on a dance floor, therefore she gladly stayed in their shadow swaying a bit here and there in time with the music.

After twenty minutes Beca took a break from 'dancing' and went to get herself something to drink then she started wandering around the big sorority house.

"Beca!"

She turned just in time to see Stacie before the taller girl hooked an arm around her shoulders. "I'm so glad you're here!"

"So am I. You girls sure know how to throw a party," Beca smiled.

"Of course we do, we're a sorority we have a reputation to uphold. So, does that mean you'll come more often?"

"I'm not making any promises, but I might try a bit more," Beca shrugged.

"Trying is good for now," Stacie squeezed the little brunette a bit. "Ooh, I think Hunter found its new prey," Stacie's attention shifted to some guy walking into the main room.
"I'll never get used to hearing that," Beca chortled thinking about Stacie referring to her privates as a dude, it was amusing and disturbing in equal measure.

"Alright, if you stay all night long know that there's a room for you to sleep, the other Bellas stayed over the other times so they can show you. If you need anything don't hesitate to ask."

"Thanks."

"Are you good?"

"Sure, go chase."

"Aye, aye capt'n!" Stacie mock saluted with a wink.

"Stay safe!" Beca quickly added before the other brunette was out of earshot.

"Always," Stacie winked at her then zoomed in on her target.

Beca decided to explore the house further and found herself near the kitchen. She spotted Benji – Jesse's roommate, talking to some girls. She was about to turn away but stopped when the girls started to make fun of Benji and not in a nice way either. This quickly turned into a humiliation for the young man and Beca saw red at the spectacle.

She went in and made sure to be on the path of the girls when they tried to exit the kitchen and 'accidentally' spilled her beer on the girl who had made the rudest comments.

"What the…" the girl pursed her lips not to curse. "What is this? The spastics' night out?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't…" Beca pretended to be contrite.

"Just… ugh… whatever," the girl stormed out followed closely by her friends.
Beca's smirk disappeared when she noticed Benji's back as he made his escape. The brunette quickly followed and saw him enter another room hastily. She sighed, after a few seconds of hesitation she went after him.

The room turned out to be a giant closet. Beca was a bit taken aback but then focused on the young man sitting cross-legged on the floor. She sat down in the same fashion next to him. "Cool hide out," she declared looking at all the shoes and vests.

"Yeah…although I'm not hiding, just so you know."

"No?" Beca frowned.

"I'm just waiting for my super power to kick in."

"Your super power… which is?" she dragged the last word.

"Invisibility…I've just made a fool of myself and so I'm waiting 40 minutes by then I'll be invisible again, perfect to make my getaway with some dignity."

"Right… that is not happening," Beca said firmly. "Did you have a jacket with you?"

"No."

"Good. Do me a favour and suck on your lips."

"Excuse me?"

"Just do it and trust me. Stand up."

Beca waited for Benji to do as told then mimicked him, at the same time she ruffled his hair and undid the top four buttons of his shirt. She untucked one hem of his shirt from his pants and messed with his collar. "Alright, you can stop. Let's see…"
Benji looked at her expectantly not understanding what was going on. "Dishevelled appearance, swollen lips, rumpled clothes… hmm… hold your breath as long as you can," Beca listed out loud to check the details.

When Benji finally breathed again he was flustered. "Perfect, now give me your hand," Beca intertwined their fingers. "Walk ahead of me and head straight to the main entrance. You want to be in a rush, not as in 'I'm trying to flee a crime scene' but more as in 'I can't wait to get somewhere private with you'.'

"Wait, you want people to think that…"

"And he finally caught on," Beca smirked. “Come on that look won't last. Whatever happens don't let go of my hand. Go."

Benji nodded and opened the closet door. They had to make their way through dancing people in order to reach the main door. Beca thought that was good as they earned a few stares. She stopped their progression when she spotted Amy and Cynthia–Rose.

Perfect.

She gave a 'play along' nod to Benji as she approached the other girls.

"Hey guys, I'm out," she announced, she almost had to shout to be heard over the music.

Both girls quickly made the maths between Benji's appearance and their linked hands. They looked surprised but before either of them could say something Beca was startled when Benji boldly delivered a light kiss on her neck. "Come on," he quickly added.

"Got to go, it's magic time," Beca wiggled her eyebrows suggestively.

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do," Amy smiled.
"That's an awfully short list," Beca joked with a smirk before signalling to Benji to go on.

They left the house and they were several blocks away when Beca broke the silence. "Alright, I think we can stop holding hands now."

"Sorry about the…" Benji motioned his neck.

"That was actually inspired, very much in character. Anyway… I'm going back to mine, you're welcome to hang around if you want to," she shrugged.

"You don't mind?"

"Wouldn't offer if I did."

"Yeah, cool"

Beca looked at him in disbelief then chortled when an unholy growl erupted from his stomach. "Guess we're going to find drink and food first."

Chloe arrived at Stacie's sorority when the party was already in full swing. She had meant to be there earlier but she had a paper to finish and she knew herself well enough to know that she wouldn't have any motivation to do it the day after the party.

She quickly scanned the areas and spotted most of the other girls. She got herself something to drink, and enjoyed the dance floor for a song or two then after looking all around she was surprised not to see Beca, certain that the brunette had said she would be there.

She decided to ask another Bella, if Beca had ditched the party she'd go and drag her to it.

"Hey Amy, have you seen Beca?"
"You just missed her, she and magic boy left to find a more private venue to hook up, like fifteen minutes ago," the blonde smiled.

"Magic boy?"

"Benji," Amy specified.

“Oh…” the redhead was taken aback but if she was honest with herself (and she never lied, not even to herself) surprise wasn’t the only thing she felt. The other feelings were unpleasant so she put them aside not wanting to ruin her evening.

She was glad when she spotted Tom, her occasional hook up, at least he would be a good distraction for the night.

xxxxx

“How about this? Slow it down to make it deeper,” Benji suggested. “Okay, a little more, mark four beats of silence, then drop the melody back in but with all the layers.”

Beca had feared that she and Benji wouldn’t really find anything to say to one another and that this evening would be nothing more than awkward silence around pizzas. She had hung out with him a bit since Jesse insisted to make her movie education, but they’d barely speak to each other when he was around. She needn’t have to worry though because once he was over his apparently pathological shyness, Benji was quite fun and more importantly he turned out to be as into music as she was.

This was one of the reasons she loved music so much, it was a universal language. She didn’t know how they had come to create a piece together, but they had been back to her dorm for almost three hours and she was ecstatic at the creative flow they were caught into.

She had never really worked with someone before, preferring to do her thing on her own to avoid useless clashes and also because she was protective of her stuff. That being said the past hours let her know that she liked the process, it was different but just as stimulating.
“I don’t know, I’d like to rework the melody here…” Benji mused.

“Yeah, something’s off.”

“But it’s hard to say what,” he agreed.

“Let’s take a break, sometimes distance is needed.”

Benji moved onto the bed and sat cross-legged on it. Beca joined on him adopting the same position.

“This night is awesome,” he nodded with a smile.

“It is.”

“I’ve never hung out with one of the cool kids before, so thank you.”

“You think I’m cool?” Beca frowned with amusement. She had been labelled a lot of things but cool wasn’t one of them.


“Sorry, I’m what?”

“Bembi, B-M-B-E: Beca Mitchell Badass Extraordinaire.”

She couldn’t help the boisterous laughter that escaped her throat. “Excellent,” she definitely liked that title, she held her fist and he bumped his against it.

Once she calmed down he became serious again. "Thank you, for what you did at the party."
"Meh, don't sweat it."

"Nah, I really appreciate it, I owe you one, big time."

"I have a question," Beca stated.

"Ask away."

"Why the magic?"

"My siblings thought it would help me grow confident," the young man shrugged.

"Does it?"

"Kind of… "

Benji held his left hand palm up then palm down, made a fist and turned it up and when he opened it a big coin was in it. Beca smirked. Benji grabbed the coin and started rolling it smoothly over his knuckles in a back and forth movement.

"I like how I can hold someone's attention," he kept on his eyes laser focused on Beca while the petite brunette was mesmerised by the movement of the coin. When it made three full back and forth, Benji held it prisoner of his fist again, he then blew on his closed hand, this time when he opened it the coin wasn't there anymore.

Beca frowned in confusion, then Benji held his right hand near Beca's ear, she heard a tiny chime and there he was holding the coin in front of her again.

She wasn't going to lie, she was impressed. "Dude, that was slick!"

"Thanks," a tinge of pink appeared on his cheeks.
"Why not doing that trick back there?"

"It’s one thing to do it in front of someone I know as opposed to someone looking at me like I was mentally deficient. No offence, but your specie senses fear and inexperience, I'm oozing with both."

Beca rolled her eyes. "Those girls were assholes, you actually dodged a bullet if you want my opinion."

"I'm a pro at dodging bullets," he joked derisively. "I've never even kissed a girl Beca, and I think I'm not as lame as I used to be," he chuckled humourlessly. "At this rate, I don't have much hope for the future."

Beca stared at him a long time then made up her mind. She took a deep breath and sat a little closer. "Don't ever stop the magic, it's your thing and quite frankly it makes you original. You just have to work on a smooth way to bring it up."

"I take note of that."

There was a long silence, during which Beca pondered a few things.

"You're a sweet guy, Benji," she told him seriously, then cleared her throat. "I don't want you to get the wrong idea, but I really need you to know that this is not pity."

He frowned but realisation dawned on him a nanosecond before her lips connected with his. It was soft and like the track they had made he felt his heart stopped, marked a beat then pumping again furiously. She gently sucked on his bottom lip then pulled back.

She watched as he took a few second to realise the contact was broken and slowly opened his eyes again. "There… now you've kissed a girl," she informed him she smirked nervously.

"Wow…” he nodded slowly. "This is officially the best night of my life."
"You're not going to be weird about this, are you?" she asked cautiously.

He grinned sweetly and shook his head. "Not a chance, don't worry," he sighed with a nervous chuckle. "Wow."

"Like I said, you've kissed a girl and... uh... a few minutes from now you'll have made out with one as well."

He looked at her, eyebrows touching his hairline, disbelief painted all over his face. Beca snorted with amusement and just hooked a finger on the collar of his shirt to bring him closer, initiating the second kiss.

Almost forty minutes went by until Beca gently pushed Benji away with a hand on his chest. They were kind of lying down, one of his hands was on her waist while the other had been playing with her hair. For someone inexperienced Benji was either a natural or a quick study, in any case it had been enjoyable for both parties.

Benji took a moment to focus again then stared at Beca. He brushed one bang of hair behind her ear, his touch feather like. He allowed himself three last kisses, one on her neck, one behind her left ear and one on her lips. He then shifted his position to sit back up. He took notice of his rumpled clothes, but didn't care, he just focused on what he was feeling, holding onto the sensations as long as he could, carving those moments in his mind and heart.

Beca put herself in a sitting position again and scratched the back of her neck dreading the awkwardness, hoping that things wouldn't backfire on her.

"You know, maybe we should lay out a voice on the track, what do you think?" he asked as if they had never stopped talking about their creation.

She grinned for she knew right here and then that they both were on the same wavelength and that things would be alright. "It could work," she pouted a bit. "Oh that makes me think," she snapped her fingers. "I need to introduce you to DJ, he's a friend of Kimmy-Jin and he does make crazy mixes, anyway... his cousin has a live studio not far from here, we're going there next week end, you should tag along that way we could record your voice for the track."

"Sounds like fun."
"I'll ask him if he's okay with that."

"Cool."

The petite brunette got up and returned to the chair in front of the computer. Benji moved on the bed to be closer to the screen.

"You know, I still can't believe you didn't make the cut for the Trebles," she reflected out of the blue.

"Bumper thinks I'm a weirdo."

"Bumper Allen is a douche bag."

Benji laughed and shook his head "Let's work on that melody again."

They kept at it until it was almost 5 a.m. then crashed on her bed. When her phone made some awful tune a little after 7 a.m. to wake her up Beca did not feel ready to get out of bed.

Benji groaned, but didn't stir. A some point during their sleep (it was a nap as far as Beca was concerned) he had tossed an arm around her waist and Beca found herself thinking that this wasn't as pleasant as Chloe's embrace, granted Benji and her hadn't had any intention to snuggle but still.

"Benji," she elbowed him gently."Sorry dude, but I have to get ready, I have a shift at the station," she mumbled not opening her eyes.

"hmm 'kay…" he tried to wake up.

They both functioned with radars, the crude light of morning making their eyes sting. It took Benji three attempts to manage putting his shoes on but he did succeed eventually. He yawned and stood up. "I had a great time," he told her with a voice thick with sleep.

Beca made an effort to keep her eyes open, she sighed. "Yeah, me too."
"Good luck at the station."

"Thanks, dude. Have a nice day."

They fist bumped then Benji left. Beca got up not to give into the song of the sirens (well the song of her bed) and prepare herself to go for a shower hoping that it would wake her up enough to make it to the station.

Boy the day was going to be long.

xxxxx

"What is it?" Beca asked with a deep sigh.

She had been silently stacking CDs and vinyl discs for the past three hours all the while trying not to nosedive into one crate. During all that time she had felt Jesse's insistent stare on her but she was too tired to converse so she had let him stewed in whatever his mind was cooking. Now however she was starting to get annoyed.

"Nothing."

"Then quit staring, it's getting on my nerves."

The young man exhaled. "It's just…" he trailed off.

"Ugh… Jesse, I've barely slept so if you have something to say, come out and say it, stop beating around the bush."

"Alright," he held his hands in surrender. “Rumour has it that you and Benji hooked up last night,” he said watching at the brunette closely to gauge her reaction.
“And?” she simply asked while sorting out the pile of CDs she had in hand, her expression never changing.

Jesse waited but continued when he understood that the brunette wouldn’t expend. “So you don’t mind? The rumour, I mean,” he moved to another crate to face the brunette who was just focused on CD piles. “Not that it’s a big deal or anything… I don’t even know where that came from. Mind you, Benji came back to crash in his bed barely twenty minutes before I left to come here and… you’ve just said that you had barely slept and… wait are you saying that it’s true?”

Beca glanced at him briefly. “I’m not saying anything, you’re having a monologue,” she pointed out before moving to a shelf to put back the CDs on it.

“I don’t buy it.”

Beca yawned for the umpteenth time, she wouldn’t take back her night for anything but she really wished she had had more time to sleep.

“Did you hear me?”

She tried focusing on Jesse again. Of course he had chosen today to be a pain in her side. “Uh?” she asked with a sigh.

“I don’t buy it,” he repeated. “You and Benji. I just don’t see it happening.”

“I’m sorry, is there a point to this babbling?” she frowned.

“You’re not going to tell me, are you?”

“Tell you what?”

“Whether or not you hooked up with Benji,” he didn’t understand why she was playing dense. He thought about two things, either it was true and she was embarrassed about it or she was pissed at the rumour but refused to show it. “I’m just curious… do you want me to find out who made the rumour? I doubt it was Benji but…”
Beca ran out of patience. “What is it to you whether or not Benji and I hooked up?”

“Seriously?” Jesse swore he could feel his eyes trying to escape their sockets. “You hooked up with Benji?” his jaw worked on air for a few second. “Nah, I don’t believe you, come on this you and… Benji, I mean… it’s… Benji.”

“Again, I’ve barely slept so my tolerance threshold for douchebaggery is extremely low,” she muttered tiredly.


It was just wrong. No, not wrong, but it went against the plot. The idea was that he was the sweet nice guy in the background, not Benji, because if Benji was that guy, then he was just a random secondary character and that sucked.

“Wow… and now you sound like an asshole, a conceited one at that, congratulations.”

She scoffed because Jesse was annoying before but to have him basically saying that he was better than Benji really irked her. "Isn't there an unwritten code somewhere saying that you're not supposed to throw your friend under a bus or something?” she wondered out loud.

“Yeah, okay, you're right that came out wrong, sorry. It's just that…”

"It's just that what I do or don't do on my time and whom I’m doing it with is none of your business, so could you please stop being a whiny gossipy bitch."

"I wouldn't be a whiny gossipy bitch if you just answered the question," the young man pouted.

Beca sighed in exasperation but didn't add anything. The door of the station opened before Jesse started a new rant.
"Uh… your ears must be ringing man, we were just talking about you," Jesse stated.

Beca turned around and sure enough Benji was there with cups and a bag from the Lighthouse.

"Really?" Benji frowned slightly then focused on Beca. "Hey… I brought you mocha and some snack, I figured you might need a boost," he explained bashfully. He had felt bad that the little brunette had to work with the little sleep they had had so once he had rested properly he had decided to get her a little pick-me-up.

"Oh man," Beca let out and appreciative moan. "You keep rocking my world, Benji," she smiled genuinely and took the offered collation.

Beca briefly thought that it was a shame she didn't fancy the other young man because he was really sweet and that kind of thoughtful gesture was awfully adorable.

"It's the least I could do," he beamed.

"Alright… Benji, be honest," Jesse interrupted their staring, feeling slightly nauseous. "Did you two hook up?"

Benji looked at his roommate curiously. "Jesse, dude, a gentleman shan’t ever tell tales about ladies, you should know better," he schooled him gently.

Yup it was definitely a shame she didn't fancy Benji because he was a catch, Beca reflected with a grin. They hadn't needed to talk about what they had shared since they both knew that they were just friends.

Jesse snorted. "Right… I still don't buy it," he repeated.

"I was just making the delivery, I'm out," Benji announced ignoring his moody roommate. "Have a good day," he smiled at Beca then turned around. He stopped on his track deciding that he didn’t like his roommate’s insinuations and faced Beca again hoping she would forgive him for what he was about to do. "I forgot your sugar," he said.
Beca frowned but Benji just walked back to her and kissed her cheek. When he pulled back he winked at her with a smirk and she couldn't help her chuckle. Yeah, they could mess with Jesse and they were going to milk that cow for all that it was worth.

"Bye," Benji said then gave a nod to (a slack-jawed) Jesse as if he remembered he was there.

Beca sipped her cup, grin still firmly in place and felt giddy when she saw Jesse's expression, her day had definitely perked up.

"Okay… I asked you out and I don't even get consideration, but Benji…" he shrugged. "I just want to know what he has that I don't, pure curiosity."

Beca cleared her throat then opened the bag Benji had left to find two cinnamon rolls. She looked at Jesse with a smirk. "Well, Jesse, a lady never tells, but if you must know… he's got the magic in him," she said suggestively and took a bite of her treat.

That smile on her face wasn't going anywhere and for that she'll have to thank Benji later.

xxxxx

Chloe was steadily growing frustrated. First she had been forced to admit that she had a full on crush for Beca, not the kind of crush that could be shove aside and subside on its own. Nope, she was having a hard crush that needed to be dealt with because it would take a mind on its own and soon set deep roots in her heart if she wasn't careful.

She was frustrated because she felt ridiculous, she barely knew the brunette and quite frankly for all her openness to people she had never been one to fall that easily or quickly. The worst part being that Beca wasn't even aware of the spell she could cast.

She wasn't afraid to put herself out there and eventually try to seduce the other girl or at the very least see if she would be open to the idea but Beca was one tough shell to crack. The friendship was already a battle so complications were really neither needed nor welcomed.

The redhead was frustrated but above all she was jealous. After fear, jealousy was the feeling she disliked the most because it made her angry and that was against her nature.
She couldn't justify her jealousy because it wasn't like Beca knew how she felt and even if she did, the brunette didn't owe her anything.

Beca hadn't even mentioned anything about Benji, so Chloe didn't know what was going on. All she knew was that ever since the party the man seemed to pop out of nowhere all the time, she would turn her head and see him with Beca. Sure he didn't really hang around, they would only talk animatedly for a few and then he'd go again but really he was everywhere and that made Chloe want to scream (or punch him).

She didn't like feeling that way so she had taken a little distance from the brunette, nothing major but they had started to make an habit of going to the Lighthouse at night and then sleep together afterward, that hadn't happened since the party because Chloe always found a reason (a valid one) to cut their time short.

It was stupid really, all she had to do was to ask Beca about the status of her relationship with Benji to put herself out of her misery. Then again, she shouldn't ask in the first place, because, again, the brunette didn't owe her any explanation.

Chloe sighed feeling a headache coming. She knew she'd have to do something soon, first because she wasn't one to wait passively, and then because she just wanted things to be clear.

"Alright, I'm going back home, are you coming or do you have plans?" Aubrey asked as she gathered her belongings. Today's practice hadn't been half as disheartening and frustrating as the others, the girls were making progress but there was still a lot of work to be done.

"I think I'm going to work at the library then I'll see, I'll let you know what I'm up to before you start dinner in any case."

"Noted, see you later."

"Later," Chloe smiled to her best friend, picked her backpack and exited their rehearsal space.

She grinned when she saw that Beca had been waiting for her. The brunette was listening to music as per usual and waved at her. Chloe took a deep breath to quiet the fluttering in her chest and started to walk to the other girl.
"What are we doing?" Beca asked as soon as the redhead was at her level.

"I have a paper to work on."

"Exciting," Beca smirked.

"I know, this crazy college life of mine."

"Well how about…"

"Hey Beca!"

Chloe turned to the sound and saw Benji hurrying in their direction. There went her good mood. It was always the same lately, she was starting to feel as if that idiot was waiting in a corner to come to Beca during their exclusive time together.

"Benji, what's up?" Beca asked with a wide smile.

"Nothing much, hey Chloe," he grinned. Chloe just nodded with a grin in acknowledgement.

Another reason why Chloe was frustrated was the fact that she couldn't really hate Benji because the guy was genuinely sweet.

"I just wanted to give you this," he held a flash drive to Beca. "I found those sounds I was telling you about."

"Awesome!"

"Lots of potential, it'll be fun."
"Dude, I can't wait. We're still on for Friday?"

"Most definitely," Benji beamed.

They got lost in conversation, Chloe didn't participate, mostly because she was too busy keeping her jealousy in check.

The moment he excused himself and left didn't come soon enough in Chloe's opinion. "Sorry about that," Beca returned her attention to the redhead.

"It's okay."

"So, do you want to come to mine to work?"

"Nah, I'll pass. There are less distractions at the library."

Truth to be told had Beca asked before Benji had showed up she would have gone there to work but now she knew she would be unable to work in proximity of the brunette because her mind would dwell on her and Benji and that was just not going to happen.

"Okay, well text me if you want to do anything later."

"Sure."

They parted ways when they neared the library, Beca winked at her before putting her headphones over her ears where it belonged.

Chloe exhaled heavily. She really needed to do something about this.

xxxxx
Beca was typing a paper on her laptop while Chloe was facing her, sitting on the opposite side of her bed reading some textbook. It had been two weeks since they had found themselves alone together. They saw each other every day because of the Bellas but the past weeks Beca had noticed that they hadn't hung around half as much as they had used to. She hadn't mentioned it because after all that wasn't a big deal, Chloe had a lot of work, as for herself she had been busy with making music with Benji and DJ.

She felt slightly ridiculous to feel needy of the redhead's presence. As much as she hated to admit it, she enjoyed their time together.

The brunette was working with some music in the background but the sound in her headphones was lower than usual so she wouldn't get too distracted.

She looked up when she thought she heard Chloe's voice, immediately pushing her headphones around her neck.

"So, you and Benji… you are…" Chloe spoke without looking up from her book.

Beca was surprised at the line of thought but replied nonetheless. "Friends."

Chloe nodded but didn't add anything. Beca had the feeling that she was missing something.

"With benefits?"

"Uh?"

"Friends with benefits," Chloe specified. "You're hanging out together a lot and you've obviously gotten closer…" she looked at the other girl.

" Hmm no… we're just friends," she frowned.

"Oh… okay," the redhead nodded.
Beca smirked with amusement. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say you're jealous," she said before putting her headphones back on.

"That's the thing, you don't know any better," Chloe mumbled, watching the brunette. She couldn't blame her, after all until recently she hadn't known any better either.

Beca pushed her headphones again. "Sorry, you said something?"

"I said, we should go to the Lighthouse later."

"Of course," Beca grinned. "It's kind of mandatory by now."

"Yeah," Chloe smiled back.

Well at least now the redhead would have a better control over her urge to hit Benji. It still didn't resolve her quandary regarding the brunette but it did give her a bit of comfort.

xxxxx

"...You see us as you want to see us - in the simplest terms, in the most convenient definitions. But what we found out is that each one of us is a brain... and an athlete... and a basket case... a princess... and a criminal..."

Beca's attention was split between what was happening on screen and Jesse who was mumbling the lines next to her. It didn't matter that she knew he was a film buff, she was still surprised that he knew every lines of every movie he made them watch.

"...does that answer your question? Sincerely yours, the Breakfast club."

"You're missing the best part..." he said never leaving the screen.

"Sorry," she chortled and tried focusing again.
"That song is awesome," he nodded. "It should have been a Billy Idol song but he passed it up… the idiot," Jesse informed her. "On the plus side it launched Simple Mind in the US."

"Not bad."

"So… what did you think?"

"It was decent," Beca admitted.

"De… what?" he looked at her crestfallen. "This movie is amazing! It's… equally beautiful and sad… it is the most accurate portrays of teens there is… it takes stereotypes and break them down one by one… it's… come on…"

"All right, I can bump it up to good, I mean, I liked the characters, there were good lines and I didn't fall asleep."

"You're so hopeless," Jesse shook his head.

"I'm sorry," she laughed. "I'm not like you, Jesse. At least give me credit for trying."

"Yeah, okay," he chuckled. "You know, there's magic in movies…"

Beca decided to ignore the not-so-subtle slight and stir the conversation back to the movie. "You’re right that song is great."

"It's perfect."

The little brunette felt Jesse's stare on her when she was focusing on the song, as she looked at him to ask what was on his mind she noticed that he had the look on his face.

He hadn’t been lying when he said that he would persevere pursuing her. Usually he would say
something as a joke or just make a reference to magic in passing (less than subtle jabs at Benji), when that happened Beca could just dismiss him with a witty come back and that was that. However there were other times when he would give her the look, like they were ‘having a moment’ and when that happened she could hear the gears in his head turning, like right now.

It was annoying but Jesse was inoffensive and when he wasn’t trying to hit on her he was actually great to hang out with. She just wished he could get it in his head that they would never be more than friends.

She was a bit irritated because they had been having a cool evening until now. Luckily, she was saved by the bell or rather by her roommate coming back in with Cho and another guy.

Beca had barely a second to glance at her roommate and she hoped that the young Asian understood her silent message. Kimmy stared nonplussed for a few seconds then sighed. “The white girl’s back.”

“And I’m out,” Jesse declared and started gathering his belongings. He had been about to lean in for a kiss when Beca’s roommate walked in. Kimmy-Jin was not the warmest person he knew, the handful of times he had met her she had not really acknowledge his presence and today was no real exception, one thing was certain his evening with Beca was done.

“Always a pleasure Kimmy-Jin,” he told Beca’s roommate as he made his way out and nodded in direction of Beca before exiting the room.

Beca held on a few more second then scoffed. “The white girl’s back? Seriously? That's the best you could come up with?"

"It worked," Kimmy simply shrugged.

They were not extremely talkative roomies but they did have a perfect understanding of one another. Kimmy-Jin had understood the ‘rescue me’ silent plea from the other girl as she walked in, she had easily guessed that puppy boy had tried to make a move again. Not that she gave a fiddlestick about it, but she knew that the little brunette wasn’t receptive to the boy’s advances and apparently he couldn’t tell.

"Hey," Beca nodded to Cho.
“Hey Beca, this is Cameron a friend from our study group,” Cho introduced the other boy.

“I’m Beca, nice meeting you,” she nodded. “No DJ?”

"He'll come by later,” Kimmy informed.

"What are you guys up to?” Beca asked Cho as she moved so the other girl could sit on her bed.

"Video games, small tournament, want to join?"

"Sure,” Beca replied.

She wouldn't call it a habit but she did stay every now and then when Kimmy brought her friends back to their room. They would have general debates about one theory or another (never getting personal) or just play video games, in any case they always had a good time.

Beca's phone vibrated she looked to find a message from Chloe. “Actually I’m going to take a rain check on that, it's Chloe, so I’m out,” she said to no one in particular already getting her jacket.

“Say ‘hi’ to Red for me,” Kimmy said with her monotonous voice.

“Hi to Red for me,” Beca repeated with a smirk.

“You’re not funny,” the Asian stated flatly.

“Considering your ‘white girl’ line, I think I get a pass on that one,” Beca snorted in amusement. She put a flash drive on Kimmy’s desk. “For DJ. You guys have a good night,” she saluted them with a small wave then left the room.

xxxxx
“Why music?” Chloe asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you like music?"

"I don't know," Beca's response was automatic. "Why do you like music?"

"It makes me feel less alone. It's a universal language. It's amazing to think that somewhere on the other side of the planet someone I don't know, with whom I probably have nothing in common feels the same things I do when listening to the same song... I like music because it connects me to the rest of the world regardless of all those things that set me apart from it."

Beca looked at the Chloe with awe and something else she couldn't name that made her feel warm. "That's... a good point," she nodded.

"Back to you, why do you like music?" Chloe repeated her question.

"I just do," Beca shrugged. There was a pause then she kept on. "You know that song from Tim Buckley, 'song to the siren'? I've been working on it, I'm using Paul Charlier's cover of the song as a base. I don't know if you've heard it? The challenge is to find the right balance in the melody... in a way it's like that Radiohead's song Nude, it took them about ten years to figure out the proper instrumentation and..."

"You always do that," Chloe cut her off.

"What?"

"Every time I ask something about yourself, you give me a generic, non committing answer or you change the topic altogether or you just to turn the conversation around and make it about me. You keep making this," she motioned the two of them with a back and forth movement of her forefinger. "...a one-sided interaction."

Beca forced herself to remain calm, it was the first time that someone saw through her diversion
techniques and called her out on it. It occurred to her now that she never hung around people who asked her personal questions, or questions period, or cared enough to spot her defence mechanisms.

“How about you talk to me for a change?” Chloe asked with a grin.

"I was talking to you."

"As in say something about yourself," Chloe specified.

Beca quickly grew nervous because it was obvious that Chloe wouldn't let herself be sidetracked from her quest. She gulped and tried to think of an escape. She scoffed nervously blowing her cheeks. "I hate Brussels sprouts," she let out a fake sigh of relief.

She had technically honoured Chloe's request, so hopefully the redhead would content herself with that.

"Wow… really?" in spite of her grin Chloe was not amused. She had known the brunette was keeping her at arm's length but hoped that she had proven herself enough to be worthy of the other girl's trust. She just wish Beca's guard was not so high all the time.

"Oh yeah, true story, I'll starve rather than eat those."

Chloe rolled her eyes. "I'm just trying to get to know you, Beca," she explained her intentions, not wanting the brunette to be defensive.

This was the very reason why Beca didn't hang out with people, why she didn't do 'friends'. In her experience people always had an agenda, they stuck around long enough to get what they wanted then left, not before making sure to hurt you in the process.

She knew that 'I want to know you' song and despised it. Opening up to people was nothing more than giving them ammunitions they'd stock in a corner of their head to use against you when they needed it, so they could use you more efficiently.

Sure Chloe was nice, but she was just human, and Beca had experienced enough to know that as
good a person as the redhead seemed to be, she didn't want to give the older girl that power over her.

"After all this time hanging out together I barely know anything about you," Chloe continued. "All I know is that you're a music junky, sarcasm slash snark is your second language and you are tremendously talented…"

"And now you know I hate Brussels sprouts."

"And you hate Brussels sprout," Chloe echoed with a sigh.

"Well… there you go, you know me."

"Come on, there's more to you than that."

"Nah," Beca shook her head. "I'm sorry, but I'm lame like that," she shrugged.

Chloe bit her bottom lip. She wanted the brunette to open up and she didn't want to push. On the other hand she knew that if she didn't nudge the other girl she would never open up on her own accord. She took a deep breath and made a decision hoping it wouldn't backfire on her or that she wouldn't lose everything.

"Fine," she exhaled with a playful smile. "We'll do this the hard way then."

Beca frowned, unsure of where the redhead was going (that twinkle in the other girl's eyes filled her with dread). "What are you talking about?" she dared ask.

"Well… I've decided that I would not say another word until you say something about yourself, something real," Chloe kept her smile in place. She wasn't asking to be revealed secrets and what not. She'd be happy if Beca could answer one of the many questions she had asked, her favourite song, why she liked music or when did she get her first tattoo.

Beca scoffed. "Yeah, right…"
She had known the redhead for a little more than two months and the other girl had yet to stay one full minute in silence so that ultimatum sounded more like a joke than anything else.

"Alright, do you want another one?" Beca asked raising her chin in direction of Chloe's empty cocoa mug.

The redhead shook her head and smiled as a silent thank you. "Should we go then?"

Once again Chloe's response was non verbal, she shrugged in a way meaning 'sure why not'. Beca snorted, her mouth slightly agape. "Seriously… you're not going to talk?"

This time Chloe's expression clearly meant 'I just said so'. Beca didn't find it amusing at all, but she refused to cave in. She just sighed, shaking her head. "Fine, whatever. Let's go."

xxxxx

"What did you do?"

Beca glanced at her roommate before returning to her reading. "I've already told you before, put your sentences in a context when you want to communicate," she pointed it out.

"Red hasn't been around for almost two weeks, what did you do?" Kimmy-Jin clarified. She was also reading, lying on her bed.

Beca stopped her reading and looked up with a frown. "What makes you assume that I'm the one at fault?" she was genuinely curious.

Kimmy marked a beat then focused on her book again. "You're the idiot of the duo."

"Yeah, I love you too, Kimmy," Beca said sardonically.
When Chloe had issued her ultimatum, Beca had figured that the senior would give up her silent treatment after an hour, a day at best. She had been wrong. The redhead hadn't spoken to her in ten days, five hours and forty minutes (if she had to guess). Beca had attempted to start conversations but Chloe would only respond with gestures, it wasn't difficult to understand her (the girl had an expressive face) but it was frustrating.

Beca had stopped trying upon realizing that Chloe wouldn't give up until she had had what she wanted. She didn't understand why the redhead was pushing and she didn't agree on it either. She hadn't asked anything from Chloe, the other girl had talked on her own accord so she didn't see any reason why she should do the same, she was just not that kind of person.

She was the way she was and if it wasn't enough for Chloe, then so be it. She would not budge.

"What did you do?" Kimmy asked again.

Kimmy-Jin didn't really care if Beca was moody, again, she and Beca were not friends, they were roommates that got along and had very cordial interactions. They understood one another, they didn't do useless talk, they respected one another's privacy, they made sure to be mindful of each other's comfort and did the reasonable things required for their cohabitation to be peaceful. They would never actually hang out alone, but she didn't mind the petite brunette staying when Cho and DJ were around, or Beca didn't mind her staying when Chloe was around.

What they didn't do was drama, or long talks about feelings and what not, or this whole sharing each other's lives, or being a shoulder to cry and whine on. No they just stayed out of each other's business.

Those were their unspoken rules and they were both fine with it.

Yet this time she felt compelled to step in. It wasn't because of the dark depressing mood her roommate had been casting in their room for the past days. She had ignored it so far and could ignore it until the end of time (again, they were not friends and they didn't do drama). She felt compelled to step in because of Chloe. She wasn't friend with the redhead either but there was something utterly wrong about seeing the girl depressed. It was like the world was out of tilt.

Last Thursday during their weekly math meeting the redhead had been a bit distracted and not as enthusiastic as usual. Yesterday the girl had been down, plain and simple. She barely said anything and her smile never reached her eyes. It hadn't taken her maths skills to put two and two together, something had happened between her roommate and the senior. Since she had a better understanding of her roommate she had taken an educated guess and figured that Beca had been at
the origin of the fallout.

Beca looked at her roommate who was still reading. "For your information, I didn't do anything," she pointed out with irritation. "She won't say another word to me unless I tell her something about myself. Everything she needs to know, she already knows, so I refuse to be bullied into doing something I don't want to."

Beca kept repeating herself that she didn't care. She was used to be on her own, at least now she didn't have to worry about her personal space being respected or being dragged out with no warning at any given time. Now she could spend all her time working on her music and she was fine with it.

Kimmy-Jin took the information in and after a second or two rolled her eyes at her book. "Resistance is futile," she said.

Beca scoffed. "Yeah right, I have will power, she'll get tired of it eventually, if not, I don't care."

The young Asian shook her head, her roommate obviously didn't know a lost battle when she saw one. "Resistance is futile," she repeated.

"Seriously?" Beca narrowed her eyes at Kimmy-Jin.

"Your resistance is futile," Kimmy just drove her point home.

Beca shook her head. "Whatever, I don't even know why I bother talking to you."

The little brunette was not going to cave in, no matter what her roommate thought.

xxxxx

Chloe snapped her fingers to get Beca's attention then pointed two fingers toward her eyes meaning 'watch me'. She started snapping the rhythm then did the steps of the choreography.
She was worn out by the situation but she couldn't complain because she had brought this on herself. She had known that Beca wouldn't give in easily but she had not anticipated their will contest to last this long. One week and four days since the last time she spoke a word to the brunette, since her silence frustrated the brunette by the fourth day all interaction beyond the Bellas’ rehearsals had ceased altogether.

It wasn't just stubbornness, she knew that she had to stand her ground and that if she gave in the other girl would never open up. She just wished Beca stopped seeing her as a threat. The defensive walls of the brunette were very high and very thick, and her resistance told Chloe that the girl had been hurt and that not many people had stuck around to tackle her fortress.

Chloe wouldn't give in, she cared about the brunette a lot already, and even though this silent war killed her she was determined to wait patiently for Beca to meet her halfway.

"Use words Chloe, damn it!" Beca exclaimed with frustration.

The redhead pursed her lips then turned around. "Stacie, if you're done, please come and help Beca with her steps."

"Oh yeah, sure, talk about me like I wasn't there. Really?" Beca was peeved.

Chloe stared at her nonplussed then walked away to another group of Bellas.

"Did you kick her puppy or something?" Stacie asks cautiously when she arrived at Beca’s level.

"Can you just show me the steps?" Beca did her best to keep irritation out of her voice.

"Alright take it easy, I come in peace," the taller girl raised her hands in surrender. "Let's take it from the top."

"You're moody today," Jesse stated.
"I'm not moody, your movie just sucks," Beca replied flatly.

"You know what I like about watching movies with you?" Jesse asked rhetorically. "Your constructive criticism."

"Fine, this movie sucks because we've spent one hour establishing that she's a demanding cow throwing a tantrum and he's a tool, in about twenty minutes they'll fall into each other's arms because...reasons, then they'll kiss and we'll finally get the credits."

"It's a romantic comedy!" Jesse chuckled.

"It fails to be both romantic and comical."

"You're a tough crowd."

"Please, every single love story you made us watch is the same with different faces. She's a manipulative cow or he's a jerk, but deep down they have a heart. They meet someone that is their complete opposite and take an hour and half to fall prey to the power of love and give them a 'you change me speech', they kiss, the end. Or they're both good people but one of them lies for some obscure reason, if there's a reason at all; they fall in love, at some point some character inconsequential to the plot reveal the lie, the main characters break up, the liar make a big romantic gesture then they make up, the end," she summed up. "It's always stupid."

“O-kay... Admittedly you've just summed up most of the rom-coms of the past decade, however there are great love stories in movies and series,” he argued. “Wait, before you say anything, I’m not just saying that because I’m a movie junkie, it’s true and I can prove it.”

“Whatever,” she half protested. It’s not like she had anything better to do, normally she’d have been dragged out by Chloe to some place or another but...

The thought of the redhead didn’t improve her mood one bit so she forced herself to focus on whatever Jesse was saying about the next movie they’d watch.

“...and long story short I’ve stuffed the body of my teacher in a cupboard.”
Beca frowned “What?”

“Nothing, I was just making sure that I was talking to myself,” he wisecracked with a smirk.

“Sorry, dude.”

Jesse scrutinized her for a moment. “I’m here if you want to talk about whatever’s bothering you,” he offered seriously. "I know I'm goofy and immature most of the time but I'm a good listener."

Beca wondered why people had this obsession about ‘talking’, but didn’t say anything. “Jesse… I’m trying here, it’s just that movies don’t have the same appeal to me as they do you, although some you showed me were decent.”

Jesse wasn’t convinced by the answer but knew better than too push. “You’re right, so let’s do something you want to do instead.”

"No, it's fine, today is movie day, so just make sure the next one is decent."

An hour later Beca was fuming at the character on screen. "He's right… why does she need to know that stuff?"

"I think her demand is legit."

"No, it's not! She just wants to satisfy her curiosity. And twenty minutes from now she'll throw it all back in his face!"

"Yes, because it's a movie and there's the rule of drama but otherwise she's right."

"Why can't she be satisfied with what she gets?"

Jesse paused the film. "It's about trust. You care about someone you trust them, you let them in,
"Just because you don't talk about your past or about everything that's in your head doesn't mean you don't trust someone," Beca argued vehemently.

"That's exactly what it means," the young man frowned. "Okay, like… relationships of any kind, friendship, family, romance or whatever… it's about giving and receiving, the key is balance as in both parties must give and receive in equal measure. Your past, and the way your mind works… those are the things that makes you…you, therefore the only way to know you is to know those things. It's basic logic, really."

"It's called being nosey and it doesn't mean you care."

"If I open up to you and you never open up to me then that makes you a jerk because you're taking advantage of me."

"Or it just means you're a fluffy pile of hormones looking to get laid… I mean, either works," Beca came back with a shrug.

"Wow… your faith in human beings is outstanding," Jesse shook his head with a grin.

"I imagine it comes as a shock to you since you apparently live in the land of unicorns and rainbows."

"I'm not saying trust blindly, but allow people to earn your trust and let them in… you're living in society, so join in."

"You sound like my father, and that's not a compliment," she muttered intelligibly.

Beca let out a frustrated grunt. She couldn't make sense of her mix, for the first time she didn't hear anything, like her mind was blank. She had lost her drive, her inspiration, her spark, her mojo, her fluid, or whatever superpower she had regarding music was gone.
She was pissed, she hadn't been able to do anything productive or satisfying since Chloe stopped talking to her and now she blamed the redhead completely.

It was totally Chloe's fault. She had bulldozed her way into Beca's life and turned it upside down. Beca used to be able to stay on her own, she was even glad for it. Now all she could think of is what would Chloe say about some thing or another or what Chloe was doing.

She hated Chloe because now she couldn't even enjoy her 'me time'.

"Listen up, the first round is around the corner so I'm adding one rehearsal a day, we need to be perfect. Those of you still struggling with choreography, please see Chloe," Aubrey announced at the end of their rehearsal.

Beca was exhausted, Aubrey had made them do cardio for most of the rehearsal, she could barely feel her legs. It didn't matter how many times they did it, it always hurt.

She watched the girls filling out of their rehearsal space. She thought rehearsals were boring before, but now it was just plain depressing, she wasn't really having fun with the others. She was moody so she kept to herself not to dampen the group's spirit.

Today marked the two weeks since Chloe had last spoken to her and all she wanted was for the other girl to acknowledge her again.

She waited patiently for Ashley and Denise to finish their conversation with the redhead then stepped closer as Chloe started putting her belonging back into her backpack.

"Hey," she said softly.

Chloe turned to her direction and gave a very small grin before focusing on her task again. "How are you?" Beca tried.
The redhead closed her eyes with a sigh. She wanted to talk to Beca, but she didn't want to back out. The situation was painful though, so she just hurried putting things in her backpack then started to walk away.

"Wait... I... come on, it's been two weeks and..." Beca exhaled sharply. Clenching her jaw she was mentally cursing herself, cursing the redhead, cursing the universe for she had to accept losing this battle. Chloe was almost at the door when she spoke again. "I used to stutter severely," she quickly confessed.

The words brought Chloe to an immediate halt, for a second she thought she had imagined it but then slowly turned around to face Beca. The brunette looked away as if ashamed. Chloe walked back to the other girl with cautious steps sensing that any sudden movement might send Beca running.

"Well... I still do when I'm very upset," Beca shrugged.

Chloe had to strain her ear for Beca was almost mumbling. The brunette cleared her throat. "Having a name like Beca Mitchell when you stutter is quite a bitch," Beca continued, alternating between staring at her shoes and glancing at the other girl. "First day at school and it takes me over a minute just to introduce myself in front of the class," she snorted bitterly. "By the time that was done I was tagged as a weirdo and made the butt of every joke."

Beca glanced at Chloe and she was relieved not to see pity in her eyes. "Needless to say I didn't talk, that made it hard to communicate..."

Chloe listened attentively. She could feel her heart beating wildly in her chest, she was still questioning whether or not this was happening. She didn't move or interrupt since it was obviously costing a lot to Beca to talk. "One of my brothers... he noticed that I wasn't stuttering when I was singing so he taught me everything while singing and encouraged me to make tunes so I could talk. That made me upgrade from 'stuttering weirdo' to 'singing weirdo', but at least I could communicate."

Beca crossed her arms over her chest in a vain attempt not to feel as vulnerable as she did; she unconsciously started to play with her left ear out of nervousness but stopped when she realized what she was doing. "To this day I still sing in my head when I read or talk or when need to make a public speech," she added. "It's a... matter of tricking my brain, I've learnt to pattern my speech so it's like singing in a low range..." admitted with a barely there embarrassed grin.

She looked at her shoes for several seconds then sustained the redhead's gaze."The reason I like
music so much is because it gave me a voice… it… allows me to express myself with words or otherwise," she pursed her lips and took a deep breath, held it a little before exhaling. "There."

Beca felt drained and hot, that confession had been physically painful. She had been tensed the whole time and her muscles were protesting. That was the most she ever revealed of herself to anyone, she couldn't say why she decided to go with one of the most embarrassing stories about her but she couldn't take it back now, the cat was out of the proverbial bag.

Maybe she had chosen that story as a proof that she was willing to make an effort – yes, Chloe had practically held a gun to her head to get to that point, but Beca was trying. Now she was hoping that giving Chloe the benefit of the doubt as far as her trust went wasn't a mistake.

Chloe fully appreciated the confession and she couldn't help but feel like something was expanding in her chest. Beca trusted her enough to share something very intimate. She had wanted the brunette to talk but hadn't expected her to give so much and she was incommensurably grateful and humbled about it.

She could see that Beca was uncomfortable, since she had met her halfway Chloe just picked things where they had let them off. "So did you figure out how to tackle your Tim Buckley's cover?"

Beca couldn't help the sigh of relief escaping her lips, she almost felt like crying at hearing Chloe addressing her again. She gave the redhead a wobbly grin, mentally forcing herself to get a grip before answering. "I don't know… I have ideas and a rough version so far," she nodded. "I could use an objective opinion."

Chloe smiled. "Let's go then."

She hooked her arm around the brunette's and as hard to believe as it was (for she never thought she'd admit such a thing) Beca welcomed the disregard of her personal space.

The world was finally right again.

When they arrived at Beca's dorm, Kimmy-Jin was lying on her bed, reading.

"Hi Kimmy," the young Asian looked away from her book for a second to confirm that her ears hadn't deceived her.
"Hey, Red"

Chloe put herself at ease on Beca's bed while the brunette set her laptop

"By the way, Will came by to say I was right," Kimmy's monotone voice filled the room again.

Chloe glanced at Beca curiously "Who's Will?"

Beca slowly shook her head in confusion. "I don't know any Will" she pointed out to her roommate.

"Will Power," Kimmy drove her point home, never stopping her reading.

Beca frowned but after a few seconds realization hit her and she tilted her head glaring at her roommate while Chloe chortled. "Oh wow, aren't you hilarious…" she said flatly.

"Actually, it was a good one," Chloe sided with Kimmy. "Here, Kimmy, give me some love," she held her right fist toward the other girl and Kimmy bumped it with her own an actual grin on her face (it was small but, it was there nonetheless).

"Welcome back, Red."

Beca rolled her eyes, "I think I'll make sure never to have the both of you in the same room from now on," she muttered.

"Stop pouting," Chloe chuckled and planted a quick kiss on Beca's cheek.

Beca was thrown off by the gesture but decided to focus on what she was doing. "I...I got Benji singing on this one, we recorded it at DJ's cousin's studio. Here," she handed over her headphones to the redhead ignoring her thundering heart or the heat on her cheeks.

She had been through two weeks with no physical contact whatsoever with another human being so
everything was a bit overwhelming at the moment (yeah, that was the only explanation), not that she was complaining.

"I'm working on the melody, I'd like to do something reminiscent of the ebb and flow of the tide. I'm trying to find a way to make the melody work backward and forward at the same time…” Beca explained just so she wasn't focusing on what she was feeling right now.

They spent the afternoon listening to music, not saying anything. It was no surprise when they ended up at the Lighthouse afterwards talking well into the night, the conversation never stopping once as if they were trying to compensate for the two weeks of silence.

When it was late and sleep was beckoning them, they went back to Beca's dorm and soon found themselves lying on Beca's bed, cuddling like it was the most natural thing in the world.

For the first time Beca didn't tense at the touch, she didn't need a few moments to relax in Chloe's arms. Now that she was secured in the other girl's embrace she realized that those past few days had been hard not only because the two of them hadn't talked at all but also because she had been craving for the redhead's contact (she still wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or not).

"I've missed you," Chloe whispered before kissing her shoulder.

Beca just squeezed Chloe's hand as a silent 'me too'. She was forced to admit that Chloe's theory about how most of the world's problems could be solve with hugs and cuddles didn't seem so crazy now.

She had allowed Chloe to get close to her (not just physically) and she still had to figure out why, but that introspection would have to wait, right now she just wanted to enjoy their closeness and the feeling that things were back to the way they were supposed to be.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Howdy everyone! Once again thanks for the reviews and kind words and kudos!
Here’s the new part.

Enjoy,

Forsty ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part 4

“The Director will be here soon,” the young officer in front of her declared after hanging up the phone.

“It’s not like I could go anywhere,” Beca stated the obvious (with her right wrist handcuffed to a bar on the wall she was limited in her movements)

Well, the day had been a bust.

She had to admit that life was seldom boring with the Bellas (except when they were performing evidently). The good part was that they had nailed their routine, Amy had even managed to breathe a little life in their otherwise dead performance and they had qualified (surprisingly enough).

Now however, she had a slightly swollen left hand (from a well-deserved punch… the guy was literally asking for it), she was handcuffed, and trying to think of good argument to get herself out of charges for destruction of property. On the bright side she was sitting comfortably and officer Wingam was actually nice to her.

“Is that necessary?” she asked making the metal on her wrist clink.

“Your attire leads me to think that you’re a flight risk,” the officer wisecracked referring to Beca’s fly attendant outfit.
Beca scoffed humourlessly and narrowed her eyes. “You were just waiting for the opportunity to get that one out, weren’t you?”

Wingam’s smile widened, he didn’t even try to deny her statement. “Absolutely.”

“You do realize it’s lame though, right?”

“You’re just a spoilsport,” he shrugged. “And to answer your question, it’s protocol until the wronged party arrives, sorry,” the young man gave her a contrite grin.

“No need to apologize, I was just curious.”

“Can I offer you some water?”

“I’m good, thank you.”

It took forty minutes for the Director of the art centre to arrive. Lucky for Beca the night was slow so she had easy conversation with officer Wingam while patiently waiting.

“Ah, there he is,” Wingam declared mentioning a man walking in. “Mr. Baxter,” Wingam stood up and offered a hand to the new comer.

“Arthur,” the man replied with a friendly smile.

Beca thought it was good, the Director didn’t look upset so she figured she had a fair shot at pleading her cause.

“And this is…” rich hazel eyes turned to her with an inquisitive (yet benevolent) gaze.

“Beca Mitchell,” Beca momentarily forgot about the handcuff and tried extending her right hand only to be stopped almost immediately. “Sorry…”
“Arthur, please get these off her. I don’t think she’s a flight risk, even if that point could be argued considering the outfit.”

Beca hung her head in defeat (stupid outfit!). Wingam gave her a shit eating grin meaning ‘I told you it was a damn good joke’ as he undid the restraints.

“There we are, let’s try again. I’m Alvin Baxter, Director of the art centre.”

“Beca Mitchell,” she shook his hand. “I apologize for all the trouble it was…”

“Don’t worry about it,” the older man waved a dismissive hand. “I’ve watched the surveillance tape…”

Ah crap, I’m screwed…

“… and accidents happen.”

Beca’s mouth was slightly agape (surely it couldn’t be that easy… right?), she closed it immediately when Wingam looked at her.

“I’m not pressing charges, so long as Miss Mitchell engages herself to pay for the broken window,” Alvin Baxter looked at her with a soft expression.

“Of course, sir.”

“That’s settled then,” the Director nodded.

“That’s fine by me, less paperwork and everyone is happy, now we’re going to…”

“I’m sorry, Wingam, I need you for a sec,” another officer called.
“Excuse me, I’ll be right back.”

Beca cleared her throat and spoke as soon as Wingam was out of earshot. “Thank you very much for not pressing charges.”

If he had indeed watched the tape, he saw the fight and the ruckus that had ensued.

“Meh, I’ll deny I ever said it at gunpoint but it was quite an entertaining evening.” Alvin chuckled.

“At least it made up for the boring performance,” she joked.

He pursed his lips. “It’s not that you were bad out there… let’s just say you could use a little… life.”

“To put it mildly.”

“You know, for someone petite you pack a mean left punch,” pride was colouring his speech which amused Beca.

“Uh…I… thanks, I guess.”

“And I’m back, sorry about that,” officer Wingam put an end to their interaction. “Here’s what I propose, since everything will be sorted amiably. You’re going to exchange information. Mr. Baxter will keep me posted regarding the broken window, and Miss Mitchell, if you do not hold onto your word there will be charges.”

“I’ll have someone fix the window tomorrow,” Mr. Baxter said.

“And I’ll come to pay the bill,” Beca agreed.

They exchanged information, talked a bit more then Beca was finally allowed to leave. She was surprised to find Jesse outside of the station.
“Hey Hilary Swank from Million Dollar Baby,” he gritted her.

“Hey,” she mock punched him. “You know you just have to say Million Dollar Baby, you don’t have to reference a specific actress.”

He looked at her in disbelief. “Wow, prison changed you…”

She smirked, she was about to say something else when she stopped dead in her tracks, her father was exiting his car. “Why the fuck is he here?” she muttered.

“… because I called him?” Jesse winced.

She turned around, all humour gone. “What the hell, Jesse? Why would you do that for?” she made a conscious effort to keep her boiling anger in check.

“Look… you were handcuffed, it looked bad and… I didn’t know what else to do…”

“That is no excuse to call my father!”

“Hey, I’m sorry, okay… I didn’t know what was going on in there and… why are you taking it out on me? I’m the only one here.”

“I didn’t ask you to be! Next time do me a favour, mind your own business and don’t try to help me. I’m a big girl, I can handle myself.”

Jesse was a bit miffed by her outburst, after all he was just helping a friend. She departed before he could add anything. He sighed and went to join Benji who was waiting for him in his car not far.

Beca didn’t say anything to her father and just got into the passenger seat of the car preparing herself for the incoming earful.
This had to be Karma, she got off super easy with Mr. Baxter, so this was her punishment.

Her father got in the car and slammed the door to display his dissatisfaction. “I get a call in the middle of the night to hear that my daughter has been arrested for…”

Beca tuned out the man’s voice. Considering their history, he had lost the right to reprimand her or act as if he cared a long time ago.

“Beca, are you even listening to me?”

“No, Graham, I’m not. I know how much you like the sound of your voice so I was letting you enjoy your moment.”

“You better can your attitude right now, young lady, especially after pulling a stunt like that!” her father’s temper flared.

“You’re the one who told me to join in,” she pointed out calmly. There was something about irritating the man that made her smile inwardly (petty revenge was enjoyable).

“I’m glad you think this is funny, just in case you still haven’t caught up yet, even if it’s a misdemeanor, these kinds of things go on your record. This is not a good thing, Beca! That means…”

Beca let the man go on another rant and just waited for the ride to be over. There was no point arguing, she wasn’t interested in anything the man had to say any more than he was interested in what she had to say. They hadn’t had a conversation since she couldn’t remember when and quite frankly she had done well enough by herself for the past years so even if they could actually talk it wouldn’t change anything as far as she was concerned.

She got off the car as soon as it came to a stop on campus. She was about to slam the door but decided that she would have the last word. “By the way, it was just a misunderstanding, so no charges. And I’m fine, thanks for asking. Have a goodnight Graham,” she declared with an algid voice then calmly shut the door and walked away without a glance backward.

Graham Mitchell watched his daughter go and suddenly felt like an idiot. He hadn’t asked her what happened, just assumed that it was bad and she was at fault. He had lashed out too caught up in his
anger and her nonchalance hadn’t helped. He sighed, letting his head fall back against the headrest. He wished he knew how to fix things, how to actually have a relationship with his daughter that wasn’t confrontational or one-sided.

He took a deep breath and started the car again, there was nothing he could do on that front tonight.

Beca was fuming (as she usually was after interacting with her father), her anger started to melt away when she saw a familiar figure sitting on the front stairs of her building.

“So, how does freedom taste?” Chloe asked with a playful grin.

Beca made a show of rubbing her tongue against her palate as if she had an after taste in her mouth. “Like chocolate, caramel, apple and a hint of cinnamon.”

“How insightful, smarty pants,” the redhead rolled her eyes.

Beca took note of the fact that the other girl had changed (lucky her). “You didn’t have to wait for me.”

“Of course we did,” Chloe replied.

“We?” Beca sighed. “Please tell me the whole bunch is up in my dorm… not that I mind but I really could do without a pissing Kimmy off.”

“Don’t worry, I didn’t want to inconvenience her either, so they’re waiting at the Lighthouse.”

“I need to change if you don’t mind.”

“Sure.”

They went up to Beca’s dorm in silence. Kimmy actually greeted Beca (‘Hey, jailbird’) then went out to make a call.
Beca quickly found a pair of jeans, a flannel shirt and comfortable shoes. She then started to change, not minding Chloe’s presence (modesty was a moot point between them since the ‘singing in the shower’ incident).

“So how did it go?” Chloe asked from her spot on Beca’s bed.

“Alright, the Director of the centre was really nice, no charges. I apologized and promised to pay for the window.”

The redhead nodded but kept scrutinising Beca and noticed that she seemed a bit agitated.

“I’m ready.”

Chloe grabbed Beca’s left hand before the brunette reached the door. She figured they wouldn’t get much time to talk once they joined the others. Beca’s hiss of pain made her ease her grip immediately.

“Oops, sorry,” the redhead winced. “Maybe you should put some ice on it.”

“Nah, it’ll be fine.”

Chloe ran her thumb on the swollen knuckles then brought them to her lips, delivering a ‘magic kiss’ on each one. “Better?”

Beca felt sick, or something (maybe she had the flu). She felt hot and there was a fluttering in her stomach, not to mention the sudden increase of her heart rate and body temperature. She didn’t say anything about that however, instead she blinked slowly. “So much,” her voice dripped with sarcasm “You should consider medicine as a career,” she added with her trademarked smirk.

Chloe narrowed her eyes. “You know, hugs, cuddling, magic kisses and TLC, are efficient remedies since the dawn of times.”
“And a step closer to world peace, yeah, so you’ve told me.”

Chloe shook her head but grinned nonetheless. She focused on Beca’s hand again, rubbing her thumb delicately on the hurt knuckles. When she looked at Beca again her expression was more serious. “Are you okay?”

Beca was staring at her hand trying to figure out how a touch could be burning and electric at the same time. It took her a second to register Chloe’s voice and another to respond. “Why do you ask?”

“You seem upset,” Chloe pointed out. She mentally cursed when Beca took her hand away at the observation.

Beca was a bit unnerved, she didn’t like that the redhead could pick up on her mood so easily. She considered dismissing her but then reminded herself of the silent treatment she had received for weeks so she relented to talk. “My father picked me up at the station, thanks to Jesse… not the most pleasant ride.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Depends… are you going to stop talking to me again if I don’t?”

“Beca…” Chloe sighed, she held back from arguing upon seeing the insecurity in Beca’s gaze. “Of course not.”

The brunette gnawed her bottom lip. “In that case, I don’t…” she murmured before looking away.

“Okay,” the redhead didn’t push knowing that the DJ’s father was a very sore subject. “I’m here any time if you ever do,” she added then leant and let her lips linger on Beca’s cheek, to comfort or thank her for being open she couldn’t say (maybe it was a bit of both).

When she pulled back their faces stayed inches from one another, her gaze glued on Beca’s lips. She leant in again imperceptibly but at the last second looked back at Beca, the brunette’s frown was enough to kill her momentum.
Beca was surprised when Chloe kissed her (she usually was when such a thing occurred) and her heart which was beating a rather odd beat came to a stop when the contact lingered (it then resumed its odd beating). The gesture was somehow familiar and yet different.

The redhead’s face was suddenly very close, her breath was warm against her lips, the warmth was spreading to her entire body, the fluttering in her stomach was back. She could swear that Chloe was leaning in.

*I don’t have the flu...*

The thought was utterly incongruous. (What the hell?) Beca frowned because her brain was signalling her something but the translation was delayed.

Baby blue eyes met hers and she felt something shift, but she had the feeling it wasn’t good.

“We should go,” Beca heard her voice but she wasn’t certain to have spoken.

The warmth vanished as suddenly as it had come. Chloe nodded quickly and looked away. Kimmy-Jin chose that moment to come back in the room.

“Have a good night Kimmy,” Chloe said before exiting (running out of) the room (like her pants had caught fire).

“Later,” Beca added then followed the redhead.

*I don’t have the flu...*

Beca trudged along the corridor still trying to decipher the nagging thought in the back of her mind.

*I don’t have the flu...*

*I don’t have the flu!*
I’m attracted to Chloe…

She slowed her pace as everything came clearer.

…and we were having a moment while my brain was farting…

She felt her synapses come alive all at the same time, giving her a perfect instant replay of the last three minutes. She could see Chloe leaning in for possibly a kiss and her stellar response to the whole situation.

“Oh Mitchell, you’re a fucking moron,” she muttered to herself slapping her palm on her forehead.

Meanwhile, Chloe was berating herself, she had been caught on the moment and tried to kiss Beca, but if the ‘what-the-hell-are-you-doing?’ expression of the brunette was of any indication her attraction was unrequited. Looking on the bright side at least now she knew Beca wasn’t interested so she could move on and forget about the gaping hole the size of a state forming in her chest (yeah…piece of cake).

She forced a grin on her face when she saw Beca coming. It wasn’t a big deal, really, she’d get over it as long as the brunette didn’t shut her out completely because of her little slip.

“Fair warning Aubrey isn’t happy,” Chloe immediately jumped into conversation to avoid unwanted and awkward question (that and also not to dwell on the rejection).

“What a shock,” Beca chortled. She spotted the diversion tactic right away (she was a pro at it herself). She let it slide, mostly because she had had enough excitement for one day, and then she knew that if she brought up the subject of her new found understanding of her own body’s reaction and her brain fart she would most likely make things worse.

Her best option was to just finish this day, sleep on it and figure out what she wanted now then find out a way to tackle the subject with the redhead in due time.
“So on a scale of 1 to 10, just how pissed off Aubrey is?”

Chloe breathed out in relief, when Beca didn’t try to talk about what had just (almost) happened. “I’d say it’s a mild 11.”

“Oh, she’s in a good mood then. I was expecting worse,” Beca stated honestly.

“Truth to be told, even though she’d deny it with her last breath, I think she was amused by the whole thing.”

“So why isn’t she happy?”

“Because we only beat the Sockapellas by one point.”

“Ouch.”

“Exactly.”

“Oh well… maybe she’ll be open to expand her horizon now,” Beca mused.

That was wistful thinking, Aubrey was still in the denial bubble, in her opinion all the Bellas needed was to work harder on their routine. It didn’t matter that everyone was subtly trying to put some change (hell even if it just meant switching songs), but it was like blowing into a violin: utterly useless.

They all stayed at the Lighthouse for an hour or so then parted ways with the promise that upcoming rehearsals would be more intense than the previous (hooray…).

xxxxx

The next week went by in a blur because Aubrey somehow managed to toughen her regimen
(seriously, did that girl know no limits?); between the rough rehearsals, pulling all-nighters because she had found a certain momentum with her music, all the while completing class assignments, Beca felt exhausted.

Also, the fact that Chloe was kind of (but not really) avoiding her had made the week suck. Avoiding was probably not the right term, technically the redhead was just making sure that they were never alone and finding reasons not to hang out.

On the plus side it had given Beca time to mull things over. Now that she was aware to her attraction to the redhead, she realised that said attraction was not exactly new, (Beca had never been accurately attuned with all of her emotions, as a result she was sometimes slow on the take) as a matter of fact she could trace it back to their shower if she was honest, her body had sent signals then but her brain had just not translated those properly (case in point: she had until now identified her attraction as flu symptoms).

For once the thinking part of the problem wasn’t the hardest. Now that she was aware of everything and knew what to do, she had yet to figure out a way to bring the subject back up with the redhead.

She was attracted to Chloe, and taking the near kiss as an indication that the attraction was mutual, she figured half of the work was done. So after much consideration, she had decided that she wanted to give it a chance, see where it goes.

She even had elaborated a simple strategy: be blunt about it.

Now she just needed a few minutes alone with Chloe in order to go through with her plan. Since the redhead was making it difficult for such an occurrence to happen, she had decided to sneak up on her at the end of the practice for choreography… in other words, right now.

As the last Bellas filled out of their rehearsal space she entered and sure enough Chloe was inside gathering her belongings.

“Did you forget something?” the redhead asked without looking probably thinking that it was Ashley coming back.

“Hey there,” Beca announced herself.
Chloe’s head snapped in her direction, panic flashing through her eyes for a second. “Beca,” she breathed out. “Practice is over.”

“I know, I was hoping to catch you actually. I thought we could…”

Beca didn’t get a chance to finish her suggestion that Chloe cut her off. “Actually, I have to go, I have…” the redhead launched into a detailed reason of the day to avoid exclusive time with the brunette.

Beca nodded, plan A was to invite Chloe back to her dorm to spend time together and she had expected it to fail, luckily she had elaborated a plan B which she immediately went with. Namely she closed the gap between them and in a swift movement gave the other girl an effective ‘shut up’ kiss.

The kiss was soft and as elating, if not more as Chloe had imagined it would be. That being said she was too stunned to respond to it.

The petite brunette pulled back and all Chloe could do was stare with her mouth slightly agape because she doubted her state of wakefulness.

“Right,” Beca sighed. “Here’s the thing, I don’t know if you’ve noticed but I’m not very social and as a result sometimes I miss signs or cues or whatever.”

It occurred to Beca right then that she probably should have prepared the speech part, or at least thought of the main lines, because speeches were not her forte.

Oh well, it was too late now so she went on as best as she could. “The other day… by the time I finally caught on… you were running away…” she waited and in front of the redhead’s lack of response she continued. “What I’m saying is, I’m slow on the take but once I have my marks, I’m solid.”

Once more the brunette marked a long pause to give the senior an opportunity to say something but Chloe only blinked, her stunned expression still firmly in place. At this point Beca found it amusing.

“Did I just find how your ‘off’ switch works?” the brunette chuckled. This was the longest the
redhead stayed without talking in her presence (saved from their time studying and their silence war)

Again, she only got blinking in response. “Okay…” the word dragged on her tongue. “So… I’m picking you up tomorrow at seven, you can use the time until then to choose whether it’s a date or not and let me know. If it is, cool. If I somehow misread the signs or whatever, it’s cool too we’ll just hang out like we usually do and forget this whole thing,” she rambled on.

She nodded and started to walk away but stopped midstride and turned back to Chloe. “In case it’s a date, wear something casual because I have no idea what we’ll do and I’m totally going to wing it,” she warned. “I’m off now so you can… recover, I guess.”

She grinned a bit, this time however there was some uncertainty behind it. She had been fairly certain not to have misread anything but now she could feel doubt crept in. She was confident in the fact that if she had indeed misread things, nothing would change (what with Chloe being Chloe) and well she would be a bit disappointed to be honest but otherwise their friendship would not suffer (a bruised ego was easy to bypass).

Beca was almost at the door by the time Chloe finally came out of her stunned silence. It didn’t matter, the older girl managed to catch up with the other her in a few strides. The redhead put a gentle hand on Beca’s shoulder to turn her around and with no more warning than she had been given, grabbed the lapels of Beca’s plaid shirt and kissed her.

To say that she was caught off guard would be an understatement. Beca barely have time to register the hand on her shoulder the sudden spin of her body in the opposite direction before being caught into a kiss. ‘Caught into’ were the good terms because if her kiss had been sweet, Chloe’s was fire and fireworks. It was intense and made her see flashes of colours behind her eyelids, her hands came to rest firmly on the redhead’s waist so she could stay somewhat grounded.

When oxygen became an issue and they parted, Beca was out of breath and flabbergasted. She did huff with a smile when her synapses fired again. “I…I…t-t-ta…” she felt the familiar and dreaded sensation of stumbling over words coming and closed her mouth to calm down and focus before trying to speak again. “I take it, it’s a date then.”

Chloe’s eyes twinkled as she beamed in response. She bit her bottom lip and hesitated for a couple of seconds before bringing their lips together for a second encore. One thing was certain it was already her new favourite things to do with Beca.

For a fleeting moment the thought that they should probably save some of this for their actual first
date crossed Beca’s mind, but then again she didn’t care much for conventions and let’s be honest kissing Chloe was… wow.

xxxxx

It was a rather long kiss (long enough to almost qualify as a make-out session, in fact), Chloe couldn’t keep the smile off her face all the way back home and was positively giddy by the time she arrived. She found Aubrey sitting on their couch, reading some textbook and taking notes. She sat cross-legged against the armrest so she was facing Aubrey’s side.

“How was your day?”

“Hardly exciting, working on papers, cleaned around, did the groceries to see the light of day then more working,” Aubrey answered without lifting her head from her book. “Yours?”

Since several of Bellas were swamped with work, Aubrey had relented to only do one practice a day for the upcoming week, today it was only choreography practice for those who needed it.

“I’m a bit late with my physics assignments, I have to prepare our next math meeting since I’m the one animating it, I went to the library to get that book I was telling you about, I had lunch with Kevin and Mary from my robotic class so we could discuss our next project, went to the doctor to check the nodes, I kissed Beca, rehearsal was really good, I even managed to make Amy do cardio… oh and I asked Kelsey and she said we’re on again for the singing telegrams,” she said in a one breath.

Aubrey closed her eyes and sighed heavily. “I can’t believe this…” she stated slowly. “How many times have I told you not to wait the last minutes to do your physics assignments, you know how much time it takes you to complete those what with your perfectionism and need to go overboard with details. You said you wanted to go to the party this week-end, which mean you’re going to pull all-nighters, and you know I need you up and alert for rehearsals,” she chided gently.

“Don’t worry, I got this, I promise I’ll be all pepped up for the rehearsals,” Chloe smiled. “Well since you’re working I’m going to make dinner, do you want something in particular?”

“Anything green will do,” Aubrey nodded as she put her glasses back on to continue her reading.
“Oki doc,” Chloe replied.

“Thanks,” the blonde smiled while writing. There was a long silence only broken by the sound of her pen scratching on paper, when she felt Chloe standing up she spoke. “You honestly think I missed the ‘I-kissed-the-alternative-pain-in-my-side’ part of your little info dump?” she asked flatly.

Chloe slowly sat back down. To tell the truth, for a second there she thought she had gotten away with it. “A girl can hope.”

The reason why she had drowned (or at least tried to) the news involving Beca among other information was because she was apprehensive. It was no secret that her best friend and the other girl didn’t like one another, Chloe didn’t like it mostly because she knew that if they gave each other a chance both girls would actually get along as they were much more alike than they imagined.

The other reason she hated the situation was that she liked both girls alike, and as much as she wanted to pursue something with Beca if Aubrey disapproved and if she was to make a choice then her loyalty to Aubrey would win over her fondness of the petite brunette, even though such a decision would break her heart.

The blonde put her books and notes aside, took off her glasses once more. “What are we talking about here?” she pinched the bridge of her nose feeling an impending migraine. “Is it a ‘got-to-get-it-out-of-my-system’ kind of thing or is it something serious?”

“I really like her,” Chloe said seriously. “We’re going on a date tomorrow.”

Aubrey took a deep breath. She wasn’t blind so she had noticed her best friend’s toner quite early on, she would be lying if she said that she hadn’t hoped the redhead would move on from it without acting on it. She didn’t have any affinity with Beca Mitchell, the petite girl was solely responsible for half of the headaches she had suffered since the beginning of this year. Hate was a strong her, but she really, really, didn’t like Beca (and she knew the feeling was mutual). That being said, she loved her best friend, therefore she could and would always compromise to make her happy.

“I’ll stay civil with her as long as she does the same with me. Also, regardless of what will happen between the two of you, she doesn’t get a pass when it comes to the Bellas. That goes for you too, whatever this is it stays outside of the Bellas, I don’t want any drama,” she warned firmly.
After a pause she continued. “I don’t mind her hanging around here, I guess, just… maybe not on a daily basis,” she wrinkled her nose, her patience had its limits, and chances were that she would probably commit a murder if Beca was around every day.

Chloe beamed and hugged her best friend tightly. “You’re the best, I love you,” she landed a loud smack on her friend’s cheek.

“Yeah, yeah…” Aubrey rolled her eyes. “I love you too,” she added with a kiss on the redhead’s crown. “Now go on and feed me.”

“Aye, aye Captain!”

Beca was nervous which was unusual for her, if there was the one thing she was grateful for regarding her speech impediment it was that it had forced her to get thick-skinned pretty early on in life. Yet, standing in front of the redhead’s door she felt nervous. Although she was aware that she wasn’t nervous about the incoming date but rather with the idea to face the very person who opened the door and was now facing her.

“Hey, Aubrey,” she greeted the other girl with the smallest grin.

The blonde gave her half a nod in acknowledgement before stepping away to let her in and closed the door. “Chloe, the troll is here!”

“Screw you, I’m no troll!” Beca bit back, narrowing her eyes at the other girl.

They stared at one another for a moment then with a sigh Aubrey relented to amend her announcement. “Chloe, the hobbit is here!”

A sardonic smile etched on Beca’s lips. “Thank you.”
“You’re welcome,” Aubrey mirrored her expression.

Upstairs Chloe (who had been so excited about the date she had lost track of time and now found herself not anywhere near ready) hung her head with a sigh and shook it. She held her towel tight around herself and stepped into the corridor. “Beca, I’m really sorry but I’m running late, make yourself comfortable, I’ll be right out,” she shouted.

“Take your time, no worries,” even though she couldn’t see the brunette she knew the girl was smirking most likely because she had known she would be late.

“Thank you, I’ll try to be quick!”

Chloe started to retreat in her room again but then thought of something. “Please, try not to kill each other!” she added as a precaution.

“I can behave,” Beca muttered loud enough to be heard and Aubrey just rolled her eyes in response.

“Can I get you anything to drink?” the blonde asked with no enthusiasm whatsoever.

“As much as I enjoy a good cyanide cocktail every once in a while, I think I’m going to pass, but thanks.”

“Too bad those are my specialty, your loss,” Aubrey shrugged.

After a brief awkward silence Aubrey decided to return to what she was doing before the petite brunette’s intrusion. “Well, you heard her, make yourself comfortable.”

She moved back to the couch leaving Beca to decide where to sit. Once she was comfortably settled she grabbed her controller, put her earpiece back on and started her game again.

Beca first figured she’d stay out of the blonde’s way but then it occurred to her that it’d look like she was afraid of the other girl, so after a brief hesitation she joined Aubrey on the couch.
To say she was surprised that Aubrey was playing at some FPS would be an understatement (she wouldn’t have thought the blonde even know what a video game was, or a game period, what with the stick up her butt and all) and though she wouldn’t admit it out loud she was impressed because the girl seemed like quite a skilled player.

“That’s right Jack, you got shot!” Aubrey speaks to her earpiece.

Beca watched the other girl play, wiping out the other players one by one. “Yes, gentlemen your behinds have been whooped by a girl… again,” Aubrey playfully teased.

The young DJ bit the inside of her cheek not to smile at the other girl’s boast. “Oh please, stop finding excuses, get over yourself and admit that I’m good,” Aubrey kept on seemingly answering to a sour loser. She snorted “Yeah right,” she shook her head.

Beca was familiar with the attitude of some players out there. Somehow when a guy beat a guy he was good but whenever a girl beat a guy it wasn’t because she was good, nope, it was because the guy had encountered some problem (unfortunate sneeze, frozen screen, greasy hands, dysfunctional controller, asteroid falling in their room…). It was kind of sad that even now in the 21st century there were still people in the gaming community who were under the impression that a) girls didn’t play, b) if they did they were bad or c) they simply played games that made watching paint dry exciting. That being said the rampant misogyny only served to make the victories all the more enjoyable and sweeter in Beca’s experience.

“Oh, I’m ready so bring it on, just make sure to use your good controller this time, buddy,” though the tone was light, Beca could tell Aubrey was fuming, she almost felt bad for whoever the other player was (almost). “I’m not going anywhere, let me know when you’re all set.”

Aubrey muted her microphone. “I’m about to make that bitch cry so hard he’ll never play again,” she muttered sharply to herself before turning her gear on again (Beca was greatly entertained by the blonde’s gaming persona by now). “Okay, let’s do this.”

If Beca thought Aubrey was good before, she was currently lacking the proper adjective to describe the way the blonde was playing now, it was like she had turned her game up to eleven. The kills were swift, precise and so fast she doubted the other players had time to understand what was happening. The best part was that it seemed effortless for the blonde.

Once again Aubrey muted her microphone.
“This conversation is unnecessary because it goes without saying, but since your ear monstrosities might be affecting the way your brain works, I’ll say it anyway.” Aubrey was addressing her without losing an ounce of focus on her current party.

“Oh, you’re always so spiritual,” Beca huffed.

“Can the sarcasm for the next few minutes because I’ll only say this once. Chloe’s my best friend and I love her. You hurt her in any shape or form and I’ll annihilate you in painful ways you cannot fathom even in your wildest nightmares. Do not test me, because you haven’t seen me pissed off yet.”

The threat was hardly unexpected, if Beca was honest. She wouldn’t lie either, Aubrey’s cold delivery had sent chills down her spine, but the truly scary part was the ease with which she could picture the blonde putting her threat to execution (watching the blonde play made Beca happy that the girl had a virtual outlet because that kind of aggression was just not suitable for the real world)

“Now’s a good time to give me some sign of understanding, Mitchell,” Aubrey prompted when the silence went on longer than she’d have liked.

“I copied loud and clear. My intentions are good and I’ll always do right by her.”

“Good.”

“Damn, nice headshots,” Beca couldn’t hold back her awe any longer. “I must say, it’s kind of earth shattering to find out that you are a hardcore gamer.”

“It shouldn’t be considering that you barely know me, if at all,” Aubrey shrugged.

It was not an attack, just a mere statement of a fact. The enormity of that truth hit them both squarely in the face. Neither could deny that no attempt to reach out for the other had ever been made since they had met. Before either of them could potentially address the issue however, Chloe walked in.

“And here I am, again I’m sorry,” said the redhead.
Beca turned her attention to Chloe and stood up. She could feel drool gather in her mouth as she approached the other girl and admired her. “Wow… you make causal look incredible.”

She winced at the cheesiness of her statement.

“I went the extra mile to make up for being late,” Chloe smiled.

“You’re forgiven.”

They stared at one another, Beca was currently fighting the urge to kiss the redhead, little did she know Chloe was in the same predicament. The tension between the two was palpable however and Aubrey swore she could read both their minds.

“Would it be weird if I kissed you right now?” Beca threw caution to the wind and voiced her thought.

“No,” Chloe breathed out with a shake of her head, her lips stretched into a wide smile.

“Ugh for goodness sake, need I remind you that I’m prone to barfing, do you really think it’s wise to titillate my gag reflexes?”

Chloe rolled her eyes at her best friend. Beca didn’t hold her tongue however. “Geez, you’re such a dictator. Tell me, is it okay if we breathe around you?”

“Last time I checked Mitchell, this was my apartment therefore my dictatorship is justified and allowed.”

“Okay, that’s enough you two, I’ll see you later Bree, have fun kicking asses.”

“You too.”

“Bye Oberführer Posen,” Beca mock saluted over her shoulder.
“Bye, midget.”

Chloe took their bickering as a good sign and since they hadn’t killed one another while she was getting ready, she felt that the odds were on her favour.

“So, what are we…” she didn’t have a chance to finish her question as Beca’s lips silenced her.

Beca had held herself just long enough for them to get out of the apartment and the redhead to close the door, but she really couldn’t wait anymore to feel those lips again, there was just something about kissing Chloe that was addictive.

One of Chloe’s hands clutched Beca’s flannel shirt, pulling the brunette closer while she kissed her back with matching enthusiasm. When they broke the kiss they were both a bit out of breath.

“I know conventions dictate that we wait until the end of the date but I really wanted to kiss you.”

“Conventions are overrated, feel free to give into that urge at any time,” Chloe bit her bottom lips, not even trying to conceal her mischievous smile.

xxxxx

Amazingly enough, the only change occurring since their first date was the addition of kissing (lot of kissing, lot of it). Beca and Chloe were hanging around the way they always had only now, more often than not, they’d end up losing each other into grand make-out sessions (not that either objected to that).

Three weeks after their first date, even though kissing had turned into a daily thing, the novelty and warm fuzzy feeling attached to it hadn’t worn off one bit, if anything the chemistry was building up, getting stronger as time went by.

This explosive chemistry forced them to be mindful of where they would indulge themselves with kisses. For instance Chloe’s room possessed the great quality Beca’s didn’t: it was private. Usually they were both very aware of that fact, today however they had forgotten about it.
The penalty for that oversight was a chaos of awkwardness and embarrassment for all parties involved.

The details were blurry, what was supposed to be a brief kiss goodbye, turned into a long kiss which somehow ended with Beca sitting on her bed with her back against the bookshelf and Chloe straddling her, the top three buttons of her shirt undone and Beca’s hands gliding against the skin of the small of her back.

Both girls were caught up on each other (as they usually would when they’d kiss) and the world around had faded to a distant memory (as it usually would when they’d kiss) which is how neither of them heard the door open and close.

As for Kimmy-Jin, engrossed in the text message she was sending she failed to realize what she had walked in on.

There were five seconds of blissful unawareness, the proverbial calm before the storm.

Then reality crashed on the three of them like a hammer.

First Kimmy looked up from her cell phone, caught off guard by the sight she stumbled backward hitting the door behind her, the sudden uncoordinated movement causing one of the books she was holding to fall on the floor. The dull thud broke the hormonal haze Chloe and Beca were caught into causing them to realize they no longer were alone.

“Uh… sorry!…” “Kimmy!” “Sh…”

Three voices mingled in the air at the same time while chaos expended.

Trying to avert her eyes Kimmy turned around to leave but the shock had shot her orientation skills so she found herself looking for a doorknob on the wrong side of the door. Chloe, in her haste to get back to a decent position while buttoning her shirt only succeeded to lose her balance, Beca too focused on her inner prayer for the whole thing to be nothing but a dream failed to catch her on time and could only watch her girlfriend painfully land on the floor.
As the three girls faced each other again with flushed cheeks and batted breaths, they all understood the true meaning of the words ‘awkward silence’, ‘mortification’ and ‘wish the ground could open up under my feet’.

Chloe was the first to recover. “Hey Kimmy… sorry about that…”

“Yeah, w-w-we g-got…” Beca tried but immediately shut up unable to get a good grip on words.

“… carried away,” the redhead picked up the brunette’s drift easily.

“I uh… sorry, didn’t know… mean to…” Kimmy didn’t know what she was trying to say but was certain that the other girls had understood the general idea.

“We’re really so…” Chloe was about to apologize again when she caught glimpse of Kimmy’s watch, looking at her own for confirmation her eyes almost popped out of her head.

If she had had to guess she’d have said that she had only been kissing Beca for five, ten minutes top but definitely not an hour and a half (where the hell had that time go?)

“Crap!” her sudden exclamation and subsequent panic had the non negligible effect to shatter the ambient awkwardness. “Aubrey’s going to kill me!” she hurriedly looked for her jacket but before she had a chance to grab it her phone came to life flashing her best friend’s name.

She took the device and winced in anticipation. “Bree, hey, sorry I…”

“Don’t you even dare trying to lie blow smoke in my ear; I know you were most likely in a lip-lock with the hobbit! This is the second time your toner’s interfering with the Bellas! I warned you about that happening, so get yourself together because I’m losing patience!”

“Yes, yes, you’re right, I’m so sorry, I promise it won’t happen again,” Chloe immediately apologized.

“Just get your ass over here Chloe!” Aubrey ordered before hanging up.
“This is going to be a fun afternoon,” Chloe muttered with a sigh. Aubrey was a handful when stressed and upset (and that was an understatement).

“Sorry,” Beca offered.

“You should be. I’m blaming you for this.”

“Me?!”

“Yes, you.”

Beca huffed in mock indignation. “Sure, complain now!”

“Why do you have to be so damn irresistible?” the redhead continued her muttering.

Kimmy coughed unwillingly at the bickering, reminding the other two girls of her presence.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry,” Chloe made a face then grabbed her jacket. She went to kiss Beca but then remembered that it was how the whole thing had started. So she just shook her head before walking to the door. “I’m really sorry, you had to see this,” she addressed Kimmy.

The young Asian nodded. “It’s okay,” she muttered.

They clumsily stepped around one another so Chloe could leave. “I’ll see you tomorrow,” Chloe referred to their weekly math meeting then left.

The two roommates were now alone with a new pet elephant standing in the corner of their room. Kimmy debated whether or not to leave without acknowledging the animal but then opted to focus on picking her books from the floor and went to her desk. Grabbing a piece of paper she scribbled something quickly on it then turned to push the paper in Beca’s direction.
Beca frowned, but did no motion to take the paper

“My number,” Kimmy stated the obvious.

“I’m flattered Kimmy, but surely you understood from the recent mayhem that I was with Chloe,” Beca tried to ease the tension with her trademarked sarcasm.

Her roommate narrowed her eyes at her clearly not ready to find the joke funny yet.

“Sorry,” Beca pursed her lips.

“So you can… let me know when to pull all-nighters at the library… every now and then.”

Kimmy wasn’t sure why she was giving her roommate a pass or even why she was offering to be amenable but she suspected that it had to do with the redhead more than anything because she knew she wouldn’t have done the same if her roommate had been with puppy boy.

Beca nodded in understanding even though she was more than a little stunned by the offer. She took the paper and Kimmy simply returned to her desk giving her back to her roommate. To be honest Beca had not thought that they’d ever need to come up with a system regarding extra privacy. Though she was surprised at Kimmy’s willingness to compromise, she was grateful nonetheless and figured it was only normal that she’d compromise as well.

The DJ got up from her bed, then wrote her own number on a sticker note. She gathered her laptop and a few things in her bag. She put the note on Kimmy’s desk “So you can let me know when you need the room to… host your study group.”

Her roommate gave a tiny nod of acknowledgement. Well, now that they had agreed on the way to handle their new pet elephant, Beca felt that a little time away from one another was in order so that everybody could pretend that the past ten minutes had ever happened.

“I’m off to the station,” she mentioned before exiting the room.
“Sniper top left.”

Aubrey took the information in motion and moved her character accordingly.

“Three incoming right flank,” Beca added.

It was kind of weird, Beca and Aubrey spent more time in each other’s company (granted they were seldom alone but still) since she and Chloe got together. They would always bicker and annoy the hell out of one another but sometimes they’d have a quiet time which more often than not included video games (who would have thought it’d be their common ground?)

“Reload.”

Right now for instance, Beca had come to see her girlfriend. After spending a little time together, Chloe had shooed her out of her room in order to finish some homework so they could go out later. This was how she found herself alone with Aubrey while the other girl was purging her daily dose of anger and frustration.

“Sweet,” Beca pouted in appreciation at the blonde’s latest headshot. “Grenade, incoming.”

Aubrey grunted and paused the game.

“Sorry,” the brunette tried to deflate the incoming berating.

The blonde just got up from the couch to snatch a controller from the drawer of the furniture under the TV. She went back on the couch extending it to Beca. “Just shut up and make yourself useful.”

Beca gaped a few seconds (clearly not expecting the gesture) before taking the device with a tiny nod.

While Aubrey couldn’t deny the brunette’s indications were spot on and useful she didn’t really need them and it was quickly getting on her nerves. She reset the game to integrate Beca as a new player.
It didn’t take long for the both of them to find their groove as a team and even less time for them to tear damages online.

Chloe was working on an assignment since she wanted to spend as much time as possible with Beca this week-end. Things couldn’t be better with the brunette, everything was running smoothly, Beca still had to be pushed a little when it came to talking but she did make the effort. They did enjoy spending a lot of time together but at the same time they weren’t attached by the hips.

To say that they were fond of one another would be an understatement. She’d never been shy to demonstrate affection but if she listened to herself she’d have her lips glued to Beca’s in permanence. In the end the ‘hardest’ part of their new dynamic was the difficulty to keep their hands and lips to themselves. There was also a lot of chemistry between them, not that she was complaining.

Speaking of chemistry she really had focus on her current assignment if she wanted to go out with her girlfriend any time soon. Plus she had left Beca alone with Aubrey and if those two managed to get along a little better since she was with Beca, she didn’t want to push her luck too far.

She took a deep breath and decided to go get some of her favorite drink in order to get in her mental work zone. Upon exiting her room she could hear voices from below and for a second feared that Aubrey and Beca were arguing. She sighed and hurried downstairs to play the referee but she stopped abruptly at the last steps completely surprised by the sight that greeted her.

“… next time lay off on the eyeliner clearly it’s impairing your vision,” Aubrey noted.

“Says the girl who doesn’t know the difference between left and right,” Beca countered.

“At least I know how to aim.”

“Shut up.”

“Articulate.”

“Headshot! What was that about my aim?”
“Lucky shot, nothing to write home about.”

If it wasn’t for the bickering Chloe would have said that her best friend and girlfriend had been swapped with other people.

“I almost lost thanks to your stellar skills… I haven’t experience that in a decade.”

“Maybe if your head wasn’t so big, I’d have enough room to play properly,” Beca bit back.

“Please, don’t blame me for your poor game play.”

“Whatever… oh great here comes another idiot.”

“I hate when they do that… they don’t want to learn how to play instead they just use the most powerful weapon.”

“Let’s take them down,” Beca nodded.

“Lead the way, Bilbo.”

Chloe was torn between being amused and glad or freaked out, forgoing her snack she retreated back in her room to finish her work so she could be done before whatever spell those two were under wore off.

It took her an hour to finish and check her work, when she went downstairs again the two other girls were still playing.

“Flank me on the right,” Beca instructed pushing her buttons frantically.

“Way ahead of you.”
Chloe tried to follow the action, and though she was not a big gamer herself she could see the efficiency of the two girls. She could easily see their dynamic work wonders on the Bellas, not that it would happen with Aubrey’s current mindset (but a girl could hope).

“I’m all done,” she announced her presence.

She didn’t get an immediate response but didn’t take offence. She knew she had been heard and that they were just too engrossed and focused to reply now but would as soon as they were done.

“Boo yah!” Beca exclaimed holding her right hand out and Aubrey gave her a high five.

“Not bad Mitchell.”

Beca turned to Chloe. “Sorry, did you manage to beat your chemistry to submission?” she grinned.

“Yup.”

“Cool,” she stood up handing the controller back to Aubrey.

Chloe grabbed Beca’s collar and pecked her lips playfully.

“You want to come with?” Beca asked Aubrey when they had almost reached the door.

“On your date?” Aubrey arched an eyebrow.

“We’re going to have a few at the Cool Head, Amy, Stacie and CR are probably already there wrecking havoc,” Beca shrugged.

Aubrey looked at the brunette, she could feel herself gaping like a fish on dry land.
“It’s not rocket science Posen,” Beca added.

“Uh… let me change real quick,” Aubrey replied in a haze before retreating to her room.

Now Chloe was really wondering if she had inhaled something or just walked into an alternate universe. Her girlfriend had just asked her best friend to join them out… on her own accord. It wouldn’t have been such a shocking thing if that statement didn’t refer to Beca and Aubrey. Sure the two girls more or less tolerated one another but not to the point of being friends.

In any case (hallucination or parallel universe) Chloe couldn’t wipe the smile off her face as she stared at Beca.

“What?” the young DJ asked genuinely not understanding the look her girlfriend was giving her.

Chloe wisely decided not to make a big deal out of whatever that was. “Nothing,” she said with a shake of her head. “Actually…” she hooked a finger on Beca’s shirt and pulled her closer so she could capture her lips again.

The evening was good and surprisingly enough for the first time Beca and Aubrey’s bickering seemed more like friendly teasing. Chloe was happy because the two persons whom she cared about the most were finally getting along, even though it was just for one day.

Most of the Bellas were at the bar where there was much laughing, singing, dancing and crazy stories, then they ended up at the Lighthouse for a snack before parting ways.

Chloe went to Beca’s dorm to have a little more time with her girlfriend while Aubrey went back to their place. The redhead quickly scanned the room when Beca opened the door, when it was clear that Kimmy wasn’t there she grabbed Beca to turn her around and pull her close to kiss her, the weight of their bodies closing the door. Far from being taken off guard Beca simply chortled in their kiss.

Several minutes later Beca tried to move them to the bed for a more comfortable position but Chloe didn’t seem incline to step away from the door.

“Kimmy might come back at any moment, I really don’t want to get busted again,” the redhead explained between kisses. “This is just a goodnight kiss.”
“She’s away for the week-end,” Beca informed before attaching her mouth to Chloe’s neck.

“Really?” the word was breathed out.

“Uh huh…”

Chloe grabbed Beca’s face to bring her lips back on hers, Beca’s hold on her hips grew tighter as the kiss heated up. They parted staring at one another, Chloe only breaking the eye contact to lock the door, then wordlessly she started kissing her girlfriend again, her slightly trembling hands working on the buttons of Beca’s plaited shirt.

They eventually stumbled onto the bed, a tangle of limbs and clothes.

There were sighs, and moans, a lot of writhing and wiggling, kisses, sucking, touching, nibbling, scratching, some teasing and biting. Several moments later, they had both climaxed, yes, but the overall experience was more than underwhelming.

Lying side by side they were staring at the ceiling, the silence stretching between them.

Beca puffed up her cheeks and silently let the air go. “Well… that was…” she trailed off, she didn’t want to offend Chloe but didn’t (and honestly couldn’t) lie either.

“…awful,” Chloe finished pensively.

Beca felt relieved that at least they were on the same wavelength on the matter. “Yup.”

“I don’t…” Chloe frowned. “I mean, you’d think with all the chemistry…”

“I know! Right?”

Silence filled the room once more. Chloe replayed the whole thing in her head then narrowed her
eyes and bit her bottom lip as a thought crossed her mind. “This wasn’t… your first time, was it?”

The brunette scoffed in disbelief. “Oh sure, let’s blame it on me. I hate to break it to you but you didn’t exactly send me on orbit either,” she was peeved at the implication.

“I mean, there’s nothing wrong about being inexperienced…”

“Yeah, I’m aware thank you…I could ask you the same, in all honesty,” Beca defended herself.

“I’m just saying that, you know, if it was the case a little heads-up would have been nice, I would have proceeded differently…”

They were speaking at the same time, not really taking the other’s answers in.

“Oh screw you Chloe… I’m sorry to piss on your lollipop but the answer is no, sorry, you were not the first,” Beca declared firmly, her irritation pouring from her voice. “…quite far from it actually,” she added in a mumble.

True, Beca was socially awkward most of the time but she found out quite early on that social skills and sex didn’t have to mesh in order to happen.

She used to make money playing DJ for parties, nothing too big but most of the time it was for people a bit older. In a way she had been in the college scene before being in college. The thing was, being good behind the turn tables made her sex appeal skyrocket and in that case not being talkative gave her a ‘dark and mysterious’ air, needless to say she had never had to make a lot of efforts on the seduction field.

While she wouldn’t categorize herself as a serial player, she had had her fair share of hook-ups (one night or sort of regular), and them being with more experienced people she had learnt a lot to say the least. Therefore, tonight’s fiasco and Chloe’s insinuation were harsh digs at her pride.

The silence was tense, Beca couldn’t believe the gall of Chloe (blaming it all on her, when clearly it took two to tango), while the redhead was unconvinced by her assertion of experience.
Chloe sighed, her tone gentler when she spoke. “All I’m saying is... you were kind of... fumbling,” she tried to be more diplomatic.

“Oh yeah, I was,” Beca affirmed sharply. “Here’s a fun fact though, in case you’ve never noticed I’m a lefty and you had my dominant hand in a death grip, after several failed attempts to get it back I tried to improvised with the other one…” she defended herself. “…and now we know I’m not ambidextrous on that particular field.”

“Oh.”

“Well, since we’re on the critic portion of the evening... what was with kicking me with your knee?” Beca retaliated, not one to back off when her skills were called out.

“I was cramping,” Chloe protested with incredulity.

“And you almost bit my ear off because...?” Beca trailed off. She was being borderline petty, that she knew, but then again Chloe had started it.

“Okay, that was an unfortunate event, I knocked my elbow and that hurt, my jaw contracted in pain on reflex,” the redhead winced apologetically. “And what’s your excuse with that weird move of your wrist?”

“Again, I was trying to work with my weak hand, that move is gold... trust me,” Beca snorted.

“...gold–plated,” the redhead muttered with a snort.

“Oh shut up.”

“...whatever.”

“I don’t want to sound conceited, but I’ve never had anyone complain about my skills nor have I ever left someone unsatisfied,” Beca defended her honor after a long pause. “At least, since I was over the awkwardness of the first times, you know...”
“Me neither.”

“And yet, this sucked,” the young DJ stated the obvious again.

“Yeah… big time.”

Once more they fell into silence both picked and frustrated at the situation. The chemistry between them being so high all the time when they did something as simple as kissing they had both figured that getting physical would be a high octane, mind-blowing experience. Instead of that, it had blown. Period.

“Okay, you know what? The more I think about it and the more I realize that the real problem here is your tiny bed,” Chloe concluded. “Don’t get me wrong, it’s propitious for cuddling, just not so much for more physical activities.”

“That… is a very good point,” Beca reflected.

This time the silence didn’t hold any tension. Beca looked at her bedmate with quirked eyebrows when Chloe laughed to herself.

“So… just to be clear, this wasn’t your first time,” the redhead teased.

“Ugh…” instead of replying with words Beca opted for a tickle attack knowing how sensitive Chloe was.

Chloe wiggled out of reach completely forgetting that she was on the edge of the bed, before she knew what was happening she hit the floor in a muttered thump.

“Ouch,” Beca laughed. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Chloe chortled. “How come I’m always the one ending on the floor?” she winced.
“Hey, seriously are you okay?” Beca was concerned now, she hovered further on the edge of her bed.

Before she could register what was happening Chloe had pulled her down, she whimpered in surprise and barely managed not to crush her girlfriend upon landing.

“Chloe! You think this is funny?!”

Chloe burst out laughing at the indignant look on Beca’s face. “I clearly do.”

“You suck,” Beca pouted.

A mischievous spark lit up Chloe’s gaze. “That also, I do,” she agreed as she attached her lips to Beca’s neck and sucked on it.

There were sighs, and moans, a lot of writhing and wiggling, kisses, sucking, touching, nibbling, scratching, some teasing and biting. Several moments later both were spent, struggling to catch their breath.

“That… was…” Chloe panted heavily.

“Yeah…”

“Your…bed was…”

“Definitely the problem…”

“Totally… good heaven…”

If their first time had been a wet firecracker, this time had been like a spark in a barrel of gun powder. They had expected mind-blowing fireworks, truth be told it had been well beyond that (much to their delight and relief).
“I officially apologize… that wrist move… pure fucking gold…” Chloe smiled dumbly at the ceiling.

“Told you,” Beca smirked with unconcealed pride.

Chloe propped herself on one elbow and let her hand roaming over Beca’s sensitive flesh in a feather-like caress. “So… does that mean you used your best moves on me already?”

“Why, did you?”

“No silly,” the redhead huffed with amusement. “So?” she prompted again.

The brunette let out a breathy chuckle, Chloe’s touch already igniting her drive again. “Please… that was a mere warm up,” she boasted.

“Cocky.”

“Obviously not,” Beca chose to take her literally.

“Pretentious, then.”

“Nah, just honest,” the brunette shrugged.

“Well you have my full attention, so bring it on,” Chloe challenged.

Beca’s smile turned feral as she caught Chloe’s wandering hand, getting on top of her girlfriend. The night was definitely young.

xxxxx
“Put that on the table please,” Chloe instructed, pushing a large bowl full of warm mashed potatoes into Beca’s hands, stealing a quick peck on the brunette’s lips before returning to the kitchen.

Thanksgiving being next week and most of the Bellas going home for the occasion, Aubrey and Chloe saw it fit to throw a dinner together for the Bellas at their place so they could celebrate all together. Beca had participated to the best of her abilities (that meant getting the drinks, setting the table and following directions she was given).

Denise, Jessica, Ashley, Cynthia–Rose, Aubrey and Chloe spent the afternoon in the kitchen and they had made quite a feast.

Beca felt a bit awkward and at the same time she was tentatively enjoying the warm feeling spreading in her chest. She had never had any trouble hanging around with the other girls but right now it felt different than the other times.

They sat at the table savoring a meal, everyone sharing a little more about themselves. Beca even told one story about herself. After a great evening full of laughter, singing and a movie, all the Bellas left safe from Beca.

Chloe was trying hard not to smile like an idiot as she watched Aubrey and Beca bickering and teasing each other playfully while they did the dishes.

They shared hot cocoa while engaging in yet another musical debate. It was almost 1 a.m. when Aubrey stood up with a yawn.

“I’m going to call it a night,” she announced. “I shall be listening to loud music so you may have a thorough and lengthy debate about physics or whatever if such is your wish.”

Chloe gently swatted her best friend’s shoulder with the back of her hand which made Aubrey smirked. They hugged, Aubrey breaking the embrace with a kiss on the top of the Chloe’s head.

She then turned to Beca. “’Night Bilbo,” she added with a slight movement of her head.

“’Night,” Beca actually made an effort not to grin. Neither of them would admit it out loud but they were both aware to be on the verge of friendship.
Beca and Chloe kept talking a little more, finishing their cocoa.

“What?” Beca asked when she noticed Chloe staring at her.

“I’m happy,” the redhead beamed. “You make me happy,” she amended after a slight hesitation, not wanting to send the brunette running.

To get Beca to talk on a personal level in general was akin to pull a teeth, so to get her to talk about feelings was kind of a wistful thinking. That being said Chloe could appreciate the fact that the brunette just expressed herself differently through gestures and actions, all of which did speak louder than words so in the end the redhead didn’t feel too frustrated by the lack of verbal communication.

She was about to change the topic (she could feel discomfort rolling off her girlfriend) but was surprised when Beca spoke. “Yeah well, it’s apparently contagious… not that I’m complaining or anything,” she mumbled.

Chloe’s smile turned brighter (if that was possible).“So…” she leaned her hips against the counter watching her girlfriend cleaning their mugs. “Are you up for a ‘thorough and lengthy debate about physics’?” she winked.

“Like you need to ask,” Beca dried her hands before kissing the redhead.

Things heated up quickly (as they usually would), Chloe forced herself to break the contact. “Bree will have our heads on stakes if we had sex here,” she breathed out heavily.

“Only if she finds out,” Beca smirked. “We did get away with it twice already,” she added in a conspirational whisper.

“Shhh!” Chloe hushed her laughing. “Come on Smarty Pants,” she hooked her fingers into Beca’s belt loops and started to guide them both upstairs.
Beca looked at her roommate when there was a knock on their door; Kimmy just shrugged indicating that she wasn’t expecting anyone. The DJ narrowed her eyes at the other girl because funny enough when neither of them was expecting company she always ended up being the one to open the door, and Kimmy was well aware of that (if the very, very subtle smirk on her face was of any indication).

The little brunette forced herself not to sigh out loud when she found her father on the other side, she stepped away to let him in, giving him a less than lukewarm welcome. They hadn’t really spoken since the broken window incident, and every attempt to reestablish communication had been half-assed at best.

“How are you doing?”

“I’m doing well, Graham, thank you.”

She tried to reign in her irritation, aware that he hadn’t say anything to antagonize her, at least not yet.

“How about you?” she made an effort to speak in a softer tone.

“Alright as well,” Graham replied with a small grin. There was a long pause during which he naively hoped that talking to his daughter would be easier this time around. “How are you getting on with your classes?”

“With the usual excellence, as always.”

Graham nodded. “That’s good. And how’s your…”

“Alright, no offence but could we please end this idle, empty chit-chat and skip to the reason of your unexpected visit?” Beca cut through the chase, unable to stand the awkwardness any longer.

“Right, I’ve come to abduct you,” Graham attempted levity. He cleared his throat when his trait of humor fell flat. “It’s Thanksgiving, I want you to come home and…”
“I’m sorry, home? Where would that be?” Beca’s tone was sharper than a knife. It didn’t take much to send her on the edge when in presence of her father, but there were words that would trigger a violent knee jerk reaction, ‘home’ and ‘family’ being on top of that list.

Graham inwardly winced but made sure not to lose his temper when he amended his sentence. “I want you to come to Sheila and I’s. She’d be very happy to have you with us and the boys…”

“Oh I’m sure she would.”

The patience in the older Mitchell was wearing thin but once again he did not rise to the bait. “I know, you two don’t see eye to eye but surely you can make a truce long enough to go through one meal.”

Hate was a strong word but Beca knew for a fact that Sheila despised her. The woman had never hid that fact and the feeling was mutual. However Beca had found the perfect weapon against the bitch: utter indifference. It drove the woman up the wall (to Beca’s great delight), but that was not enough to willingly want to spend time in the company of the woman if she had a choice.

As for her half brothers… she got along okay with Calvin, the eldest – the one from Sheila’s previous relationship, mostly because of the common ground they stood on. They had both been through the same (cheating parents, broken family, nasty divorce), neither of them was particularly happy about the new family collage anymore than they were interested in building any sort of real new sibling relationship, but they had bonded nonetheless (kind of). Then there was the youngest, Daniel, who was born from the new union, Beca couldn’t really blame him for he hadn’t asked for anything but she did resent his being because he was a constant reminder of the painful disintegration of her original family.

“Yeah, thanks, but no thanks,” the brunette dismissed the invitation.

“It’s Thanksgiving, Beca. No one should spend it alone. What else are you going to do? Brood all alone while twiddling with your… your DJ thing?!” his words hadn’t finished coming out that Graham was already regretting them, he had just been frustrated and lashed out.

“You can cancel if you want, it’s okay,” Kimmy-Jin’s voice surprised both father and daughter alike.
Beca’s head snapped in her roommate direction as she had managed to completely forget her presence.

In truth, Kimmy-Jin had meant to escape the room discreetly but Beca’s father was blocking the way out, so she had made herself invisible (which had been remarkably easy), trying to ignore an interaction that made both silence and awkwardness physically painful.

Not wanting to witness a fight however, she had stepped in and was now pinned by two pairs of eyes.

Beca had felt white hot rage picking up instantly at her father’s remark and her next words would have ripped the man to shreds if she hadn’t been cut off just in time by Kimmy-Jin.

She had yet to properly register what the other girl had said. Whatever it was, the unexpected intervention had effectively put her off her footing and stopped her incoming outburst flat.

“I’ll tell the others there was a change of plan,” Kimmy added giving the other girl as much context as she could when she saw confusion in the brunette’s eyes.

Understanding dawned on Beca and she followed along immediately. “No… we’re good.”

She turned back to her father. “I have plans I’m looking forward to with my friends,” her tone was calm but her anger palpable.

“Oh… good… good,” Graham Mitchell breathed out with a nod.

“We need to get ready,” Beca added to dismiss him.

“Right… well, I’ll leave you to it then,” the man smiled before turning around to leave.

He was barely out when he stepped back in unexpectedly.

“I…”
Graham Mitchell was a man of the letters; he was a prolific and highly regarded English Professor. He had mastered the art, the infinite beauty that was using words. Yet, whenever he faced his daughter, words always failed him miserably.

Delivering lectures in front of massive crowds was easy, he was in his element. Right now though, he was like a fish on dry land. He was trying to have a heart to heart with his daughter when they hadn’t had a conversation that wasn’t an argument in years (building a rocket out of paperclips and matchsticks felt like an easier task right now)

He wanted things to change however, and in order for that to happen he had to be the one to set things in motion, that he knew for a fact.

“I owe you an apology,” he spoke before he could find a reason not to do this. “I was out of line and I didn’t mean to belittle what you do.”

Beca immediately started to question her state of wakefulness.

“I actually owe you more than one, starting with the other day…I tend to make assumptions about you and… well, react like an idiot as a result.”

If she wasn’t speechless, Beca would have asked what was going on. She was half convinced that her father was about to announce that he was terminally ill or something.

“I know that so far my performance as your father has been far from stellar. I think I did a decent job at the beginning but I lost my way and did bad choices rather quickly. Even if it doesn’t seem so, I’m aware that you’re past the point of needing me for anything now.”

Beca was fairly certain to be on drugs now. There was no way her father was actually saying those things, right?

“I can’t change the past anymore than you can change the fact that I’ll always be your father. I’d like us to have a relationship that is neither bitter nor outright antagonistic.”

Apparently Beca’s feelings about the idea were transparent because Graham rushed on as if to
prevent her from responding. “I know, I know… there’s a lot of work to do, most of which has to come from my end, and that’s fine, really.”

The man paused and took a deep breath. “The point is, I’m trying here and I won’t stop. If you don’t want to meet me halfway that’s alright, all I’m asking from you is for one tiny step in my direction,” he pleaded. “Whenever you’re ready, of course.”

Beca stared at her father trying to take anything in as she was slowly starting to accept that this was neither a dream nor a side effect of some drug. She didn’t know how to respond, but she’d be lying if she said that his words hadn’t struck a chord within her.

“Alright, I’ll let you two get ready. Have a happy Thanksgiving,” Graham chose to leave rather than wait for an answer. As true as Rome hadn’t been built in one day, he had to accept that his relationship with his daughter wouldn’t be mended the second he decided to get it back on track.

The brunette hated to admit it but as tough as she had made herself to be, there was still a tiny part of her that was nothing but a little girl longing for her daddy’s attention and affection. She had mainly resolved herself to the fact that she would never get a proper relationship with her father, what with everything that had happened in the past. However, to hear him say all those things she couldn’t help but feel a spark of hope, even though her reason told her that she shouldn’t fall for it.

“I’ll call you next week,” she spoke before her father left. He turned around so fast she swore she had heard his neck crack. “We could have coffee… or something,” she shrugged.

There was only a grin on his lips but Graham was restraining himself from whooping and dancing for fear of scaring off his daughter. “I’ll look forward to it. You girls be careful and have fun,” and with that he left the room.

Beca sighed, not sure how to feel about what had just happened. She didn’t want to dwell on it either so she decided that distraction was in order.

She was startled when she saw Kimmy-Jin at her desk, she had once again managed to forget the other girl. They stared at one another in silence. “I don’t know why you did what you did but… thanks,” Beca offered.

“Fear to be accused of conspiracy for murder 2.”
There was a beat, then Beca laughed softly. “That was actually a good one. Who knew you could be funny?”

Kimmy just rolled her eyes, and Beca swore she saw the flash of a grin.

“You ready?”

Beca squinted her eyes with suspicion. “Ready… for what?”

“No one should spend Thanksgiving alone,” the young Asian echoed Beca’s father.

“Thanks but I’m good, seriously…” Beca had no desire to be around people, much less around people she didn’t know.

“You owe me,” Kimmy-Jin simply pushed further.

“Oh now that’s low.”

“Perfectly fitted for you then.”

“Ah, ah, hilarious,” the brunette replied with her flattest tone. “And I despise you again,” Beca sung with a fake smile.

Kimmy ignored the barb and added. “Cho and DJ will be there, come on.”

Beca didn’t want to go, but she did owe Kimmy-Jin for preventing a fight with her father which in turns might have been the trigger for his ‘desire to mend their relationship’ speech.

Damn it.

She had looked forward some time alone.
Kimmy stepped out but didn’t walk away clearly waiting for her, Beca sighed heavily as a reminder that she was going against her will.

Forty minutes later she found herself in a familiar place. They were at DJ’s cousin, she had come to spend most of her weekends there with DJ and often Benji using the studio that was in the basement to jam around or just create tracks. Today however the house was packed.

Beca had been anxious but everyone made sure she was at ease, she had found herself engulfed in easy conversations about music or other. She usually hated festivities, especially anything revolving around family because they were unnecessary reminders of the wreckage that was hers.

She hadn’t thought it would be the case but she enjoyed herself throughout the day, meeting quite fascinating and nice people who didn’t mind when she stayed silent, just listening and appreciating the moment. She had found herself thinking back to times when her family still qualified as a somewhat happy bunch, when the warm feeling of contentment was going around like it could never wear out.

By the time it was almost one in the morning, when most of the people had call it a night, Kimmy, Cho, DJ, his cousin and Beca stayed up sharing hot drinks, pumpkin pie and playing some made up game.

Beca looked at Kimmy-Jin who was next to her. “Thank you,” the two words were heartfelt and held much more than she could express. The day had been a pleasant surprise, she was deeply grateful for the unexpected turn of event.

As it always was the case between them, Kimmy-Jin understood the unsaid beyond the spoken words of her roommate. For all the oddness of their interaction, they couldn’t deny that they were in tune with one another or that they were quite alike on many aspects.

Kimmy-Jin’s brief, shy smile was mirrored by Beca’s, both of them aware of the subtle shift operating at that moment. Although they could definitely not call each other a friend, there was now the certainty that they’d eventually reach that point someday in a not so distant future.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Howdy everyone! As always thank you so much for the kudos and your kind words, you are the sweetest!

Well, it took much longer than expected to complete this part, but here it is.

Enjoy,
Frosty ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part 5

Things were going great. In fact, all was good in the best world possible.

Beca would have never thought it likely (she’d deny it if asked) but she was starting to like that whole college thing.

Putting aside the rehearsals where Aubrey kind of turned into Satan’s henchman, she had a great time with the Bellas, they hung around a lot and laughing was a daily thing when they were together. Speaking of Aubrey, though neither of them was ready to call their interaction friendship, it was a fact, they were already there.

Then there was Chloe. Everything the redhead touched or did was magic (yes, it was as corny as it sounded). Ever since they had met, Beca’s world had been thrown upside down, and since they were dating well… Beca was a certified happiness junky (it was harder and harder to keep her broody, dark, cool personality in check – the one she had perfected so well over the years, damn you Chloe!). At the very least she had the Bellas as an excuse to break into songs (yeah, that’s how bad that whole my–girlfriend–is–awesome–and–makes–me–super–duper–hyper–happy thing was).

Christmas break with the Bellas was interesting to say the least. They had delivered singing telegrams and cheers all around like Santa’s personal elves, done a gig or two for parties, or just hung around for some memorable karaoke nights.

Christmas Eve had been spent in the same fashion as Thanksgiving, with Kimmy, DJ and Cho and the addition of Jesse and Benji, only this time they had gathered with some of the Bellas at the
For the first time in a long time Beca was happy, she was enjoying herself (her mojo was on fire, she was creating music like crazy), she was having a good time with people surrounding her (while she still had some progress to make as far as social skills went, she did fit in which was a first in itself).

In short, life was good and uncomplicated.

“...I’m telling you, if a cover is good and I mean really good, it completely eclipses the original. Take ‘All along the watchtower’ for example.”

“I don’t know, there are good covers of that one out there, but nothing beats Hendrix’s original, in my opinion,” Chloe mused.

“Ah, but see, that’s exactly my point. Jimi did such an amazing cover that it serves as a reference for people when they want to do their own version.”

Chloe stopped on her tracks. “Wait, Hendrix’s a cover?”

“Yup, it’s an original from Bob Dylan, Jimi covered it six months after it came out and basically rerouted music history’s course,” Beca explained. “Even Dylan liked Jimi’s version better.”

“You’re a bottomless well of musical information,” said Chloe before kissing Beca quickly.

Beca blushed at the compliment then frowned. “Wait, did you just called me a music nerd?”

“I did, but notice that I had put the forms to it,” the redhead stuck her tongue out mischievously and winked.
“Dude, not cool,” Beca protested.

“Shut up, you liked it.”

They started kissing, but Chloe put an end to it after a few seconds. “Enough of that or we’re going to be late.”

For Chloe, kissing her girlfriend was always an exercise in restraint, because if she was listening to herself, she’d have dragged Beca back to her place for sexier activities.

With the second round around the corner Aubrey was working them to the bone with a tough regimen. That meant three rehearsals a day no matter what (they had worked a scheduled that fitted everybody, so sometimes they had rehearsal at the crack of dawn or on the verge of midnight, literally).

In order to keep their sanity and good moods, the Bellas would generally have breakfast together before the first rehearsal of the day when it was super early, like today.

As they were approaching the Lighthouse to join the others, Beca suddenly stopped walking. Chloe only looked back when she felt the tug backward since they were holding hands. She looked at her girlfriend and registered the stunned expression. Following Beca’s line of sight she noticed some guy standing not far from them. He was clearly smiling at the brunette.

“Who’s that?” Chloe asked. “Beca?” she prompted when she received no response from the other girl.

Beca’s expression hardened and she let go of Chloe’s hand. “I’ll be right with you,” she simply said, never looking away from the man.

Chloe wanted to argue as questions started to pile up in her mind but there was an edge in the brunette’s voice that told her it wouldn’t be wise. “Okay,” she went along with Beca’s silent request.

She glanced one last time at the man then put a comforting hand briefly on Beca’s shoulder before
Most of the girls were already at their usual table, she greeted them before joining Stacey, Cynthia-Rose and Amy at the counter to order something for her and Beca. When they got back to their table she made sure to sit where she could have a view of the bay window, keeping a discreet eye on her girlfriend and the mysterious man.

She couldn’t help the slight worry she felt, Beca had gone from relaxed to cold and detached in 2 seconds flat. Whoever the man was, his mere sight had caused the brunette’s thick walls to erupt back up, it didn’t take a genius to figure that whatever their history was, it hadn’t ended on a high note.

It took almost a minute for Beca to get over her surprise. Long buried emotions (rage and resent on top) had burst back up in a matter of seconds, overwhelming her.

She walked to the young man on the other side of the street, only stopping a couple of meters from him.

She had never thought she’d ever see him again. He was still lean but his scrawny frame had gained some muscles and a few tattoos judging by his exposed forearms, his teenage features had morphed into those of a man except for the trademark boyish grin, not much remained of the boy he once was.

“Hey,” he greeted her with a soft grin.

Beca’s fists were tightly balled, her jaw painfully clenched and it took every last ounce of self control not to instinctively punch him.

She took a deep breath before speaking through her teeth. “What are you doing here?”

The man smirked with amusement, Beca however didn’t miss the flash of hurt in his eyes. “Wow, I knew expecting a hug was a tall order, but I’m not even going to get a proper greeting with a smile? Seriously? Come on,” he kept on grinning.
Beca was not pleased, if anything the man’s words only fuelled her rage. “Hello, Aaron, what are you doing here?” she amended her question but her voice remained just as algid as the first time she had asked it.

The man resigned himself to the fact that this was as warm a welcome as he’d get with a sigh. “I’ll take that,” he nodded with a pout. “And to answer your question, I came to see you, of course,” the affectionate grin came back.

“It was kind of a surprise to find out you went here for College, but then I remembered that it was a free ride,” he joked. “Cynicism aside, I guess you and the old man worked things out, which is cool.”

He waited a moment, for a reaction or a few words but Beca could have been made of stone for all he knew since her expression never changed one bit. “You’re really not going to say anything?”

The brunette had a few colorful words in mind but decided to be the bigger person and bypassed them. “Come on, little sis, we haven’t seen each other in ages, you’re only going to give me the silent treatment?”

She noticed that the spark in his green eyes had been a bit dulled with tiredness, but Beca could see wisdom and experience shine through. She could also see the brotherly love reflect in them, just as bright and warm as she remembered it. Right now though it only served to piss her off.

“That’s what you get for playing dead for three years. As matter of fact you could have actually been dead for all I knew,” Beca finally untied her jaw. “You wanted to see me, you saw me. Wish I could say it was good to see you as well, but I can’t be bothered to lie right now. Why don’t you crawl back into whatever hole you came out of? Have a good day,” she finished and turned around to walk away.

“Hey now, wait… fuck!” she heard him curse, then she felt her wrist being pulled.

She extricated herself from his grasp, holding her fist in the air as a silent threat for an incoming punch. Aaron instantly put his hands up in surrender.

They stared at one another for a moment, then Beca lowered her fist. She didn’t say anything, but she didn’t walk away either, granting him another minute of her time.
Aaron sighed heavily, he took a deep breath in order to reign over his anger and frustration. His voice was gentle when he spoke though. “Good to know your pig-headed character is still there,” he stated.

Beca decided to walk away again but he hurried to speak once more.

“Look, I get it okay? I didn’t stick to the plan and I didn’t visit, but you know I wasn’t exactly having the time of my life. I understand your anger and the stubborn silence, I do, but surely we can get past that now,” he argued softly. “And by the way, I think you’re being a tad unfair. If one of us should reproach the other to play dead, that should be me.”

Beca blinked slowly, biting her tongue to censor herself just in time. “Is that so?” she opted for a passive aggressive reply.

“Yes, because at least I wrote to you. Granted it wasn’t much but compared to your radio silence it was something,” he defended himself.

“You wrote to me,” she snorted with anger. “Let me guess you gave that mail to the little elves hoping they’d deliver it. Next time try the postal service bro, it works better.”

He looked at her with confusion and hurt. “I did write to you Becs. Maybe not right away, but as soon as I was somewhat on my feet, I wrote at least twice a month, every month.”

“Guess you have me confused with someone else, because I sure as hell didn’t receive any letters.”

Beca was livid. She was used to have people in her family spinning bullshit stories her ways, but Aaron was among the very few who had never done so, until now that was.

One thing was for certain, she was growing tired of this interaction.

“Why would I lie to you?” he swung his backpack on one shoulder, opened it and held something toward her. “Here.”

She could see four envelopes stacked together. She saw her name and an address on it, next to it a
‘returned to sender’ stamp. Another stamp above it showed it had been originally sent months ago.

“Funny story, that’s how I found out we didn’t have a childhood home anymore,” Aaron said with a hint of bitterness. “Not that I really give a toss mind you, sure we did have a few fond moments there, but it’s not like it held any real emotional value to me after everything that happened… still it was weird to find out this way, you know?”

Beca’s eyes were still trained on the envelopes, her mind not quite processing it all.

“The others never came back so I know you got them. I get it if you never read them, but at least I’ve tried, you have to give me that.”

“I’ve never received any letters,” Beca shook her head.

Aaron was truly at a loss. Now he wondered what had happened during his absence. “I did send them Becs,” he reasserted.

“Aaron, I never received any letters,” this time the statement was tinted with anger and reproach.

Everything was starting to become too much, his presence, his words, those letters in her hands, the ones he claimed to have sent… it was all starting to oppress her.

“I have to go,” her voice sounded distant to her ears. It felt much like she was in a haze.

“Mumble…”

That snapped her back to reality instantly. “Dd…d…d…” she tripped over her tongue, feeling words slip out of her grasp she took a deep breath and spoke in a slow, controlled manner. “Do… not… call me… that.”

Aaron sensed her discomfort so he did something he never had before after using her pet name. “Sorry.”
There were too many things to process, too many emotions, too many questions at once. Her instinct of preservation kicked in switching the autopilot mode on. Without realizing it, she was walking away.

“Beca, wait…” Aaron planted himself in front of her. He was about to reach out, but thought better of it. He searched his bag again, took a piece of paper out of a small notebook and wrote something on it before handing it to her. “My number, please call me so we can sit and have a proper conversation. I know the past three years sucked, but trust me I’ve missed you like crazy, I just want to catch up and pick things back up where we left off.”

She looked at him several seconds then grabbed the paper, she put it along with the envelopes in her messenger bag without a word.

“Just so you know I’m going to stick around for as long as it take for you to call me,” he smiled.

She didn’t reply and just headed to the Lighthouse. Aaron didn’t follow and just sighed, things hadn’t gone smoothly but they hadn’t gone too badly either all things considered.

Fat Amy was larger than life, the girl could hold anyone’s attention like no one else. Whether it was with a tale from her native land or just another adventure of her campus life or any thought that crossed her mind really, she could create a powerful spotlight for herself to shine under. This meant that life was seldom dull when the Australian was around.

Chloe couldn’t have been more grateful for that right now, because Amy monopolizing the attention meant that no one but her was watching Beca outside the diner.

There was something odd about the young man, he seemed familiar yet she knew for a fact that she had never seen him before.

Whatever was going on, it was unpleasant for Beca, the brunette was more tensed than Chloe had ever seen her. For a second she even feared it would turn physical but things quieted down a bit. She didn’t catch much of it after that, to keep the attention away from the brunette she spurred Amy on and participated to their conversation.

Beca finally walked in, the girls greeted her but were too focused on Fat Amy to notice her pallor or
her slightly stunned expression. Though curiosity was eating at her from within Chloe pushed her questions aside.

“I got you the usual,” she whispered to Beca before kissing her cheek.

“Thanks,” the response was automatic and flat.

Chloe put her hand on her girlfriend’s, she was equally surprised and hurt when for the first time Beca pulled away.

The redhead didn’t know the man but at that moment she put him at the top of her black list.

xxxxx

Patience was a virtue, one that Chloe had acquired and perfected over the years thanks to Aubrey. She had learnt the right balance between knowing when to push and when to back off.

Patience had been her best friend over the past three days.

It had been three days since the odd interaction between the mysterious young man and Beca. Three days during which she had not once brought the issue with the brunette. Instead, she had spent them reminding her girlfriend that she was there for her, not by means of words (for she knew those would have sent the brunette running for the hills) but through small gestures.

She had understood that Beca needed time to process whatever that was in her own time, therefore she had given the brunette time and space, trusting that she would come to her once everything had decanted.

As it was, she was glad Beca hadn’t completely shut her out, which was another sign that she had earned a bit of the brunette’s trust.

If Chloe was honest she was worried about her girlfriend, unfortunately she couldn’t do any more
than she already was until Beca clued her in.

Patience was a virtue, but most of all it was fucking frustrating.

xxxxx

Beca groaned loudly before trashing her latest attempt at a mix. It didn’t matter how hard she tried she couldn’t focus, it was like her creative bank was empty.

Four days ago, Aaron had appeared out of nowhere and since then she hadn’t been able to think about anything else, their conversation looping around in her head like a broken record.

A heavy weight made of all the questions, all her anger, pain and resentment was crushing her chest, making it almost impossible to breathe. If it hadn’t been for Chloe’s quiet presence she probably would have lost her mind by now.

She had tried to talk to Chloe, whether it was to seek comfort or guidance to make sense of it all, she didn’t know (maybe it was both) but just thinking about the whole thing made her feel like a cold hand was holding her throat in a vice grip, panic would rise and words would just evade her grasps effectively trapping her into silence.

Beca had feared the inevitable questions from the redhead, but none came. In fact Chloe had refrained from mentioning the events of the other morning or Aaron. She hadn’t pushed Beca to talk or made any reproach regarding her silence, no instead she had just been quietly at Beca’s sides, doubling her affection as if trying to prove her theory about hugs and cuddles. Not so long ago, it would have made Beca feel more oppressed, and she’d have lashed out. This time however, it made her feel grounded and kept her from losing it.

The brunette sighed deeply, opening the drawer of her desk she stared at the letters Aaron had given her. She hadn’t opened them. Part of her was stubbornly refusing to believe the story her brother had attached to it.

Try as she might her mind still hadn’t been able to process it all to this day.

Maybe those were the only letters he ever sent, upon having them returned to him he probably figured he might as well invent others in the process to paint himself under a good light after
everything that had happened.

Or maybe he purposefully sent them knowing they would return to him in order to have something to back his story up.

If she really thought about it, the first option was plausible while the other was ludicrous, plain and simple.

Option three was that he was actually telling the truth, but then how come she hadn’t received anything?

Was she supposed to believe that thirty letters or more had somehow vanished in the nature, or that maybe they had disappeared into some kind of vortex, or that magic elves had stolen them?

The answer had been nagging at her from the back of her mind during those four days, but she had refused to face it. She couldn’t ignore it any longer though.

Beca exited her room and walked across campus with determination. She was a woman on a mission and nothing would stop her.

“Hi, is Professor Mitchell here?”

“Yes, but he’s not receiving students at this hour.”

No one could stop her either and certainly not her father’s assistant guarding the gate of his office.

“I’m not a student,” she mumbled as she walked on.

“Hey, young lady, I said he wasn’t receiving students!”

Beca didn’t need to turn around to know the woman behind her had stood up and was now chasing after her but she didn’t care and just kept marching on.
“Stop! You can’t…”

The little brunette opened the door with so much force it was a miracle it was still on its hinges.

Graham Mitchell was working on his next lecture when someone barged into his office. First annoyed, he was surprised to see his daughter followed closely by his assistant who looked beyond irritated.

“And just where do you think you are, young lady?” what’s–her–name hissed angrily.

Beca ignored the question and whatever comment that followed, instead she was staring at her father (or trying to bore holes in his skull with her eyes, more like).

“Professor, I’m so sorry, I tried to stop her but…” the woman tried to explain with a contrite tone.

“It’s alright, Maggie, don’t worry,” he assured her, a benevolent grin on his face. “This is my daughter, Beca.”

“Oh…”

“I am really sorry, she can be rude at times,” Graham shot daggers Beca’s way in a quick glance before looking back at Maggie. “Everything’s fine. You can leave us alone.”

Graham stood up and made his way around the desk to escort his assistant out. “Sorry, again.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll hold off your calls.”

“Thank you, Maggie,” he said before closing the door.

The benevolent smile vanished from Graham’s face when he laid his eyes on his daughter again, to say he was upset would be an understatement.
“I am absolutely mortified right now,” his voice was laced with a very controlled anger. “You can come and see me at any time, it goes without saying, however you cannot barge in here like some kind of savage, and most importantly whatever your mood, you are to be polite and respectful toward my assistant at all time,” he reprimanded her. “Are we clear?”

He expected an answer, also he prompted her once more when she didn’t say anything. “Beca, are we clear?” he stressed each word.

“Yes, Sir.” She replied through her teeth.

He sighed before making his way around his desk again. “For goodness’ sake Beca, I may not have taught you much, but I distinctively remember teaching you manners by the time you were five,” he sat down. “I don’t know what has gotten into you, but you should be ashamed of yourself right now.”

He realized he was about to lock himself into an irritated rant about her rudeness and how she should know better, so he stopped himself. He took a deep breath to calm down, the incident was closed, no need to hang onto it or the irritation.

They had made some progress. True to her word Beca had called him after Thanksgiving, they had shared the first of several coffees together. Those meetings had been good even if a bit awkward for years of miscommunication could not be mended that easily. The point was they were trying. Their interaction was still timid, Graham had good hope that eventually they would have a good father/daughter relationship.

He focused on his daughter, assuming that something had upset her for her to forgo the bases of civility. He was concerned and in a twisted way he was glad because for her to come to him when in such a state was yet another sign of progress between them. A chance for him to be a father.

A few things he had picked up from their new found interaction was that he should always give her time to find her words, which was why he patiently waited for her to speak her mind.

“Aaron is here.”

He took a deep breath. “I know… he came to see me yesterday… we’re supposed to have a coffee tomorrow.”
To say that seeing his cadet son had been a surprise would be an understatement. It had knocked the wind out of him.

“I… he looked well… healthy…” Graham mused, he let out a breathy chuckle. “I’ve forgotten how many times I’ve thought about seeing him again… while I was hoping it’d be in good circumstances like yesterday… I was always expecting the worst to be honest.”

He leaned on his desk, sagging a little with relief. For a long time he had feared that the next time he’d see his son would be in a body bag, or in a state close to death, if ever. It had been great to see him back in shape, with a clear head and presumably his life in order.

“He said he wrote me letters,” Beca cut through his reminiscing haze. “Yet I know for a fact that I haven’t received any.”

She was speaking with a poised voice but it was only the calm before a potential storm.

“So I’ve spent the past four days reviewing the last two years and a half and…uh…” she snorted bitterly. “Let’s admit that I wasn’t one to check the mail daily or that often for that matter, for me not to receive any letter at all defies the laws of probabilities.”

Rather than immediately jumping on the obvious conclusions, she had tackled the whole issue with logic,. Unfortunately reason had brought her right back to said conclusions.

“He said he wrote at least twice a month every month… now considering everything, in that two years and a half period, there’s one year during which statistically I should have gotten a letter or maybe two as randomly as I checked said mail… it’s simple logic, really.”

As she pointed her arguments out loud, breathing became more difficult. She couldn’t say whether it was her body bracing itself for impact or just some incommensurable anger bubbling up.

“I’ve been contemplating every possibilities from a mail sucking wormhole in our mailbox to supernatural forces, aliens, elves or other mystical creatures…” she passed a tired hand over her face. “I even considered that it could be nothing but a lie on his part… but here’s the thing, he has never lied… not to me anyway,” she paused. “You and Mom on the other hand…”
She chortled nervously before asking a question to which she was almost certain to already have the answer. “Please, tell me you have no idea what I’m talking about.”

The moment she had mentioned the letters, ice had formed in the pit of Graham Mitchell’s stomach. Guilt and regret sat heavy on his shoulders.

Tough and cruel decisions could be taken with the best intentions in mind. The one regarding the letters had been such a decision. In truth, given the chance he’d make the same choice.

He had known then what he knew now, whatever decision he made the outcome would be the same for different reasons, Beca would be hurt. Worse still, time would only aggravate the situation. If he had come clean to her sooner the result would still be the same.

The fragile bond they had managed to established recently was about to shatter and as much as he was an optimist he knew that this time he may not ever get a chance to fix things between them or if he did, it wouldn’t be before a long, long time.

“Graham,” she prompted him. “Tell me you have no idea what I’m talking about.”

“Have a seat,” he offered gently but no surprisingly she ignored him.

He made sure to keep his voice even and soft not to antagonize her any more than she already was. “Listen… things were bad and your mother and I agreed that it would be for the best not to let him contact you… and…”

A humorless almost hysterical laughter erupted from her throat, taken aback, Graham trailed off. Once she calmed down Beca wiped a nonexistent tear from the corner of her eye.

“Sorry, I’m just amazed that you could keep a straight face telling that joke,” resent colored her words. “You and Mom agreed…” she echoes “Almost ten years of you two arguing over whether or not the grass is green or the sky blue, yet this is the one thing you decide to agree upon,” she shook her head in disbelief. “That to me is simply prodigious.”

“In spite of how bad things were between your mother and I, we could always put it all aside for the sake of your emotional well-being.”
He tried to placate her even though he doubted she was receptive to anything he could say.

“Aaron was sick and he didn’t have his head on straight... maybe you were in a bubble when it came to him but dealing with him was hard and…”

Words faded into a distant echo, she could see Graham’s lips move but the sound was muffled by the blood drumming loudly in her ears. Tremors were shaking her, the anger coursing through her veins made her feel hot.

Her mind took off on a tangent down memory lane, back to her childhood when she’d be so upset because she couldn’t harness words properly she would just trash her room in frustration. Aaron would hold her tight while she’d struggle to get free, but he would never let go no matter how hard she’d kick him, his embrace strong and gentle at the same time. He’d hold on telling her that he was there (and would always be) and everything would be okay, then he’d make her sing the same song with him (their song), because it was the only way to keep the words steady.

Aaron had always been there and then he was gone with no warning, not even a goodbye, just gone, leaving a gaping hole in her chest the size of galaxy in his wake.

There were no words to describe how hurt and alone she had felt, those feelings only growing exponentially every day without a sign of life, filling her to the brim until she couldn’t feel any more.

How could anyone be so cruel as to keep her in such a state?

“…we wanted to spare you the heartache of dealing with someone with his condition, we didn’t want him to hurt you, so… we kept his letters away…”

Graham Mitchell was telling the truth. He had wanted to protect his daughter from his then unstable son, but to do so meant taking the chance of having her hate him.

“…and then time went by...I kept putting his letters away because I know how hard the whole thing was on you... and you were doing well again so I didn’t say anything not to drag you back down...I know how bad this all sound but please believe me when I say that the intent was not hurt you...keeping those letters from you was a reasonable albeit very maladroit way to protect you.”
Beca’s blood reached volcanic temperature, it wasn’t anger she felt anymore but something akin to fury.

“Since when the fuck do you care about my emotional well-being?” she snapped. “You didn’t fucking care about it when you and Mom couldn’t go a single day without yelling at each other, or some passive aggressive bullshit. You didn’t fucking care about it when you couldn’t bother to show up for anything that matter to any of us… hell you could barely fucking show up for dinner!”

The f-bombs dropping left and right were nothing more than her mind desperately ringing the alarm bell, the words were coming too fast and it could barely keep up, she had to calm down somehow lest she’d lose the ability to speak soon.

She did not heed the warning however because she was beyond herself, she had lost hold on the reins of her emotions so words kept cascading out of her mouth in an incontrollable torrent.

“You didn’t fucking care when you flew across the country on the regular to fuck Sheila, nor did you fucking care when you started a family with the bitch! You…”

Her diatribe came to an abrupt halt, it took her a few seconds to register the burning sensation on her cheek.

The silence wrapped the two Mitchells in a chokehold.

Beca had crossed a line, that much she knew. Trash-talk ing her step-mother was one thing, doing so in presence of her father was another. They had had that discussion once a long time ago and normally Beca would always honor that rule. Today though she was too furious to care.

Graham had expected her anger, still her words had cut through him like a hot blade through butter. Whoever said that truth hurt was wise. He couldn’t deny the faults she had spat at his face even though the reality hadn’t been quite as crass. Although he wanted to believe that he had only slapped her because of how she had spoken about his new wife, part of him knew it was because her words had stricken a nerve.

An ugly sneer pulled at the corner of Beca’s lips when she realized that her barbs had hit home.
“You… let… me… believe that one of… the… only… person I lo… love in this… fucking… joke of a fa… family had completely abandoned me… but that was because you cared right?”

Beca was tripping over every syllable, every sound longer than it should be as if the consonants had somehow multiplied. She used the little control she had over her breathing as a crutch, every word was a mine blowing up her face. The dreading feeling of powerlessness came back with vengeance and she could feel herself slowly crumbling down under its weight.

It was painful for Graham to see her struggling to speak, it had always been. Thinking back, his first failure as her father had been his inability to help her through her stuttering, it had all gone downhill from there.

He hated himself to have hurt her, but he hated himself even more to have put her through her personal hell right at this instant. He wanted to reach out and hug her fiercely, but even he knew that wasn’t an option, if anything it’d make everything worse.

“Go yourself Graham,” she spat.

She turned her heels to put as much distance as she could between them. She opened the door to leave but closed it again and faced her father once more.

“I… I want every single letter back… and then… I want you to stay the fuck away from me!” she barely managed to form the words, her voice breathy and uneven.

She violently slammed the door shut behind her then power-walked out of the building.

“We’ve made good money during the holidays but we still need to raise some funds and…”

“Sorry,” Chloe winced when her phone cut off Aubrey. She couldn’t help her smile when she saw Beca’s grimacing face flashing on her screen.
Aubrey, easily guessing who was calling, sighed loudly for the form more than anything else (in truth she didn’t mind at all)

“Fair warning: if you intended to make this a sexy call, Aubrey is standing right next to me,” Chloe joked.

Aubrey rolled her eyes and made a face of mocked disgust (she’d sooner set her hair on fire rather than admit it out loud but she found their interaction adorable and funny most of the time). The blonde had had her reservations at first, since she and Beca hadn’t started off on the best terms, but she had to give it to the brunette, she was good to and for Chloe. It did help that they were getting along in their own way nowadays.

Chloe pulled the phone away from her ear to look at the screen for a quick check. “Babe, I don’t know where you’re calling from but I think there’s bad reception.”

No sooner had she finished her statement that the call had been disconnected. She pressed on her screen to call Beca back but after several rings she was redirected to her girlfriend’s voicemail. Rather than leaving a message, she hung up figuring that Beca would call back once she could.

“Right, sorry,” she apologized again to Aubrey. “How much more do we need to be comfortable?” she picked their conversation back where they had left it.

“Fair warning: if you intended to make this a sexy call, Aubrey is standing right next to me.”

Several minutes had elapsed since she had stormed out of Graham’s office. Beca was so distraught, she couldn’t make sense of her environment. She was breathing hard and fast, yet oxygen didn’t seem to ever fill her lungs properly, she was looking around the campus she had cross so many times over the past months, but right now it could have been a foreign country for all she knew.

She was overwhelmed and on the verge of succumbing to a monstrous panic attack. On pure instinct she had grabbed her phone and called Chloe, because the redhead always made her feel grounded.

Now hearing her girlfriend’s voice she felt like taking a breath after several minutes under water. The reprieve was short lived though as soon as she tried and failed to speak. She couldn’t make it
through the redhead name no matter how hard she tried.

“Babe, I don’t know where you’re calling from but I think there’s bad reception.”

She tried to speak once more but hung up almost immediately, it was no use, her voice was gone.

Panic kept creeping in. She was still disoriented. Looking around she spotted a small wall and sat on it. Despair coiled tightly around her, making it impossible to breathe.

Almost suffocating, she balled her left hand, took it to her mouth and bit hard on her knuckle. The sharp pain helped her focus while her survival instinct kicked in. She kept biting her fist, her teeth almost cracking the skin. She tightened her eyes shut and forced deep breaths into her lungs. She needed to calm down just enough to get her bearings so she could get back to her dorm.

She was about to break down and that could not happen in the middle of the campus.

Kimmy-Jin was on a roll, her fingers were nimbly stroking the keyboard at a speed that nearly defied laws of nature. She almost jumped out of her skin when the door was flung open and shut violently, before she realized what was happening her roommate was lying in her bed in a fetal position facing the wall.

She swiveled her chair around in confusion and looked at the tiny human ball in front of her.

The young Asian shook herself out of her stupor, then she did the most sensible thing she could think of, she gathered her belongings quickly before leaving the room, all the while pretending not to hear the sobs rising from the other bed.

“… what about a karaoke night?”

“Those are usually successful, good call,” Aubrey agreed with a nod.
Whatever she was about to add died on her lips when she saw Chloe paling slightly as she read a text from her phone. “What is it?”

“I don’t… I don’t know,” the redhead replied still frowning at her phone. She looked back up “I…”

“Go,” Aubrey prompted her immediately, whatever was going on it wasn’t good, enough for her to feel nervous energy rolling off the other girl.

Chloe nodded, took her backpack and ran out of their rehearsal space like her pants had caught fire.

The text she had received was from Kimmy-Jin, it read: *Tiny DJ in distress, 911, our room.*

Making a mad dash across campus (all that cardio during practice was finally paying off), she focused on avoiding collision with people, trying not to let her mind run wild as to what had happened.

Beca and Kimmy-Jin cared about one another in their own stand-offish and awkward way. It was an undeniable fact, one that just was, one that didn’t need any acknowledgment, one that was crystal clear between the two of them. Maybe it was early to call each other friends, but they were well on that path. That being said they were not into hugs and what not and Kimmy doubted they would ever be.

She had left the room instantly to give Beca privacy, she knew she never should have witnessed such a display of vulnerability to begin with. Once out of their room she had immediately texted Red. She had gotten to know their dynamic enough to deduce that a) Beca’s state had nothing to do with an eventual fallout between them and b) Red most likely had no idea of the current situation (otherwise she’d already be here).

Now she was waiting, guarding the door of their room like Cerberus the gate of Hell, she’d make sure the next and only person to go in would be the redhead.
By the time Chloe barreled into Beca’s dorm corridor, her lungs and muscles were on fire. She spotted Kimmy-Jin leaning against the wall near their door. The girl straightened up as soon as she saw her coming.

Chloe stopped and stared at Kimmy, catching her breath. The young Asian shrugged helplessly with a shake of her head as if to say ‘I don’t know what happened’ in answer to Chloe’s silent question. The redhead put a hand on the girl’s shoulder and gave it a simple squeeze, her small grin conveying her gratitude, then she entered the room cautiously.

Now that she knew things would eventually be alright, Kimmy picked up her bag and left once she heard the door behind her being locked.

Chloe’s heart broke the moment she entered the room. She muzzled the questions rushing in her mind, instead she focused on her girlfriend. She locked the door, ditched her backpack and climbed onto the bed, swiftly securing the brunette in her arms.

She held her girlfriend as close as possible, the little brunette’s violent sobs rattling her own body. Chloe wanted to take Beca’s pain away, to see her in such a state physically hurt her to an unbearable level.

Beca had barely made it to her room before breaking down into pieces. The confrontation with her father had unleashed all those emotions she had locked away to preserve herself, now she was being crushed by them all.

She was startled by an unexpected contact but immediately recognized Chloe’s familiar touch. The sobbing intensified, she was heaving so much it was a small miracle she hadn’t passed out yet from lack of oxygen. She put her hand over the one Chloe had on her stomach and squeezed hard, holding on with a death grip like a drowning man to a life line.

Chloe started to hum. On one of the rare times Beca had spoken about herself, she had mentioned a song she would sing or listened to whenever she was upset, comparing that song to a comfort blanket, the one refuge she’d always go to and never failed to make her feel like things would get better.

The redhead figured that Beca was so upset she couldn’t hear the song in her head or sing it to
herself, so she hummed softly. She lent her voice to the brunette so that she’d know things would be alright. No matter what had happened, they would eventually be alright.

Once she registered the sound coming from Chloe, Beca instinctively pulled on their hands to tighten their embrace. She focused on Chloe’s voice, letting it guide her back to shore.

xxxxx

After spending the night in Beca’s dorm, Chloe had taken them back to her off campus apartment. She didn’t want to leave Beca alone, but she didn’t want to inconvenience Kimmy–Jin either, not that there was ever any trouble for the three of them to share the small space for a day or two. In light of the recent events though, she felt that the room would feel crowded for the first time.

Beca hadn’t protested. In fact Beca hadn’t said much of anything at all since the day before. Once she had stopped sobbing and regained some calm the brunette had eventually fallen asleep. Chloe had watched over her through most of the night, getting very little sleep herself.

Upon arrival at Aubrey and Chloe’s, Beca had accepted the offer to shower and change. Now she was once again in a fetal position, in Chloe’s bed. She was staring at the wall, pain had superseded any other emotion and now it was so intense Beca was numb.

The redhead tried to attend to Beca’s needs, but the brunette was barely responsive to anything, all she’d get would be non-verbal yeses or nos. She watched, powerlessly, her girlfriend walled herself into silence, essentially shutting her out.

xxxxx

Aubrey looked up from her notebook to see Chloe come back from her room with an empty glass but a full plate, yet again. This little dance had been going on for the past three days. The redhead kept bringing food to her room for Beca, only to come back with the plate untouched.

It was hard to tell the little brunette had been staying with them. Beca was virtually a ghost. From what she had gathered, the girl was staying in bed, in the dark all day long, leaving the room only for a daily shower and rare trips to bathroom.

She had known immediately that something was off when they had arrived and her greeting
‘Bilbo, coming all the way from the Shire for a visit, how sweet’) had been received in silence; a quick glance had revealed the brunette to be somewhat divorced from reality.

If she was honest, she had noticed the change in Beca’s behavior a few days prior, if the brunette replied to her gentle barbs, she would do so with much less spike and wit as usual.

She hadn’t asked any question as to what was going on since Chloe seemed at a loss as well. She had however said that this week there would be very few rehearsals and they would be in small selected groups (because everyone had an important load of work and not because she was cutting the brunette some slack as small groups meant no one would notice her absence, obviously).

One thing was certain, whatever was going on with the brunette, it was taking a toll on her best friend.

Chloe, was a people person, she was always very attuned with others’ emotions and needs. In other words she was extremely empathetic, and her generous nature made her put the others before herself. A noble quality Aubrey admired but she hated to see Chloe suffer because of it.

Another thing about Chloe, she needed communication. Aubrey doubted there was much of that going on, if at all, so that was one more thing putting the redhead in a funk.

Chloe was obviously giving space to the little brunette currently hiding in her room, forcing herself to go through her daily routine, pouring herself in her studies, all the while letting worry eat at her from within.

Beca was hurting but she was not talking. Chloe was hurting because her girlfriend was hurting and she didn’t know what to do to alleviate that hurt.

The only reason Aubrey hadn’t murdered Beca yet was because she wasn’t purposefully hurting her best friend, but the fact was that she was hurting Chloe and that didn’t sit well with her. At all.

“She ignored a green pie,” Aubrey stated mentioning the dish on the plate Chloe had brought back. “Now, that, is a serious offence.”

“I know, right,” Chloe grinned a bit but with no real enthusiasm. “Don’t let it go to waste,” she pushed the plat toward her.
Taking a look at her best friend, Aubrey doubted that she had eaten much herself during the past few days. “Let’s share.”

Chloe didn’t protest, sitting down next to the blonde she grabbed two forks, gave one to the other girl and dipped hers in the small pie.

Aubrey let out a moan of pleasure at the first bite. This was one of Chloe’s invention, a mix of vegetables she somehow made into a small pie, it melted on the tongue and the explosion of flavors was sinful.

“Let it all out,” Aubrey said after several minutes in silence once she was satisfied Chloe had fed herself a little.

The redhead sighed heavily with a shrug of her shoulders. “She doesn’t talk…she just lies there, looking at the wall, looking at the ceiling… she’s locked in her own head,” she let out a tired breath. “I just… I just wish I knew how to make her understand that I’m here… that whatever it is, she doesn’t have to handle it alone… and if I can’t help, at least she can lean on me…”

She put a hand over her face and for a second Aubrey thought she was about to cry, but instead she took a deep breath and continued. “Honestly at this point, I’m just glad she hasn’t completely shut me out… but I won’t lie, it kills me to see her like this.”

Aubrey waited in case Chloe wanted to say more, but it became obvious that she wouldn’t. “Come here,” she grabbed Chloe’s hand, guided them both on the couch. She passed her arms around her best friend, securing her in a comfortable hug.

Chloe didn’t resist and held on fiercely, taking a full load of affection. “Let it all out,” Aubrey reiterated her invitation.

At first confused by the repeated instruction, Chloe understood its meaning, unable to hold back any longer she let her tears fall freely and she allowed herself to cry on her best friend’s shoulder. It was a small relief but a welcomed one.
“I’m going to be out all day,” Chloe said over her toast.

“I know, two tests, project with your lab partner, and your Thursday math thingy, although technically we’re Friday today.”

Aubrey swore she could hear the other girl’s thoughts at this instant so she decided to assuage her worries. “Hey, remember how I took great care of little Hamilton, I’m pretty sure he ended up being a centenarian which is unheard of for a…”

A small amused hiccup bubbled up from Chloe’s throat and the first genuine smile in days graced her lips. “Beca’s not a hamster, Bree.”

“I know that…” Aubrey replied with a dramatic sigh. “The point I was trying to make is, I know how to take care of living things, so stop worrying, go beat those tests into submission and focus on your things. We’ll be fine, promise.”

Chloe stared at her for a moment before nodding. “Alright.”

They finished their breakfast, then Chloe went through her morning routine. Twenty minutes later she was ready to start her day.

“Hey, wait,” Aubrey called her as she was about to leave. She walked to her best friend and silently took her in her arms for a bear hug. “Who’s going to kick ass?”

It was muffled but she heard Chloe chuckled. “I am.”

“Who’s the greatest?”

“I am.”

“And who do I adore?”

“Me.”
Cheered up by their now decade old ritual, Chloe took a deep breath then gave her best friend a gentle squeeze once she felt her emotional battery recharged. Aubrey kissed her crown then let her go.

“Go, shine your light upon the world,” the blonde said in an exaggerate fashion. “Oh, and once you’re done fighting crime, bring some milk, we’re almost out.”

Much to her delight, that elicited a small laughter from the other girl. Chloe kissed her on the cheek. “I love you,” affection pouring from her which made Aubrey feel very warm and fuzzy.

“And you should, I’m awesome,” the blonde kept the mood light. “Off you go, now.”

“Aye, aye, Capt’n.”

Aubrey watched her leave, more than satisfied to see the redhead’s trademarked grin firmly in place.

It was one of those rare days where Aubrey didn’t have class or work to do (because she had done everything and taken her usual advance). She had gone for her morning run pushing herself a little more than usual but still managed to breeze through her work out (that had put her in a good mood), she had shared breakfast with Chloe and made sure her best friend’s emotional balance was restored.

Now she was indulging herself with some quiet time, reading one of her favorite books once more.

She had spent her night thinking a lot and she had seen the proverbial light. She had woken up with a mission and once it was completed, she’d have either committed a murder or achieved a miracle, although one outcome would pain her a bit, she was fine with both.

Looking at her watch she saw it was almost noon, so she went into the kitchen to start said mission.
With a plate in one hand, a tall glass in the other Aubrey entered Chloe’s room. As expected, Beca was on the bed like a larva in a cocoon, the thick curtains keeping the room in semi-darkness. She put her cargo on the desk and pulled the curtains open, the crude light of the midday sun poured into the room, the light was so strong compared to the recent obscurity it even blinded her for few seconds.

She ignored the groan coming from the bed.

“Let me introduce you to daylight before you completely turn this room into the Kingdom of darkness where the unicorns are demoniac and the rainbows black and grey.”

She assumed the unintelligible sound she heard in response was a curse, once again she ignored it and sat on Chloe’s desk chair, facing the human ball on the bed.

“I know how much you’re getting your kick out of pouting and casting a dark mood all across the universe but this ends now,” she put an emphasis on the last three words just to let the brunette know that she was stating a fact and not giving her an option.

“I mean let’s face it, this intense emo phase of yours is getting ridiculous,” she continued with a jaded tone

“It’s been four days, I’d tell you to grow up but we both know that’s a battle you’ve lost a long time ago,” she tilted her head with a pout, then got back on track.

“The point is, it’s time to join back the world of the livings. I’m sorry to be the one to piss on your lollipop but life sucks for everyone, she’s a massive bitch to everyone because that’s just her thing. I know, I know you’re not some unique and beautiful snowflake, shocker.”

Before Beca could put a pillow over her head Aubrey snatched it and tossed it away, raising her voice making it impossible for her to escape the noise. She rolled over so she was turning her back to the blonde, wistfully hoping the girl would get the hint and leave but she wasn’t so lucky.

“Anyway, I’ve just taken some of my very precious time to make you a sandwich. Let it be said that this is not any sandwich, it is a fucking Rolls Royce of a sandwich. Every single component has been sliced, ordered and piled with surgical precision, making it a treasure of form and taste, a real piece of culinary art if you will. Which is why you, little hobbit, are going to take at the very least two bites out of it, if anything out of respect for my aforementioned precious time.”
Beca put her hands over her ears, but Aubrey’s voice still made it through loud and clear. It occurred to her that this was probably what being hell felt like.

“Please note that you will eat on your own devices or I will shove it down your throat and choke you with it,” Aubrey pointed out with a wry smile.

“Yes, it will be an undignified way to fulfill my murder fantasy because I had so much better in store for you, but I can readjust my expectations, and who am I to judge if you have so little respect for yourself as to accept a death by sandwich,” the blonde shook her head in disapproval.

“Now, Chloe lets you get away with the starving yourself because of your ‘I-hate-the-world-and-I’m-in-a-dark-mood’ thing,” Aubrey made air quotes. “I’m not her, and we’ve just established that your opinion on the matter doesn’t figure on the list of the things I give a shit about so…”

“Oh my god!!” Beca imploded with exasperation. “Will you just shut the fuck up and leave me alone if I take a bite of you stupid sandwich?!”

She had tried to ignore the blonde with all her might but Aubrey’s voice was drilling its way into her brain. The senior had always been able to push her buttons to annoy her, but this time she had made Beca’s blood reach boiling state.

Completely unimpressed by the outburst, Aubrey just blinked. “Well, for that bit of attitude, you’ll now have to eat a full half of the bitch before I consider leaving,” she informed the brunette with a condescending smile.

“What the fuck ever,” Beca spat. Violently kicking the cover away, she sat up on the edge of the bed, each of her movements translating unmistakable annoyance. She reached out to grab a half of the sandwich but Aubrey held the plate out of her grasp.

“And you will chew each bite at least twenty times before swallowing, first to enjoy the taste and second because this isn’t a barn and you’re not a pig.”

Beca pushed her tongue against her cheek, she was forcing herself to keep her mouth shut lest she’d say very unpleasant things to Aubrey. She gave the blonde a death stare and the senior just stared back as fiercely.
Aubrey finally relented to present her the sandwich again. Beca grabbed half of it and took an exasperated first bite, making a show of chewing it, all the while continuing their staring contest.

The instant food touched her tongue, she realized just how hungry she was (her brain reminded her that, yeah of course she was hungry she hadn’t eaten anything in four days, duh). Of course that meant that cardboard with seasoning would taste good but she had to admit it was a criminally good sandwich (even though she’d rather set her hair on fire than saying it out loud right now).

She ate in silence under the scrutinizing stare of Aubrey. Once she finished the first half she wanted to take the other one, but she didn’t want to give Aubrey the pleasure of capitulation, so she held back even though she was almost foaming at the mouth thinking about the succulent sandwich (and she was certain Aubrey knew her dilemma because she could swear she was silently daring her to reach for the other half).

Aubrey was inwardly smiling, well aware that Beca wanted to finish the snack she had brought (she did make kick ass sandwiches after all), but knowing the brunette, she wouldn’t admit defeat just out of principle. To Aubrey that only meant she had won first round, and she had every intention to win each one of the many to come today.

After a long staring contest she held the tall glass to the brunette. “Cold milk even though you don’t deserve such a treat, but as we both know I am an extremely generous and good person, so in all my grandeur, I shall indulge you.”

Beca grabbed the glass. “It’s a wonder the both of us can fit in this room considering the massive size of your ego.”

“Lucky me, your body never got the memo about growth spurt.”

If Beca was angry before, she failed to describe her current state. She was mentally reviewing physically violent ways to wipe the smug smirk off the blonde’s lips. It’s not that she had trouble taking Aubrey’s spikes, she just hated not having a response to it.

She drained the glass in one go (damn, that touch of cinnamon was good) “There, happy?”

“Overjoyed”
“Wonderful,” Beca mirrored the other girl’s caustic smile and tone. “Now get the fuck out and leave me alone.”

“Oh but I am leaving so you can get ready.” Aubrey got up. “You have forty minutes to shower, get dressed and get your ass downstairs, and trust me you do not want me to come back here in forty one minutes to find out you haven’t complied. If you think I will hesitate to treat you like a petulant child, you are in for one rude wake up call.”

She watched the choler deform the brunette’s face even more, knowing that if looks could kill she’d be dead by now. She could feel the extreme annoyance radiating from the other girl. In a normal day that would have made her immediately dialed down her abrasiveness, but this wasn’t a normal day. No, today she was happy to ruffle the brunette’s feathers and get a rise out of her, and she was going to do so all day long. This, in fact, was barely a warm up.

Beca was fuming. Where the fuck did the blonde come from barking orders?

She had been minding her own business and asking the world to do the same but no, Aubrey had to choose this day to be a giant pain in her side.

She was tempted to ignored the other girl and go back to bed but one thing she had learnt very quickly, Aubrey didn’t do empty threats. When she said she’d do something, she always delivered. Beca could see the senior coming back, dragging her out physically (and Aubrey was much stronger than she looked, like, she-hulk stronger) taking her to the bathroom and putting her under the water fully clothed until she’d relent to follow the issued orders.

Sure Beca could simply leave, but she didn’t want to go back to her dorm, in fact she didn’t want to be anywhere but where she was right now, therefore her options were limited: comply or face a possible humiliation/physical fight with Aubrey.

She made the most sensible choice, gritting her teeth and cursing Aubrey the whole way through. Twenty minutes later she stomped her way downstairs.

Aubrey was against one of the kitchen counters, a book in hand. Once she heard Beca coming she put it away. “Empty the fridge, clean it from top to bottom and put everything back in, once you’re done clean the oven, then the rest of the kitchen,” she instructed using her chin to motion the gloves, scrubbing material and detergents on the table. “It all better be spotless when I come back to check.”
Beca approached the table and grabbed the gloves. She didn’t reply, she had decided that if she had to ride whatever power trip the blonde was having, she would do so in complete silence (mostly because she knew she was so livid that if she spoke she would say regretful things).

She wisely redirected her anger at the blonde in the tasks at hand, scrubbing every inch of surface vigorously. By the time she was done, she was spent. The cleaning had at least provided a reprieve from Aubrey who had left her be while she cleaned the living room and the first floor.

Once they were both done (and the blonde was satisfied with her work), Aubrey sat cross-legged on the couch, she didn’t even looked at Beca and raised a controller in the air, the meaning clear.

Beca narrowed her eyes and snorted with disbelief (the blonde couldn’t possibly be serious, she didn’t feel like playing anyway, she just wanted to go back in Chloe’s room and be left alone.)

“Get a fucking move on, Mitchell, this isn’t rocket science,” Aubrey prompted her.

Purposefully moving with the subtlety of a pachyderm, Beca made her way to the couch and sat down with the grace of a ton of bricks.

Aubrey pushed the controller in her way but just like she had done with the plate earlier she held it out of Beca’s reach when the brunette was about to grab it. “Don’t even think about sabotaging the game, that’s ground for murder in the most horrendous and tortuous ways.”

She heard Beca mumbling something at her attention she had no doubt was unpleasant, but just like before she remained impervious to the brunette’s attitude.

She set the game to the hardest level of difficulty (thus increasing the degree of focus needed) and started it. For the first time they played not exchanging a single word, amazingly enough they did just as good as usual once they adjusted to the difficulty level.

Beca didn’t know how much time had elapsed when Aubrey stopped the game (if she had to guess she’d say they had done more than half of the campaign). “Time to get started on dinner,” Aubrey announced, standing up.
Beca, resigned to the fact that argument or protest were useless, followed her in the kitchen, washed her hands then awaited the blonde’s new directives.

“Bree, I’m home, and no I didn’t forget the milk,” Chloe announced closing and locking the door behind her. “Something smells good in…” she stopped dead in her tracks after stepping further inside. “…here” she finished still trying to take in the sight.

Much like the first time she had caught Aubrey and Beca playing together, she was questioning her reality, certain to have crossed some invisible portal to another dimension.

Beca was out of bed.

The redhead loved her best friend unconditionally, and right now that love expanded a thousandfold. She didn’t know how Aubrey had managed to get Beca out of bed and moving but just for that she felt the urge to crush her best friend in a hug and smother her with love.

She forced herself to get quickly over her surprise. She walked to Beca and just casually kissed her hello. “Hey you.”

She didn’t say anything for fear of breaking whatever spell was operating. Walking to Aubrey, she refrained herself from giving her the crushing hug of love, and just contented herself with a hand on the blonde’s shoulder.

“Hey there,” Aubrey grinned before kissing her temple.

“Can I help with anything?”

“Nope, we’re good.”

“Do you have time for a quick shower?”

“Yes, ma’am”
Chloe went to Beca, gave her another peck on the lips then left for her shower. She kept wondering what had happened during her absence. She wanted to ask Aubrey for her secret but then thought maybe it was better if she didn’t know. Whatever magic she had used, it was working and that was all that mattered to her right now.

When she joined back the girls, the table was set and Aubrey was giving the first course to Beca. They started to eat and Aubrey led the conversation enquiring about her day.

“…Kimmy-Jin hosted our session today, I think she was nervous but she did very well, found some very complicated problems that require serious out-of-the-box thinking,” Chloe referred to her math workshop. “She’s been quite the little star since she joined our group, but after today I’m pretty sure the boys swooned,” she joked. “I can’t blame them, the girl is cute.”

Beca’s eyebrows reached her hairline at that remark. Chloe, delighted to see her girlfriend react to the teasing put her hand over the brunette’s. “Don’t worry, you’re cuter, not to mention hot and super sexy,” she wiggled her eyebrows.

“I’m still here, folks,” Aubrey stepped in. “Let’s have mercy on my gag reflexes.”

Chloe chuckled before continuing her tale. Beca had yet to speak but the redhead focused on the most important, she was eating, she was paying attention and above all she was responsive.

“Go relax, we’re going to take care of the dishes,” Aubrey announced after they finished the dessert.

“Okay, thanks for dinner it was excellent.”

“You deserved a treat,” the blonde smiled.

“I’ll be in my room then,” with that Chloe left them.
Beca was absentmindedly drying off a pot. Aubrey had had her fuming but she had let her stew in that anger all day, eventually it had subsided long enough for the blonde’s words to finally sink in.

Aubrey was right; she had been moping around, bathing in an ocean of self-pity (that had proven to be useless). If it hadn’t been for the electrified kick in the butt from the blonde, who knows how long she’d have kept using her ass like a hat.

So life had dealt her a very shitty hand, big deal. It wasn’t the first time (and it wouldn’t be the last), just like before she needed to handle things not hide from them.

She had passed her anger on the fridge, the oven, the kitchen and countless alien enemies, and it just occurred to Beca that she hadn’t stutter once today. She hadn’t dare speaking the past few days because every time she had tried she had felt her tongue tripping over itself even for the simplest words. Today though, she had had a few back and forth with Aubrey, never once losing control.

Now for the first time since Aaron had showed up she felt like herself thanks to Aubrey Posen of all people.

“It’s not a magic lamp, you can stop rubbing,” Aubrey snapped her back to reality.

“You’re so hilarious; did you eat a clown while no one was looking?” Beca retorted as she put the pot back where it belonged.

“I don’t do clowns, they taste too funny.”

“That was lame, even for you.”

Aubrey ignored her comment a started wiping the counter. “By the way, what did you put in the vegetables?”

“Paprika and honey.”

“That wasn’t bad at all,” Aubrey nodded with an appreciative pout.
Beca had run out of things to dry yet she stayed planted where she was and waited. When the blonde noticed that she wasn’t moving she focused on her again.

Beca fiddled with the rag she was holding. Aubrey raised a questioning eyebrow when she didn’t speak. Beca stared at her a few more seconds trying to think about what to say, finally she settled for the obvious.

“Thank you.”

They stared at one another for a few seconds.

“Just go to bed, Bilbo,” Aubrey dismissed her with a sigh.

Beca wasn’t hurt by the rebuff because a) Aubrey had called her Bilbo and b) there was a blink—and—you’ll–miss–it wink and grin combo letting her know that she was welcomed and nothing more needed to be said.

“‘Night,” Beca nodded, handing the rag to Aubrey.

“‘Night.”

Chloe was lying in bed, reading, when Beca joined her. The brunette climbed into the bed and turned her back to Chloe (only because she was blocking the nightstand light).

“Chlo?”

The soft call was enough for the redhead to shift her attention to the lying figure next to her. She held her breath, this was the first time Beca spoke to her in four days.

“Would you sing to me again?”
The request was timid but it blew Chloe away. Finally, Beca was reaching out to her. She immediately put her book aside and turned off the light. She settled more comfortably, spooning Beca, the brunette entwined their fingers over her midriff, she kissed Beca’s shoulder letting the contact linger. The brunette gave her hand a light squeeze in response and Chloe started humming the same song she had hummed a few days ago.

xxxxx

Beca didn’t sleep much, mostly because she had done too much of that during the past four days. Instead, she watched Chloe rest.

She didn’t deserve her, the redhead was much too good to her and now that she thought about it seemed to her that she didn’t give back half of what she was receiving. Chloe was just so understanding when it came to her emotional constipation. She couldn’t figure out why the redhead was sticking around, but she was glad about it. She doubted Chloe knew just how much she meant to her or how much she appreciated the fact that she was putting up with her and her emotional deficiencies. In all honesty, it was a bit frightening to think of how much she felt for the redhead after so little time.

Chloe blinked her eyes open, glanced at Beca, smiling at the sight she then closed her eyes again and let out a long heavy sigh. “Please tell me you haven’t been watching sleep all night… that’s all kind of creepy,” she chuckled lazily, rolling over onto her back.

She felt reluctant to leave Morpheus’ arms, it seemed like she had slept properly for the first time in days (which was most likely the case).

“I adore you.”

That jolted Chloe awake, her eyes shot open as if to confirm that this was the reality and not some vivid dream.

Her heart went berserk when nothing out of the ordinary caught her attention. Cautiously turning her head to look at Beca, she unexpectedly exhale the little oxygen in her lungs when she understood this was indeed real.

If what she felt hadn’t been so unequivocally crystal clear, Beca would have been surprised by the
ease with which the words had come out of her mouth. She wasn’t though, because there was no
two ways about it. It was a fact, plain and simple. Her feeling was there, strong, unwavering, all
encompassing as true and immutable as she was left-handed, had grey-blue eyes and was addicted
to music.

She adored Chloe. Chloe who was always keeping her grounded, who brought forth the best out of
her, and accepted her silences, never trying to fix her but was there by her sides as she figured how
to fix herself.

Yes, maybe the word ‘adore’ couldn’t really do justice to what she was feeling but right now it'll
have to do until she found the perfect word.

Saying it felt like taking a deep steadying breath after having a weight lifted off her chest.

Chloe couldn’t breathe. She knew she was way past adoration and had been on a fast track for
much more almost as soon as they had gotten together. However, she had learnt early and painfully
that listening to her heart never meant leaving her brain behind. Conscious of the strong spell Beca
was casting and of how much she was willing to give to the other girl, she had always tried to pace
herself to the brunette, not taking too much of a lead and more importantly keeping her head with
her.

She did hold herself back, well aware that she was falling at breakneck speed, and that could only
end up with incommensurable pain in case of crash landing.

The brunette was not the most expansive when it came to express her feeling. She did put word on
them every now and then but it was always in response to Chloe’s openness. Yet, Beca had just
blown her mind away by voicing her feelings. To Chloe’s credit she had gone from 4 days of
silence, to 7 words of a shy request the night prior to those 3 words. It was no wonder they had had
the impact of a verbal nuclear bomb.

Caught off guard and completely overwhelmed, unexpected tears pooled in Chloe’s eyes. She
smiled to let Beca know that they were joyful.

Beca leant in and kissed her. Chloe kissed her back with a new born fervor inspired by her
declaration. They were both breathless when Beca broke the contact. She framed Chloe’s face with
one hand, erasing the tears still on her cheek.

Chloe’s desire for Beca was an insatiable hunger, it didn’t matter how many times they were
intimate, it was never enough, she always wanted more, to give more and receive more. Beca had never failed to ignite her most carnal desires but there was something utterly primal and visceral in the way she desired Beca at this instant that was terrifying.

Unable to hold herself back, pulling Beca to her until she was almost on top of her, she gave her a bruising kiss. Already her touch was rough, she was squeezing hard on her girlfriend’s body, the clothe barrier was the world’s greatest offence at the moment. She needed to feel Beca, to possess her.

Beca’s mouth was attached to her neck, sucking on her flesh, driving her on the edge of insanity. She pulled at the brunette’s shirt in vain, trying to get rid of it but Beca didn’t help along. Instead; Beca grabbed her hands, effectively stopping her movement, then brought them up at her head level, gently pinning her down.

Chloe struggled, wanting, needing to touch Beca, but Beca wouldn’t relent. In fact the brunette stopped what she was doing to look at her.

Chloe tried to capture her lips thinking it would distract Beca into letting go of her grip, but Beca pulled back which only frustrated her. She was about to protest and berate the brunette for denying her (this was definitely not a time for teasing) her words died on her tongue though when she managed to focus her gaze on Beca’s.

This wasn’t teasing.

There was something in the way was looking at her, like a silent plea.

Beca didn’t move, she just waited. The hold she had on her wrists was gentle, she was stroking her skin as if trying to calm her down.

For the first time it felt like they were not attuned, she felt an urgency, like a raging fire but Beca seemed to need something softer.

The wordless plea was unequivocal though, Beca wanted to lead and she needed Chloe to let her.

Taking a deep breath to reign over her own need, Chloe slowly relaxed, letting it all go, giving Beca full control.
Beca needed Chloe just as much as she needed her, but above anything else she needed Chloe to let her set the pace, she needed this to be about the redhead. She wanted to tell so much to Chloe but didn’t have the words, but she could speak differently.

And speaking, she did.

Chloe couldn’t have been more wrong about them not being on the same wavelength. Beca touched her in ways that had her out of her head, writhing, hands clenching the sheet. Usually vocal, this time her moans were nothing more than breathy whispers mingled with silent pleasure cries.

Beca’s intensity was almost unbearable, she was giving her so much it felt like trying to stay afloat in a turbulent ocean while gigantic waves after gigantic waves crashed violently onto her.

It didn’t matter how close they had been before, or how close they were now, it just wasn’t close enough. She was wishing for a way to be literally under Beca’s skin.

She was struggling to catch her breath, then she couldn’t breathe anymore, clawing on Beca’s back, almost digging into the skin, she attached her mouth onto the brunette’s shoulder a bit hard when a wild fire engulfed her as she fell over the edge.

Beca’s muffled growl of pain was the only thing breaking the silence.

The shockwave coursing through her was so powerful for a moment Chloe felt like she was nothing more than pure, raw, energy.

All her emotions spilled at once. When she opened her eyes, her vision was blurred by uncontrollable tears. Beca brought her back from her high slowly, gently, with adoring kisses and caresses.

The room was silent, early morning light was filtering through. Beca was alternatively peppering Chloe’s shoulder with kisses and gently rubbing her skin with her nose. It was one of those moments where the rest of the world seemed to have faded away in favor of quiet serenity and
contentment.

“I like being with you like this.”

Wrapped in the brunette’s arms, Chloe tightened their embrace with a smile. “I like being with you like this, too” she echoed.

Beca never ceased to amaze Chloe in the most unexpected ways at the most unsuspected times. This was the second time she spoke openly and unprompted about how she felt.

Even now, the redhead still couldn’t really grasp what they had shared earlier. She had never felt as close or been as close to anyone like this. Whatever it had been it gave ‘high octane’ and ‘mind blowing’ a new definition.

Yes, she was falling at breakneck speed but now she knew without a doubt Beca was falling right by her side wherever they were heading to.

Everything felt a bit unreal, in a good way, like a very pleasant, lucid dream.

Chloe wished she could stop time and stayed in this very moment forever, because it was as close to perfection as could be. Right at this instant, troubles and worries had taken a back seat, her room was the whole world, and lying there in Beca’s arms she felt fully contented.

Sadly, time could not be stopped so she just reveled in that moment until she knew for certain that she’d always remember it with absolute clarity.

“Your spooning technique is improving,” she broke the silence once she was finally ready to face the world again.

“Really?” Though she had her back to Beca, she knew the brunette was smiling.

“Uh-huh… guess you have a pretty good teacher.”
“I do indeed…” Beca hesitated for a split seconds before amending her reply.”…remind me to thank Kimmy next time I see her.”

“Oh you…” Chloe gasped as she elbowed Beca. She was so surprised by the unexpected turn that her eyes almost popped out of her skull when her jaw hit the floor.

“Ouch! She’s not so cute now, is she?” Beca kept on with mirth.

Chloe turned just enough so she could playfully hit her on the shoulder. Beca laughed, grabbing hold of Chloe’s wrists, she tightened her embrace as Chloe was trying to wiggle herself out. Chloe stopped struggling and instead gave her back to her girlfriend in an overdramatic fashion.

“I should throw you out for that one!”

“I think you’ve bruised two of my ribs, surely that’s enough,” Beca said with an amused hiccup.

“Serves you well,” Chloe turned her head to stick her tongue at her which only amused Beca more.

Beca kissed her shoulder and the crook of her neck. “You’re my only spoon,” she whispered seriously.

That made Chloe chuckle, the statement was corny and kind of awkward (something Beca was aware) but it was absolutely adorable. Turning her head, she gave Beca a mock glare.

“I better be.”

Beca just leaned in to give her a sweet lingering kiss, all trace of teasing gone. Putting a gentle hand on her face, Chloe forwent her witty reply sensing her girlfriend’s vulnerability. “You’re my only spoon as well.”

Beca’s shy grin send a pleasant tingling down her spine. She turned again to assume her little spoon position more comfortably, pulling on Beca’s arm to bring them even closer.
“It was a good payback, I have to give you that,” Chloe said after a moment. “Don’t take that as an encouragement though.”

Beca chuckled before kissing her shoulder in agreement.

Silence filled the room, it felt much like a soft protective blanket. Beca felt an urge tugging at her guts. Chloe sensed a shift, a barely perceptible tension. She was about to turn around and ask Beca if she was alright when words rose into the silence.

“The other day… at the lighthouse…” Beca’s voice was barely above a whisper. “That was Aaron, my older brother… one of them anyway…” Pain bubbled up in her throat forcing her to swallow forcefully. “I hadn’t seen or spoken to him in three years.”

Chloe didn’t say anything. She entwined her fingers with Beca’s, squeezed then brought both of their hands against her chest. The simple gesture had a lenient effect on Beca, focusing on her girlfriend’s heartbeat, she continued.

Her unsteady voice carried maladroit words as she unveiled some of her deepest wounds to Chloe. She told her about the slow disintegration of her family, the constant arguments between her parents; she told her about Aaron unhealthy coping mechanisms; she told her about him leaving without a word, about the letters he sent, and about the fight with her father.

Chloe listened.

She never made a sound, whenever she felt Beca struggling, she’d give her hand a gentle squeeze or kiss one of her knuckles. She gave Beca all the time she needed to speak.

When Beca was done and silence filled the room again, she turned around, she put a hand on Beca’s face for a tender caress.

Beca was glad not to see pity in Chloe’s eyes. She had never told those things to anyone but she couldn’t have stopped herself from talking to Chloe even if she had wanted to. She had felt the need to open up, to let Chloe in.

She was expecting a barrage of questions, but the confession had taken everything out of her and she didn’t have any energy left to delve into a conversation. As always Chloe seemed to know what
she needed without her having to voice it.

The redhead gave her a soft kiss then completely reversed their position so she was now the big spoon, once secured in her arms, Beca felt relief wash over her.

For the third time Chloe sung to her, and right there and then, wrapped in the comforting embrace of her lover, Beca felt fully grounded again.

xxxxx

There was a brief pause in Kimmy-Jin’s stride when she entered her room and found Beca sitting on her own bed, reading.

She had been worried about the other girl, there was no denying it, but had found a little peace of mind in the knowledge that Beca was with Chloe.

Not wanting to pry she hadn’t asked Red for news during their weekly math meeting three days ago (she hadn’t verbalized it anyway) but much like her and Beca, she and Red had a mutual understanding when it came to communicate. She had kind of zeroed in onto Red when she had arrived. Chloe had shrugged and shaken her head with a sigh. That had been enough to let her know that things were still not alright.

Seeing the little DJ now however, she easily assumed that things had improved during the weekend and she was glad for it.

Beca tore her eyes from her textbook and stared at her roommate briefly. Chloe hadn’t said anything, and she hadn’t asked, but upon thinking about her meltdown she had figured that Kimmy was the reason why Chloe had been by her side so fast (after all, her girlfriend had misinterpreted her stuttering as bad reception). Even if she had been good with words, she wouldn’t have had enough to express her gratitude to her roommate, but immensely grateful she was because who knows how worse her meltdown would have been without her help.

They greeted one another with their usual bob of the head then Beca returned to her reading and Kimmy walked to her desk. The young Asian was surprised to find two bottles of aloe vera tea, two packets of wasabi-covered peas along with some biscuits she liked.
Beca had made the effort to go to some special shop to get Kimmy’s favorite treats (she had taken note of those with time). It was very little compensation for what the other girl had done as far as she was concerned, but at least she had tried.

The little DJ couldn't see it for Kimmy had her back to her but a genuine full grin split Kimmy’s face upon the discovery, she was extremely touched by the effort.

Not wanting to make a big deal out of everything though, Kimmy schooled her features back to her usual neutral expression and proceeded to put away her books and notes for the day. Once that was done, she settled on her bed but didn’t bother pretending she was going to work. She opened one packet of peas and cleared her throat to get Beca’s attention.

The little brunette looked up and saw Kimmy, one pea in hand ready to launch. She smirked, put her own textbook aside and opened her mouth. They spent the next few minutes silently testing Kimmy’s aim like they had done the first time they had shared a bonding moment of sort.

And just like that, things went back to normal, no words were spoken but the ‘thank you’ and ‘you’re welcome’ were heard loud and clear.

As simple as that moment was, it cemented their mutual appreciation into friendship.

Words weren’t needed.

xxxxx

“Hey you,” Chloe beamed seeing Beca outside of her lecture hall. She kissed her enthusiastically. “That’s a nice surprise.”

Her girlfriend grinned but Chloe sensed that she was in quite a dark mood. “Is everything alright?” she asked softly.

Beca shrugged then forced herself to speak. It was still very unnerving and uncomfortable to talk and confide in the redhead, but the mere idea of shutting her out felt utterly wrong now.
“Graham dropped a box with Aaron’s letters yesterday.”

The way Beca referred to her father, cold and detached, made Chloe cringe inwardly even though she could appreciate the brunette’s resent and bitterness toward the man.

Beca was glad she had been out when Graham had come by (the man had retrograded to simple genitor in her book since their last interaction, just thinking about him put her on edge), finding the box upon her return had sent her into a little panic.

Though it had been small, Beca’s reaction to the box had been enough to put Kimmy on alert, she had discreetly cancelled her plans to stay around the little brunette, just in case. She had been the one to intercept the package earlier in the day, she didn’t know what was inside but she had put two and two together, figured it was all linked to the little DJ’s meltdown a few days prior.

Beca had stared at the box for a long time but hadn’t been able to open it, too apprehensive about what was inside.

“I… I couldn’t bring myself to open the box… I just…” she confessed in a whisper. “Would you mind being there when I do?” she asked Chloe before she could talk herself out of it. “I know it’s stup…”

The redhead silenced her with a long kiss. It was to reassure Beca that her request wasn’t silly (it was more than natural to feel anxious about those letters, all things considered) for one thing, and then it was to thank her for her openness, her trust and finally leaning on her.

Beca was surprised by the contact but kissed her back almost immediately. The soft grin she received when Chloe broke the contact was enough to put her at ease.

“Let’s go,” Chloe simply said before entwining their fingers.

When they entered Beca’s room Kimmy was at her desk with her backpack. “Hey Kimmy!”

“Hey Red.”
Chloe and the young Asian talked about things relating to some game they had played during their previous math meeting, the redhead teased Kimmy about how she would amaze her in their next session, astonishingly enough Kimmy kind of teased back (with a neutral expression but a small grin was there); then Kimmy left stating to no one in particular that she would be away until the next day.

Beca gave her girlfriend a look, silently making an inner joke of the teasing that had started days ago.

“Stop it,” Chloe hit her lightly on the shoulder with the back of her hand.

“I haven’t said anything,” Beca weakly defended herself.

“Sure, you haven’t,” Chloe narrowed her eyes at her.

The humor was just a way for Beca to avoid thinking about the box on her desk or its content. Chloe knew her girlfriend’s deflection tactics well, she also knew Beca needed that little respite.

Chloe sat comfortably on the bed and took out a book. She didn’t want to make a big deal out of things, she was there if Beca needed her, and even if her girlfriend still didn’t find the courage to open the box, she’d be there with open arms afterwards. She didn’t care how long Beca would need, she wasn’t going to push, she’ll just wait there by her girlfriend’s sides.

Beca was at her desk, staring at the box, her heart was beating furiously against her ribcage, she could feel moisture gathering on her palms and her breath was shallow.

Part of her felt stupid to be that anxious, it’s not like she didn’t know what was inside the box. In truth she wanted to read those letters, but at the same time she was afraid of what she might read.

Almost three years of silence were about to be broken. She had been furious and resentful thinking that Aaron had not only abandoned her but forgotten her as well when the reality was that yes he had left but he had been there in a way.

Ignorance was bliss. Not knowing about those letters meant that she didn’t have to dwell on how many things would have been different had she had them during that time.
Now that she knew about them however, it changed everything. The new perspective she was given was overwhelming. All the hurt, the anger, the resentment, all those consuming feelings she had long buried to survive were now out in the open, pouring out of a soul-deep wound.

Those letters also meant that if Aaron had failed her in a way, she had failed him as well.

Just as her vision was starting to blur she felt warmth spread from her back all the way around to her chest. It took her a few seconds to realize that Chloe had wrapped her arms around her.

The senior had been going over her notes when she heard Beca’s breathing becoming more shallow and uneven as time went. Sensing an incoming panic attack she had immediately stood up to take Beca in her arms and bring her back on safer grounds.

The brunette focused on the warmth, leeching on until she felt her sanity return.

“There are two eggs talking in a fridge and after a while, one says to the other ‘how come you’re all brown and hairy?’ and the other goes ‘that would be because I’m a kiwi you moron’.”

An incongruous laughter shook Beca. “This has to be the lamest joke in history.”

Chloe shrugged. “Made you laugh, didn’t it?”

The brunette gave in with a small nod. That joke had come from the left field and had had the nonnegligible effect to melt away any remnants of her anxiety.

“Come on, my snuggle-o-meter is low,” Chloe added.

Within the next minute they were lying down and Chloe was snuggling Beca with all her body, in the most over the top way. Normally Beca would tease her about it, but today she welcomed the contact fully.

After almost an hour Chloe fell asleep, her warmth and regular breathing soothing Beca. The
brunette disentangled herself from her girlfriend and sat at her desk once more. She extended a trembling hand toward the box, took a deep breath and opened it.

A gasp of surprise came out of her lungs. There was no space left in the box, letters were neatly aligned in it, she didn’t know precisely how many were inside but if she was to make a guess the lowest number would be forty.

Another deep breath then she took the first letter assuming (rightly so) that Graham had had the good sense to keep them in chronological order.

Panic tingled her spine again but this time she looked at Chloe’s sleeping form, closed her eyes to emulate her embrace, when she felt steady she finally opened the first letter, taking the first step into the path once hidden ready to discover the other side of the past years.

xxxxx

Beca rubbed her hands on her jeans for the hundredth times, she was nervous, so nervous in fact that she was fighting the urge to bolt out of the Lighthouse.

She was of the punctual nature, but her anxiety had made her come much in advance to the set meeting. Now however, the waiting was becoming too oppressive, she was about to stand up and leave when Aaron walked in, he spotted her immediately as if he had known where she would be before entering the room.

Maybe it was some kind of natural brotherly instinct or it was just a ‘super’ sense specific to him, but as a rule Aaron had always had the ability to know whenever she was around and locate her with laser like precision no matter how big or crowded a room was.

As soon as their eyes met, time stopped and the world faded away.

Reading Aaron’s letters had been an intense emotional roller coaster of course, but above anything else it had been an odd experience.

Every letter had been like a temporal bubble of sort, while reading what Aaron had been going through, she had found herself trying to remember where she had been at the given time, what she had been doing or feeling. The reading had been like seeing both ends of a spectrum, or watching
lives develop onto parallel lines without ever crossing paths.

She had laughed and smiled with some letters, but the emotional lows were numerous. The one constant had been her anger; anger at how things had turned out, anger at Aaron’s absence from her life and her absence from his.

Aaron beamed upon seeing her, making his way to the booth she had chosen.

All of Beca's apprehension dissipated slowly, if the last time she had been blinded by rage, this time she felt the familiar warmth and affection that had always been linked to him.

They stared at one another for a moment, there were so many things she wanted to say, yet she didn’t know where to begin or how to break the ice. He chuckled, probably guessing her predicament.

“I can’t tell you how happy I am right now,” he was grinning like he didn’t know how to stop. “Ever since you’ve texted me I feel like I’ve been holding onto a live wire.”

Aaron’s face was completely glowing with delight, in spite of his beard, for the first time Beca saw the boyish features she was so used to, she saw her brother. The feeling was so overwhelming she thought she was going to cry.

“I’m so happy to see you… I’ve already said that, haven’t I?” he caught himself. “And now I’m making this weird, right? I’m sorry… sorry.”

Beca shook her head, a shy grin made its way on her lips. She had always found it amusing that while she would struggle with words Aaron could be prone to word vomit.

“Okay, calming down,” Aaron breathed in to get a grip on his word flow. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Beca finally found her voice.

There was a short pause, Aaron scrutinized her then frowned. “You’re a bit taller, no?”
She narrowed her eyes and tilted her head. “Out of all the things you could have opened with…”

Three years without a word and yet his affectionate barb hit the mark. “To be fair, I wasn’t trying to be funny.”

“Sure.”

“No, seriously, you look taller!”

“Like a basketball player.”

“I said taller, not gigantic,” he specified. “I mean, you might have gained an inch, maybe two at best which isn’t bad considering where you’ve started.”

“Oh, shut up…” she rolled her eyes and they both chuckled.

For a second there it felt like Aaron had never left, then everything came rushing back and Beca’s grin withered. Aaron felt the sudden mood shift, it seemed that they wouldn’t be able to ignore the elephant in the room for much longer.

“I’ve read your letters,” Beca broke the heavy silence. “Not the one you gave me… well, not only those…”

The cold hand of anxiety wrapped itself around her, crushing slowly but she didn’t let it paralyze her.

“They kept your letters from me… Graham kept your letters from me.”

“Yeah, I’ve found out recently.”

Under Beca’s questioning gaze he elaborated. “I saw him, from my understanding it was the day
after you had a row about it.”

The brunette did recall Graham mentioning that he was to meet Aaron in the coming day before things took a turn for the worse.

“Yeah…if you hadn’t showed up who knows if he’d ever consider telling me about them,” bitterness and resent colored her words.

Once again silence set between them, both contemplating the consequences of their father’s actions.

“I thought you weren’t writing back because you were mad at me,” Aaron confessed.

“I’d have written back!” Beca protested. Aaron gave her a look. “Not right away, that’s for certain, but I’d have written you back,” she amended.

She could be stubborn that much they both knew, so given the situation she could have very easily forgone any response for a very long time as a punishment of sort. She was being honest though, she would have written back given the chance, even if it was to say that she was upset, she’d have made contact.

“It never crossed my mind that you weren’t getting my letters at all… although thinking about it now, it does make sense… I mean, I understand why they’d do such a thing.”

“You understand? They have no excuses!” Beca almost shouted. “They had no right to do that!”

“I’m not denying that, I’m just saying that I can see why they would do it.”

He could sense that she was feeling betrayed by his stance on the matter. “Look I don’t…” he trailed off.

There were two sides of any story. Sure Aaron could choose to keep the good role and that would be it. Their father had lost credibility to Beca’s eyes so really, it could be easy to be the tortured hero in this story.
The easy way out would be a lie though.

He had done a lot of things he wasn’t proud of, ugly things he deeply regretted, but he had never lied to Beca. Of course, there had been little white lies when they were growing up but only for teasing and those didn’t count, for instance when Beca was five he told her that she’d get super tall if she hung onto monkey bars for an hour a day (and she had… every day… for two months… he still kind of felt bad about that). He had lied for Beca to get her out of trouble, because as far as he was concerned part of his duty as a big brother was to always have her back.

He had never lied to her, never on things that mattered. As hideous as the truth was, it was the truth and that was that.

“You had that gig,” Aaron started. “Some guy was throwing a massive party over a whole week and he had hired you to DJ…super well paid, your first big commitment.”

Beca remembered clearly, it was hard to forget that one week she wished had never happened. The day she left for that gig turned out to be the last time she’d see her brother for the next three years.

“As you probably recall, I had started using a few months prior, something you had confronted me about many times.”

At the heights of their parents’ divorce, there was a long period during which ‘acrimonious’, ‘bitter’ and ‘ugly’ were just not strong enough adjectives to describe their interaction. While Beca had always had music to turn to, Aaron had had drawing but unlike music it didn’t drown the noise of arguments, drugs however had allowed him to mute the noise and detached himself from the crappy reality.

He had started to use for fun, Beca had caught on immediately and confronted him about it trying to steer him away from that path. Unfortunately it wasn’t long until recreational use turned into an unhealthy coping mechanism. As long as Beca was around Aaron had had a grip on it which is probably why things had gone to hell in a hand basket when she had been away.

“While you were away, there were two ugly days between them, they had somehow turned their passive aggressive slash argument up to eleven, I just used to mute their voices and presence altogether.”
Aaron paused, this was the first out of many days he wished he could erase.

“I was so high Mom actually noticed,” he chortled bitterly. “That ended up in an argument, I... was verbally abusive and really aggressive... and this is what he walked into so he immediately stepped in... things escalated between us into a physical fight, a really violent one, thank goodness he overpowered me...”

The shame from that day had never faded, to reveal that part of him to his sister – someone whose opinion mattered to him more than anyone else’s – was hard to say the least.

“Anyway, he told me to leave or he’d call the cops... I barely had the presence of mind to gather very few things in my backpack and left. I was high and running on adrenaline, didn’t notice I had left my phone behind. When I did, I was too far gone with my ‘fuck it’ attitude and only worried about maintaining my high.”

Aaron paused, he hated to reminisce about those days. He cleared his throat and continue.

“I think, Dad thought I’d be away for a few days, long enough for whatever was in my bloodstream to wear off and me to realize what I had done, then I’d come back home and we’d figure a way to straighten me up,” he sighed. “Instead I left with some friends, whenever I was sober I would think about what I had done, and be so ashamed that I’d get high just to smother that memory into oblivion.”

Although she’d always had a high opinion of her brother, Beca hadn’t put Aaron on a pedestal, however this was a side of him she had never seen, one that she had a hard time to concealed with the image she had of him. The Aaron she knew was ever so kind and thoughtful, caring, soft spoken, goofy, fiercely protective, the only time he had showed a violent side was to defend her from bullies. The Aaron he was describing was almost monstrous, the Mr. Hyde of her Dr. Jekyll.

“I called a few times, but I’d always get either one of them. Of course they’d refuse to let me speak to you, I don’t even know if you were around or not. So we’d argued, and those phone calls were... colorful, quiet in the same vein of our last interaction.”

Realization dawned on Beca, she let out a deep sigh. Chances were, she was actually there for some of those calls.

“They were seldom in the house together at the same time...” she started to explain. “I just
assumed they were arguing over the phone, I mean… I couldn’t stand the sound of their voices… I just put music on to…” she shrugged. “I think my headphones were surgically attached to my ears by then…”

Beca shook her head to berate herself. “…if only I had paid attention… I’d have noticed the difference between the phone calls…”

“It’s not like you could have known,” Aaron stepped in. “I shouldn’t have used, I shouldn’t have been violent with them, I shouldn’t have left…” he didn’t want her to take any blame regarding what had happened. It was on him and their parents, she had been collateral damage.

He exhaled heavily and went on after a pause. “The way I see it, they probably thought that given my state of mind I didn’t have the best intentions with you or that I wouldn’t be the best influence or that I’d probably end up hurting you… they were wrong of course but all things considered I understand their point of view.”

Beca didn’t say anything, it was a lot to take in and accept. Now everything took another dimension, and she felt angry at everyone, herself included. If only her parents hadn’t taken decisions on her behalf, if only Aaron had tried harder, if only she had paid attention, if only, if only, if only…

“I didn’t come here to stir troubles…” Aaron took her out of her reflections. “…apparently you guys were working on your relationship and I don’t want to be the reason for that not to happen… yes what they did is inexcusable but they’re not the only bad guys in this story…”

Beca looked away, she’d need time to digest those new information, one thing was certain, she didn’t want to talk about this anymore right now.

“I screwed up, I let you down,” Aaron’s hand covered hers, forcing her to look at him again. “I wasn’t there for you, I wasn’t there period… I failed you, I’ve been a shitty brother, I hurt you and for that I’m deeply sorry. I hope you’ll forgive me someday.”

Yes, he had hurt her, yes she did resent his absence but she had the full picture now and that changed everything. Nothing could erase what had happened or repair was had been broken, that didn’t mean they couldn’t have a new start and it’d be one blatant lie to say she didn’t want that new start.
She squeezed his hand with a barely there grin she silently let him know that things between them would eventually be okay, that they’ll eventually rebuild their trust bridges and relationship because she was as willing to make it happen as he was.

“I’ve missed you too,” she finally admitted.

Aaron smiled, he quickly passed the back of his free hand over his eyes and cleared his throat (emotional constipation was a Mitchell trait). He chuckled when something caught his attention.

He turned Beca’s hand, running a gentle thumb over her wrist. “I see you’ve got yourself some ink.”

“Look who’s talking,” she replied with a nod in direction of his arm.

He kept his focus on her tattoo of headphones. “Please, tell me you’ve kept up with music.”

“I have.”

His smile broadened. “I had the presence of mind to leave with my iPod, your mixes… they’ve been my life line, especially in my darkest hours.”

“We have that in common,” she confessed. “I like to think I’ve gotten better since.”

“I’d love to hear it.”

Beca took her headphones from around her neck and handed them to him, she then plugged them into her phone to play him something. Just like that music allowed them to take their first step in the right direction.

Chloe was almost bouncing her way into the Lighthouse. Her day had been a good one, as if all the stars had aligned (interesting and animated classes, her latest paper had earned her a good grade, and she had had a good time with some classmates) so Beca’s invitation to the Lighthouse was the
cherry on top of that cake.

“Hey you!” she said as she gripped Beca’s lapels to being her closer.

Beca smiled into their kiss. “How’s your day going?”

“Great, and now you’ve upgraded it to awesome,” Chloe bit her bottom lip before kissing her again.

The brunette felt the warmth of her blush peppering her cheeks, even though she was not a fan of mushiness, she couldn’t help the warm fuzzy feeling she’d get when Chloe said the sweetest things like right now. “You’re so corny.”

“So, do you want to go hunt old records?”

“Hum… actually, there’s someone I want you to meet.”

Beca hadn’t said anything about meeting Aaron. It’s not that she had wanted to keep the meeting away from Chloe but rather that she knew she’d have asked Chloe to come along with her had she told her. The redhead gave her strength and a sense of security, however Beca had known she needed to meet her brother alone. So she hadn’t mentioned it to her girlfriend to avoid the temptation of comfort.

“Here are the drinks and I’m going back for the pastries.”

Chloe turned around toward the voice and was unprepared to face the man she now could identified as Beca’s older brother, Aaron.

“Oh, hi, sorry,” Aaron grinned at her before glancing at Beca.

“Chlo this is my big brother Aaron, Aaron this is Chloe, my girlfriend.”

Aaron’s eyebrows shot upward in surprise but then a big smile almost split his face in two. “Hey, I
am very pleased to meet you,” he put down the cups he was holding and offered his hand to Chloe.

“So am I,” Chloe shook his hand, getting over her surprise.

She hadn’t known that Beca was meeting him. She assumed everything had gone well from the simple fact that Beca was much more relaxed in his presence than the last time she had witnessed them interact.

Aaron looked at Beca fondly, after their talk the conversation had stayed on neutral ground about their tattoos and music, but it had been enough for him to read between the line and understand that things hadn’t been too great in his absence. Beca needn’t say more right now, the simple fact that he was meeting Chloe told him how much the redhead meant to his little sister, and he was happy about it. It was good to know his sister had someone like Chloe in her life.

“What can I get you?” he focused on Chloe again.

Chloe sighed and snuggled closer to Beca, even in her slumbering state she knew her girlfriend wasn’t sleeping.

“Wow… I can actually hear your brain working overtime,” she said with a sleepy voice. “What’s keeping you up?”

Once again Beca was surprised of how much Chloe was attuned with her moods.

The day had been good but draining. She had met with Aaron, they had talked and kind started to bond again. She had introduced him to Chloe and the three of them had spend a good evening at the Lighthouse.

Light had been shaded onto a lot of things from her past and that had been emotionally draining. There were still a lot to talk about with Aaron. They hadn’t brushed anything that was in his letters or what had been her side of the story during the separation. Their talk had been heavy enough as it was for one day.
“How are your nodes?” she asked seemingly out of the blue.

“What?”

“Your nodes …”

“No, I got your question it’s just…” she cut Beca off and glanced at her nightstand. “Wait… it’s past 1 in the morning, are my nodes really what’s keeping you up?” she was amused albeit confused by Beca’s line of thoughts.

“Yeah… well no but…” Beca struggled to find her words.

Today had given her a lot to think about and she realized something that bothered her. She didn’t know how to explain it however.

Chloe waited patiently, giving Beca time to figure out how to say what was the real issue.

“How are you nodes?” Beca simply repeated the question because in the end it all came down to it.

“They’re fine… I mean, it hurts a bit when I push my voice but… that’s nothing new or surprising since the doc warned me about that.”

Beca nodded. Chloe could feel the brunette’s frustration, there was something more there but she didn’t know what. So she did what she usually wouldn’t, she prompted her girlfriend.

“Hey, talk to me,” she gently demanded with a kiss on her shoulder.

“It’s just… I’ve been monopolizing the attention with my… fucked up family drama… and I … I don’t want you to think you can’t tell me about the things bothering you… I’m here for you… even… when things are bad… I… I don’t want you to think you can’t lean on me…”

For all her difficulty to express herself Beca did a lot to meet Chloe halfway and be open. One thing was certain though, the redhead had never doubted of the fact that she could rely on her girlfriend.
“I know that,” Chloe reassured Beca.

“Do you though?”

“Of course I…” Chloe trailed off. “Well…the one thing I haven’t told you though I should have. I just didn’t know how…”

“You can talk to me… I know I’m not good with words, but you can talk to me!”

“I know… I just… like I said, I should have told you…”

Beca turned around in their embrace so she could face Chloe. The moonlight filtering through the room was just enough for her to see her girlfriend’s face clearly.

Chloe bit her bottom lip, clearly unsure if she should speak. Beca was berating herself for the idea of being so focus on her own issues she had let Chloe down made her stomach churn.

She waited expectantly for Chloe to continue.

“I… I adore you as well.”

For expecting the worse Beca was completely thrown off. She sighed with a smidge of frustration but she couldn’t really fight the grin off her lips.

“You can be kind of a jerk sometimes, you know that?” the reproach was made with affection.

She knew Chloe wasn’t mocking her or making light of her insecurities, but rather that the redhead was well aware of how said insecurities would get loud at times (like right now). So Chloe had build up tension playing off her insecurities to better kick them away and be louder.

“Hey! So much for talking to you!” Chloe protested more for the form than anything else, because
she knew she had hit her mark.

“Chlo, I’m serious.”

“So am I!”

Chloe put a placating hand on Beca’s cheek. “I do know I can talk to you about everything and I do,” she said honestly. “I do adore you and I should have said it before.”

It took a moment for Beca’s insecurities to completely quiet down, but she did relax eventually and smiled fondly at Chloe.

“Are we good?” Chloe asked.

“Yeah.”

The redhead leant in for a long sweet kiss. “Good, now please try to get some rest, because we have an early rehearsal coming and we don’t want to trigger Bree’s punishing cardio session.”

“The option to lace her morning juice with valium is still available you know,” Beca quipped while snuggling to Chloe.

“Bee…” the redhead used her warning tone.

“Come on, even half of one would do the trick.”

Chloe chuckled. “Don’t tempt me,” her reply elicited a small laughter from her girlfriend.

Beca rose onto one elbow to hover slightly above Chloe. “You know… I can think of another form of cardio right now,” she smirked.
The redhead sighed with a grin. “Behave. Go to sleep.”

“Okay,” the little brunette resigned with a tiny pout before pecking Chloe’s lips. “Nighty night.”

She snuggled again and closed her eyes almost ready to enter Morpheus’ kingdom.

Chloe closed her eyes to be reasonable and sleep. That mature stance almost lasted for a full minute. “Right, as if sleep was on my mind now… you’re incorrigible.”

She rolled over Beca and attached her lips on her neck, her hands slipping under Beca’s clothes not wasting time with foreplays.

Biting her lips to hold back a moan and holding Chloe’s head to maintain her on one of her sexy spots, Beca chuckled as if she had known this would happened.

(She had.)

Chapter End Notes

Alrighty, I’ll leave with three things.

1) NaNoWriMo is around the corner and I intend to participate. Now, there’s realistically no way for me to complete the next part by the start of it (even if I’d somehow enter an extreme writing trance), and let’s be honest I can’t battle both fronts at once. Conclusion the next part won’t be before December… at least.

2) The next part will be the last (yes, we’re already at the end).

3) There should be a sequel, such is my ambition anyway, but we’ll cross that bridge when we get there.

Thanks for reading.
Part 6

Beca had finally made it to the booth.

As luck would have it, something had come up and Chris, the guy who usually did the night shift at the station had to leave ten days before spring break, so she had stepped into the booth only two days after Luke had offered her the gig.

Yes, she had the night shift, some could see that has only half a success but Beca didn’t. She had free reign, playing the music she liked. Yes, the night shift meant that not as many people listened as during the day, that being said she worked hard to make her time in the booth quality. Everybody has to start somewhere and generally it’s at the bottom of the scale, she was determined to climb it and if that meant only doing the night shift then so be it.

If she did a good job, people would listen. If she did a great job they might invite their entourage to listen, a simple but effective domino effect.

Once she had people’s attention, she could play more of her tracks and start making a name for herself. The perspective of putting her music on air forced her to work even harder which meant she was sharpening her skills even more, it was a win-win.

Right now, she did play some of her originals but she couldn’t only do that for hours on end, so she had come up with two concepts, ones that even Luke had approved of. The first one ‘Got you
covered’, where during two hours she would only play covers and invite people to challenge her to find covers of their favorite songs. The second one ‘One Up’ where she’d ask auditors for songs according to a certain theme and she would ‘one up’ them with her own choices.

Those little shows had gained traction almost immediately, people were participating and she was getting good feedback.

She had made it to the booth. It was going very well, yet it didn’t feel nearly as exhilarating as it should have.

“You’re listening to WBUJ on 95.7, I’m Beca and for the next two hours, I got you covered. Up next, Johnny Cash with a soulful rendition of Nine Inch Nails’ ‘Hurt’.”

Beca’s hands ran expertly over the main console, cutting her mike and starting the next track, then she focused on the screen to make sure the next five songs were properly cued up. She let out a heavy sigh then stood up to walk around the station for a bit.

She could feel anger bubbling up again. She hadn’t felt anything else since the semi-finals with the Bellas.

She was mad at the world, at the Bellas, at Chloe, but most importantly she was mad at herself because she had let her guard down.

After Aaron’s brutal re-entry into her life, things had slowly gotten back on track between Bellas’ rehearsals, her shifts at the station, creating music and the occasional pop into classes. She was keeping in touch with her brother on a daily basis, mending their relationship with cautious baby steps.

She had let herself be lured into a sense of comfort and security, forgetting for a second that Life was nothing but one mercurial and cruel mistress waiting for the first opportunity to sucker punch you in the guts.

The day had started well, she had had a fun morning at Aubrey and Chloe’s, they had then chilled with the Bellas and just as they were about to leave she had heard her mix on the radio. Right then she had been high on adrenaline and excitement.
That feeling lasted up until they saw who they were competing against. The Footnotes were not making sock puppets sing. The Bellas had lost even before getting on stage, they all knew it, except Aubrey who was comfortably set in her denial bubble.

By the thirty seconds mark of their performance people were yawning, checking their phones, talking, doing just about anything but paying attention (they could have been naked on stage and no one would have noticed). No that wasn’t true, the Footnotes were paying attention and they were having a blast watching them slowly but surely crash and burn.

That had done it for Beca, so just like Amy had done in the previous round she had taken it upon herself to bring a little life in their performance. Of course, Aubrey hadn’t seen it like that only this time Beca hadn’t backed off, she had stood up to Aubrey… and she had been the only one because they had all let her down. She had figured that it was easier to blame their loss on her rather than on Aubrey’s stubbornness.

She had needed them, and no one had had her back.

She hadn’t spoken to any of them since.

She had had one messages from Chloe that night, the redhead had just asked to know if she had gotten back on campus okay since they hadn’t ridden together. Beca had reluctantly replied in spite of her anger. There had been another text from Chloe two days later asking if she wanted to go to the Lighthouse, still reeling from the semis betrayal, she had refused. The same invitation came the day after and the next to the same result. Apart from those, they had been in radio silence for the past ten days.

If she was honest, that radio silence was the one stinging the most.

The vibration of her phone took her out of her thoughts. She grinned when she saw that it was a message from Aaron. ’Another killer set tonight Mumble, can’t wait to hear your mix! ;)

She quickly replied then went back in the booth to finish her set.

xxxxx
“Happy spring break.”

The little DJ doubted there would be anything happy about that break, still she grinned at her roommate as she was departing. “Thanks, you too.”

Beca faced her monitor again to work on her new mix. She checked her phone, tapped on it, stared at the message screen for almost a full minute, she felt the urge to reach out to Chloe but her anger was still burning, so in the end she just put her phone down and focused on her music again.

She jumped out of her skin when her phone came to life, she felt a little disappointment regarding the message sender but soon she was out of her room to join them at the Lighthouse.

“I hope I didn’t disturb you.”

Beca shook her head at her brother with a shrug. “Nah, I was being unproductive anyway.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Just a day without, I guess.”

He tilted his head with a small pout. “Not what I meant.”

It didn’t matter the years they had spent apart, he could still read his sister clearly with the smallest tells. Beca felt irritation at his accurate scrutiny, rather than be defensive about it she tried to avoid the matter.

“How have you been?”

Aaron held back a grin, his little sister’s reluctance to talk was a familiar territory, one he had learnt to navigate safely a long time ago. He was rusty for the lack of practice though, but he could try his best to encourage Beca to unload if not all, at least a bit of the burden obviously weighing heavily on her shoulders.
He first indulged her by taking the spotlight, talking about himself and about what he had been up to since they had last seen one another. He made sure to keep the attention on him at the opportunity to redirect so as not to appear pushy and give Beca time to relax.

He then directed the attention on her music and her shifts at the radio station. He let his pride at her work shine, he was happy for her, it was one step toward her goals and she was killing it.

“You could do a challenge like playing as many covers as possible of one single song, you know… it’s like that Björk’s album, ‘Army of me’ I think. She picked out covers from her fans, but you could find a song that is often covered and pick a top five or something.”

Beca pondered his idea. “Yeah, that could be interesting.”

“Admit that I have great ideas, it won’t hurt you to say it, promise.”

Beca rolled her eyes at his teasing.

“By the way, don’t you have your *a capella* thing coming? Nervous?”

Aaron was trying to keep the conversation neutral but the brutal mood shift let him know that he had stepped right onto a mine. He mentally cursed as he felt anger radiating from his sister.

“It was almost two weeks ago.”

“I gather it didn’t go well. Sorry about that.”

“Don’t be, we had lost long before showing up.”

Aaron remained quiet and took a sip of his cocoa, knowing that any push or prompt from him would have Beca clam shut for good.
The silence stretched for almost a minute then Beca launched into a detailed account of that day and everything that led to it. Aaron listened carefully, filing every bit of information.

He took a moment to digest everything, one thing was certain the chances for him to get through to his sister were not great at the moment, so he opted for a blunt approach.

“I get that you had a fallout but you shouldn’t shut them out, they’re your friends.”

“Yeah, well friends are supposed to have each other’s back, they didn’t have mine,” Beca snapped. “They were all thinking like I did, but the minute it was time to stand up to Aubrey… no one backed me up.”

Aaron pursed his lips. He understood her point of view, he really did but he’d be lying if he said that he blamed Beca’s friends. Of course he couldn’t say that directly so he took the diplomatic road. “Timing is key. Try to put yourself in their shoes, I think they were just taken by surprise at the whole thing.”

“So you think I was wrong.”

The statement sounded like an accusation. He knew right then that no matter what he was to say next she wouldn’t be receptive to it, at least for now.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Yes it does, it means you’re taking their side!”

“I’m not. What I meant was, it doesn’t matter who’s right or wrong.”

“Of course it does!”

“No, trust me, it never does.”

Beca huffed in disagreement but didn’t add anything.
Aaron raised his hands in surrender to placate her. “Look, I don’t want to fight with you, all I’m saying is I think you shouldn’t shut them all out, and more importantly you should talk to Chloe. You’re upset about the radio silence, but she’s probably just waiting for a sign from you.”

Beca looked away, clearly irritated by his words.

“I have to go, I still need to prepare my set for tonight,” she announced, effectively putting an end to their conversation.

He didn’t try to hold her back. “Alright.”

They stood and exited the Lighthouse, not wanting to part on a sour note, Aaron got his sister’s attention before she walked away.

“Mumble.” He waited for her to look at him. “Kill it again tonight,” he winked at her with a grin.

The affectionate gesture softened her dark mood. They didn’t say goodbye, just exchange a fist bump and went their separate way.

“That was Iron & Wine’s rendition of This Must Be the Place. Now, you know it’s that time of the night, coming right up one hour of music non-stop. Today’s theme: songs with ‘crazy’ in the title, starting off with Selah Sue’s Crazy Vibes. This is Beca and you’re listening to WBUJ on 95.7.”

Beca cut her mike and cued the songs list she had prepared. Taking off her headphones she sighed and moved her head around to work out the kinks, she then exited the booth for a well deserved break.

She heard a muffled banging coming from the entrance. For some reason she thought about Jesse, had he been there he’d have commented on the fact that this sounded like the premise of a horror
flick. The protagonist alone in a big room, noises coming from the outside in the dead of the night.

Beca shook herself out of her contemplation when the banging started again. She opened the door that separated the station from the lobby and was surprised to find Chloe on the other side of the bay window.

The brunette got over her stupor to let the other girl in. For the first time Beca felt uncomfortable around Chloe, it was hardly surprising considering the long radio silence and her latent anger.

“You have a good timing… I’m on my break.”

Beca spoke first when she realized Chloe might not speak at all.

“I know, it’s the non-stop hour.”

“You listen to the show,” Beca offered a small grin.

“Have to, it’s the only way to hear from you lately,” the tone was flat but the words felt like a swift punch.

Beca didn’t take the attack well. “I didn’t feel like talking.”

“Yeah, I got that memo,” Chloe ignored the glare she received from Beca and went on. “Don’t worry, I didn’t come to challenge that. I just came to say goodbye.”

Beca’s heart went frantic with fear. “You’re breaking up with me?”

“Although I didn’t have any doubt about our status quo, I won’t lie the lack of communication those past few days had me dubitative regarding your stance on that matter. So, thank you for the reassurance that we are still indeed together.”

The redhead nodded in mock appreciation before she continued, still with an even voice. “The answer is no, I came to say goodbye because I’ll be away for spring break and unavailable. I
figured that on the off chance you decided to talk to me before the 36th of the month, I didn’t want you to think I was ignoring you.”

“Can we not do the passive aggressive bullshit right now?” Beca’s words were spoken through clenched teeth.

The brunette forced herself to count up to ten then all the way back to one to calm down. Chloe was triggering all her defense mechanisms, for a moment she flashbacked to fights between her parents and that put her on edge.

“Beca, I can assure you there’s nothing passive in my aggression,” Chloe pointed out. “This is me furious and confrontational. I don’t shout, I don’t do hysterics, but I think we can both agree that I convey my sentiments just fine.”

Since she had a generally joyful disposition, the common misconception about Chloe was that she never got angry, she’d get upset at best. In truth, when her good mood was reversed, fury was the thing running in her veins. She had learnt to control it however because she realized that a) nothing productive or good ever came from losing her temper (because nobody listened when you shouted so it was all about staying rational) and b) it usually put people off their footing therefore giving her an advantage. So the more furious she was the calmer she seemed (as Beca was learning).

“Anyway, as I said, I’ll be away for the break and I won’t be available so I’ll see you in a few days.”

After a short hesitation Chloe amended her statement. “The nodes and I are parting ways.”

As upset as she was at her girlfriend, Chloe’d rather be the one to let Beca know about the surgery, not telling her seemed like a disproportionate punishment.

Concern immediately overrode every bit of Beca’s anger. On the occasion they had spoken about Chloe’s nodes, the redhead had been adamant to do everything in order to avoid surgery, too terrified for the option and of what she may very well lose in the process.

“Why didn’t you say anything before?” the question fell off the brunette’s lips almost instantly.

“No, you do not get to be upset,” the reply was calm but firm. “Besides, when was I supposed to
tell you about it? Need I remind you that you’ve made it clear that you didn’t want to talk? I respected your wish, and I refuse to push *ad eternam*, as fun as it is to be shut down time and time again, I have a low tolerance threshold to rejection."

That was unfair, Beca thought. Chloe had let her down, like the others had. And now she made it look like Beca didn’t care about anything at all, giving her the bad role.

The redhead waited for her girlfriend to say something, anything, but nothing came. She had in mind to leave, if the brunette wanted to keep pouting and shutting her out, so be it. She didn’t give into that impulse though because she knew if she left nothing would change, Beca would most likely persist in her silence and the end result would most likely be that they’d reach a no return point in their relationship.

“Is this how it’s always going to be? Every time I disagree with you I’m going to get the cold shoulder for days on end?”

Beca felt like a cooker under pressure, ready to explode at any second. She didn’t like this side of Chloe, aggressive and cold. She knew that if she spoke she’d either stutter or lash out, something about feeling cornered made her shut down completely.

Upon realizing that Beca would not break her silence, the senior huffed bitterly. “Do you know there are 10 of us in the Bellas?”

The question was so out of the blue, it confused Beca. Try as she might, the brunette was failing to see the point. She needn’t worry though for the senior was about to hammer that nail on the head.

“Being oblivious of that tiny detail is something you and Aubrey both have in common.”

That comparison stung. Not only that but Chloe was wrong, she was nothing like Aubrey, unlike the blonde she had had the Bellas’ interests in mind.

“There are 10 of us, but when we are performing we all disappear, we are meant to. When we perform it’s about the Bellas, we are one entity, that’s all. That’s what I think, maybe that’s naïve of me, so be it,” Chloe paused. “You did the exact thing Aubrey’s been doing for months, take a unilateral decision, completely disregarding the group.” She shook her head in disapproval. “I can’t get behind that.”
Beca was so upset that she didn’t actually hear anything, not a single word resonated at all. All her mind was latching on was Chloe’s aggression.

Chloe understood what Beca had felt and why she had gone rogue during their set, truly she did, but she was also sincere about not agreeing with it.

Then it didn’t take a genius to guess that Beca had felt betrayed and let down because Chloe hadn’t taken her side, nor was it hard to assume that the brunette had felt abandoned. The redhead also understood why she had been shut out, because she now had a good perspective on how Beca’s mind worked.

Now, being understanding didn’t mean she wasn’t growing frustrated at the situation though. She had yet again compromised by coming to the station, opening the line of communication, laying everything out for Beca on a platter and still the brunette kept shutting her out. What was worse, Beca’s stubborn silence was only confirming what she already knew, nothing would have changed hadn’t she made the first move.

“Nothing, still?” she prompted. She shook her head with resignation.

She could go easy on Beca and be less confrontational. Thing was, she was too furious for cutting Beca some slack. Besides, she didn’t want this kind of situation to become their dynamic. Beca needed to understand that she had to make efforts as well. Chloe didn’t want to have to put her girlfriend’s back against a wall and give ultimatums every time they had a disagreement.

“You make it so damn hard to be close to you… I keep compromising, making the effort when you barely try to meet me halfway, and quite frankly it is exhausting to have to prove myself over and over again only to be pushed harder and further away every time.”

“Why the fuck do you bother then?” Beca spit with barely concealed anger.

Of course Beca would only break her silence with a cutting reply, pushing her away as if to prove her point.

A bitter rictus stretched Chloe’s lips. Clearly she wasn’t making it through her girlfriend, and at this point she didn’t see what more she could do, not that she had any energy left. “If I didn’t know better, I’d be offended that you’d even ask,” she said flatly.
She did know better. She had enough knowledge to understand where Beca was coming from and that she was defending herself the only way she knew how. She had enough knowledge to understand that while Beca had had years to perfect the art of protecting herself and pushing people away, she had yet to learn how to let them in.

That knowledge didn’t make the rejection any easier or less painful.

Rather than pushing back, Chloe decided to capitulate. “I’m in love with you Beca.”

The brunette’s stunned expression would have made her laugh if she wasn’t so tired at the situation.

“Yeah… not the setting I had in mind to drop that bomb,” she noted with a defeated smile. “I love you, which is why I have it in me to be patient and understanding… but if you keep pushing me away eventually that well will run dry.”

She took a deep breath and exhaled tiredly. “I love you and I care. The truth is, I’m not the only one caring about you, but you don’t see it because you’re too busy pushing everybody away. You might want to reconsider that habit yours because in my humble opinion, it doesn’t work in your favor.”

The redhead felt drained so with a resigned sigh she decided to call it quit. “I’m going to go because I’m leaving early and you have a set to finish.”

She turned around started to walk away but stopped herself. She hated the idea of leaving on that note. She returned to Beca. Ignoring the myriad of emotions she saw playing in her girlfriend’s eyes, she put a gentle hand on her cheek and gave her a soft kiss.

The kiss was meant as a reassurance to the brunette but to herself as well. Yes things were not okay right now, but she needed Beca to understand that it only meant they needed to figure things out together, and she needed to reassure herself that her words would eventually make it through so Beca would meet her halfway.

“I’ll see you in a few days.”

With that she left the station.
“Welcome to my humble abode.”

A timid grin graced Beca’s lips as she entered her brother’s apartment.

“Make yourself comfortable,” Aaron encouraged her.

Beca had spent the last 24h in a fog of sort, completely apathetic to the world around her. Chloe had left her overwhelmed with too many emotions at once. On instinct her brain had switch on the autopilot just so she could functioned.

She had gone back in the booth and had known what to do as soon as headphones were over her head but she couldn’t remember that half of her set even if her life depended on it.

In fact she’d be hard pressed to remember anything that had happened since the redhead’s visit.

She wasn’t sure why but she had called Aaron. The call had been short and a bit awkward. Aaron had ended up inviting her over at his place, since she felt like the walls of her dorm were closing in on her, she had gladly accepted.

The place was sparsely furnished but it did feel homey. She moved to the table in one side of the living room and wrapped her jacket around one of the chairs surrounding it. The table was covered with drawings and sketches.

When he had fallen from the face of the Earth, apart from a couple of shirts, Aaron’s sketchbooks had been some of the few things he had left behind that she had valued more than anything and preciously guarded. His style had evolved that was for certain but his touch was unmistakable, that little something that made his drawings peculiar was still there.
“I’m working… meh ‘struggling’ is a better word, with some design,” he simply said as he came next to her to order his papers.

“I like this one,” she pointed at a colorful page with some intricate pattern before he could put it away.

“It’s close but not quite there… like… I guess it’s like when you have a clear melody in your head but can’t translate it properly, you know? On the tip of your fingers but you just can’t grasp it.”

“Yeah… I know the feeling.”

“Can I get you something to drink?” he asked walking to his kitchen then stopped himself mid tracks. “I don’t have any alcohol or coffee.”

“I’ll have whatever you have.”

Aaron came back with two ice cold sodas, they both sat at the table, facing one another. He had picked up on the fact that something was off, or at least that she had a lot on her mind. Rather than prying he waited patiently.

Her last interaction with Chloe kept playing on repeat in Beca’s head like a scratched record. The thought of the redhead made her feel like a cold hand was holding her throat in a vice grip, slowly crushing her.

She took a shaky breath and focused to keep her anxiety and panic at bay.

“The other day, you tried to tell me something…about being right or wrong… I’m ready to listen now…” she trailed off.

Aaron inhaled deeply. He took a moment to choose his words carefully. “We’re always right in our own narrative, whether we’re being objective about it or not. That being said it ultimately doesn’t matter.”

“What does then?”
“What you are standing to lose and whether or not you want things to be right again.”

He paused to gather his thoughts. “You had a fallout with your friends. If you’re right, stop waiting around for the gloat parade to come pat you on the back, put yourself in their shoes to understand their perspective then get over your ego and reach out so you all can figure out how to move on from there.”

He took a deep breath. “If you’re wrong, swallow your pride, put yourself in their shoes to understand their perspective then get over your ego and reach out so you all can figure out how to move on from there.”

He looked up pensively. “Uh… sounds like there’s an echo in here.”

Beca grinned at his little trait of humor, proud to have hit his mark, Aaron continued. “Like I said, being right or wrong ultimately doesn’t matter.”

“I’m not good at all this,” she confessed in a whisper.

“Relationships of any kind, family, friends, love, are hard for everybody even for those who make it look easy, trust me. We all have our insecurities and quirks and what not and more importantly there’s no freaking guidebook. The only certitude is that it demands constant work and compromises.”

Aaron could feel his sister’s anguish and distress. He knew firsthand how Beca had always had a hard time when it came to social interaction. To be fair, she had started with a few disadvantages.

“Mumble…” he called her softly. “Pushing people away is an easy and safe path but it’s also a lonely one.”

As silly as it seemed until recently Beca hadn’t realized that there were things she was standing to lose. When she had joined the Bellas it was just a mean to an end, show Graham she was trying so she could get out of the whole College thing after just a year and do what she had always wanted.

It all had changed quickly though, she liked those girls; she liked singing with them and just
People had always made her feel inadequate, and the time she had needed to learn how to speak without stuttering was time she hadn’t had to learn social cues and customs therefore she had always been several steps behind.

She wanted to fit in like anyone else, but human interaction was more often than not a painfully awkward affair. At least it usually was, but if she was honest it had never really been the case with the girls because they were just as quirky and awkward as she was and most importantly she had never felt judged under their gazes. (Okay, she had felt judged by Aubrey, but to be fair she had judged the senior as well).

And then there was Chloe, she didn’t need to think to know she didn’t want to lose her. The thought alone was enough to bring her on the verge of suffocation so…

Yeah, she understood Aaron’s point, she just needed to figure out how to go about it. What he said next made her questioned whether or not he could read minds, hers in particular.

“There’s no right or wrong way to do it. It’s not easy, but you have to do your part in the best effort possible, the rest isn’t up to you.”

She simply nodded. He stood up and before he could think too much he leaned in to kiss her crown. He was still walking on eggshell when it came to physical marks of affection, he had a lot to give but he could feel Beca’s discomfort. It wasn’t so much that she didn’t want it but rather that over three years without it changed what used to be normal into something alien (with the shadow of a smile, she did welcome his gesture though).

Beca knocked on the door in front of her before she could change her mind. After meeting Aaron, she had spent a day thinking about everything from a different perspective, and she finally admitted what her anger had refused to let her see. She wasn’t as right as she thought she had been.

With her new found point of view she had power–walked to her destination, forbidding herself to
think so as not to backtrack and convince herself there was a miracle alternative solution.

She wasn’t expecting a warm welcome (or to be welcome at all really) which was a good thing because she could swear she felt glacial air blowing her way the moment the door was opened.

“Chloe’s not here.”

Upon seeing who was on the other side of her apartment door, all of her pent up anger violently surfaced. Aubrey had been tempted to just ignore Beca, but she valued manners so she had opened the door and made the minimum effort to inform the brunette of Chloe’s absence. Now that it was done she was already closing the door.

“I know… I’m here for you.”

Those few words were spoken quickly with a weak voice, but it was enough to stop Aubrey mid-motion, if only because she was not certain to have heard well.

Beca clenched her jaw and took a calming breath. She was so tensed she could feel all her muscles burn, now under Aubrey’s intransigent gaze she felt so vulnerable she’d be ready to set herself on fire if that meant she could be anywhere but here.

“I ca-came…” she stopped herself immediately and did the mental gymnastic necessary for her not to stutter. “I came here to see you,” she repeated firmly.

Aubrey simply waited. Beca had made the list of the last persons she wanted to speak to or hear from since the semi-finals. She had made that fact abundantly clear to Chloe the second they had came back home that night, and though she hadn’t notified it to the brunette she was certain it was a shared feeling.

“I owe you an apo…” Beca sighed heavily remembering Aaron’s words about putting her ego aside and getting over herself. “Apologies…” she amended. “I owe you apologies.”

Aubrey kept looking at the brunette impassibly, although she didn’t let anything transpire, she was put off balance by Beca’s words (and if she was honest, part of her was shamefully basking under a hint of schadenfreude as well)
“Can I come in so I can do this properly? I promise, I’ll leave you alone afterwards,” the brunette hoped she wouldn’t have to beg (or at least not any more than she already was).

The blonde relented to invite the other girl in, even though the little DJ had announced her intention to apologize, she was mentally working herself up for an argument (letting her guard down was not the Posen way to do things).

They remained in the foyer, having no intention to make things easy for Beca, Aubrey just crossed her arms over her chest and waited.

“What I did at the semis… that was a dick move. I’ve been telling myself that I was right, and truly if my intentions were good it doesn’t make it okay.”

After talking with Aaron, Beca had reviewed her last conversation with Chloe. As much as she wanted to deny it, she had been spot on about Beca’s behavior. Ultimately it hadn’t been about the Bellas but about her ego.

“We’re so good, but that routine… it sucked okay, it… sucked the life out of us. Nobody listened to us and then… the Footnotes were mocking us and… I told myself that I was just giving a little life to our set… like Amy had but… I now realize that I just threw everyone off a cliff and hoped for the best… and I’m sorry.”

Aubrey remained silent, listening carefully to the brunette.

“Also, I’m sorry for… undermining your authority during a performance no less… I’m sorry for ruining things for everyone… I want you to know it wasn’t sabotage, I cared, I truly did, I just went about it the wrong way.”

Beca exhaled heavily wishing she was better with words, right now it all seemed to fall short. She waited for a reaction from the senior but the blonde just kept staring with her unforgiving eyes.

“Right… I guess I should go then.”

Beca had waited a full minute, clearly she had failed to fix things but at least she had tried. She
gave a curt nod and started to leave.

“Last year was the first time ever that an all female group made it to the ACCA finals…”

As random as that statement felt, Beca gave the other girl her full attention. Aubrey’s expression was still undecipherable though.

“We were making ACCA history, did you know that?”

The little DJ shook her head even though she suspected the question to be purely rhetorical.

“It was the proudest and greatest day of my life…” a small grin stretched Aubrey’s lips for a brief second before fading away. “At least right until my nerves manifested themselves in the most humiliating and disgusting way possible, and lucky me, it was immortalized on the internet.”

Almost a year had elapsed yet the humiliation was still scorching the blonde from inside out. She had genuinely tried to move past it all. All the good will in the world hadn’t been enough though because the moment she could muzzle the memory there’d always be someone to shove it right back into her face.

“I can be stubborn.”

Beca had the good grace to hold back a snort at that gem of an understatement. That didn’t make any difference, her opinion on the matter was so blatantly written over her face Aubrey couldn’t have missed it even if she’d tried.

“I am stubborn,” the senior reluctantly amended. “There are no words to express how livid I was at what you did, that was a shitty move and there nothing you can say that would ever excuse that.”

Beca gritted her teeth, of course the blonde would rub her face in it. She kept repeating herself that she had to take it, she had done wrong after all and that was her sentence.

“The shittiest part yet was your timing. Up to 3 sometimes 4 rehearsals a day almost every day for months and you only find it in you to be rebellious during our semis performance,” Aubrey shook
Aubrey wished Beca would say something, anything so that she wouldn’t have to go on, so she’d have an easy way out.

Maybe it was just instant Karma. Moments ago she had kind of rejoiced in Beca’s predicament, not even considering offering any kind of leniency. Now the parts were reversed… Karma was indeed a cruel mistress.

“I wanted that routine to take us to the finals, I needed that routine to take us to the finals. As much as I kept telling myself that it was the Bellas’ best chance, it was just about me getting a chance at a do over, a chance to perform the way I should have last year without humiliating myself…”

In all honesty Beca had never once asked herself why Aubrey had been so adamant about keeping their routine as it was. Listening to the blonde’s confession everything made sense, it seemed obvious like something she should have known from the start. After all, they had watched the video of last year infamous finals during their very first rehearsal. Heck, she had even called Aubrey on the fact that the routine looked suspiciously the same, yet nothing had really computed, she hadn’t seen the bigger picture during all those months.

Now that she had the blonde’s point of view, she couldn’t really blame her for wanting a second
chance. She understood Aubrey and even sympathize with her (she’d had her fair share of humiliating moments she had wished she could live again differently). Maybe if she had taken the time to try to understand where Aubrey was coming from, things would have been different.

“I am stubborn but you see… had you hijacked a rehearsal I’d have realized… my m… my mistake… I’d have understood that my obsession was hurting the group, that I was holding us back because of it.”

At that moment, Aubrey could hear her father telling her that there was no such thing as a bad team, just bad leaders. That was one truth she couldn’t deny today.

“For what it’s worth, I’m sorry,” Aubrey’s voice was almost a whisper by that point. “I’m sorry for not listening to you… to any of you. I’m sorry to have let my ego get in the way because I know now that if I had paid attention and led the way I was supposed to the Bellas would have had a fair chance, I’m pretty sure…scratch that, I know we’d have smashed our way to the finals.”

Beca was surprised to say the least. She had never expected the great Aubrey Posen to ever be so fragile or actually admit to ever be wrong. It was oddly reassuring to realize that she wasn’t the only one to screw up. For the first time she did see that they were not so different.

Aubrey couldn’t remember the last time she had let her guard down enough to admit her wrongs. One thing was certain feeling weak and vulnerable still sucked as hard as she remembered it.

“Humble pie doesn’t taste half as bitter as I thought it would,” Aubrey mused out loud.

That made Beca chortled. “Yeah… I was thinking the same.”

The tension between them had finally receded a bit, leaving them in a semi-awkward silence. Now that they had discussed their main issues Aubrey didn’t see any reason to stand guard in the entrance so she just turned around and walked back to the living room to sit on the couch.

After a brief hesitation Beca followed. Taking place next to the blonde she watched her picking up the controller on the coffee table and resuming her game.

For a few minutes there was nothing but the sound of buttons being expertly mashed and virtual weapons hitting their target with laser like precision.
Beca took that time to reflect on the universe’s sense of humor. Months ago, Aubrey and her had been at the exact same spot, doing the exact same thing. Aubrey had given her a well expected warning to which she had responded with a promise of her own.

She had failed that promise. A short review of her options made her conclude that owning up to it was the best she could do.

“I fucked up with Chloe,” Beca almost choked on her confession. She kept her eyes on the TV screen trying not to cry and bracing herself for what was to come.

“Yeah, you did.”

Scorching resentment poured from those three words. Aubrey didn’t look at her but if somehow Beca hadn’t picked up on the fury radiating from the blonde, the sudden increase of aggression in her game was a dead giveaway.

“But then again so did I, which is the only reason you’re still in one piece, breathing.”

Aubrey had known Chloe for almost her entire life yet one hand was enough to count the real arguments/fights they had had in all that time. Fighting with Chloe was number one on the list of the things she hated the most. It didn’t matter who was at fault, it was always a gut-wrenching experience.

This time was no exception. She was even madder at herself because had she not use her ass like a hat it could have been avoided. It wasn’t only about the whole Bellas’ debacle, she was also furious at herself because she had failed Chloe when she needed her the most and that was unacceptable.

She had been too self–absorbed, too obsessed about the Bellas’ failure and her lost chance to redeem herself, too proud to admit and own up her faults, too busy putting the blame on Beca and being loud about it, and Chloe had simply let her stew in her self-righteousness.

Then three days ago the redhead had confronted her in the most brutal way, though she had never raised her voice (she never did) her words had cut through her chest like a hot knife on butter.
During that conversation she had learnt that Chloe had decided to have the surgery right after the semis. That revelation had felt like a breathtaking punch. The redhead had been so incensed with her that she had elected to go through her worst fears and anguish alone for days rather than confide in her about it.

Aubrey had realized then that it also meant she had been so caught up riding her high horses she had never noticed that something was going on with Chloe in the first place. She should have paid attention to her best friend, she should have been there, she should have spent those days dragging Chloe to karaoke, watching musicals to sing along to, just do about everything the redhead liked as to enjoy her voice to the fullest before potentially losing it for good.

She had done none of that. Instead, she had had a late notice about the imminent surgery. They had parted on a sour note with Chloe clearly making her understand that she was fed up with her attitude and therefore demanding to suspend any contact between them for the duration of her stay away (however, the redhead being her usual thoughtful self had had the kindness to send her one text to let her know the surgery had gone well).

Of all of their arguments over the years this one had been the most violent, and if Aubrey knew they’d work it out (because they always did for one and secondly because she had finally come back to her senses) she knew it was one of those times for which she’d never forgive herself. If anything she’d always keep it in mind not to ever make the same mistake again.

“I don’t know how to fix it…” Beca’s words brought her out of her thoughts.

The pain and clear despair in the little DJ’s voice didn’t leave her insensitive.

“You’ll figure it out.”

The blonde immediately realized how weak her attempt at reassurance was. After a brief inner debate she let out a resigned sigh and kept on.

“Whether you realize it or not, Chloe will always do her best to attend to your needs. If what you need is time and silence, she’ll give you just that so long as you clue her in. She’s not perfect but she’s fiercely loyal and incredibly generous among other things, so putting the needs of others before her own is just in her nature.”

It felt odd to talk about Chloe like that with the brunette, it went against her protective instinct. If it
wasn’t for the conviction that this needed to be done in order to preserve something intrinsically
good, Aubrey would have stopped talking right away.

“This is one of the many gifts she’s bestowing on the people she cares about, it’s a precious one. You have to be deserving of that gift. That means opening your mouth every now and then to express what you feel, need or whatever’s going on in that head of yours because while she is very keen she’s no mind reader. For all you’re receiving that’s the very least you can do to give back.”

Aubrey spoke with passion, it occurred to her that it was as much an advice to Beca as it was a needed reminder to herself.

“As long as you do that you’ll figure out how to navigate any issues you two may have. And look… it’ll go a long way as a general rule.”

She paused to let her words sink in.

“Don’t ever take Chloe for granted and don’t ever stop doing your part to make it work because trust me, that’s one loss you can’t afford.”

Out of gentleness, Aubrey kept her eyes trained on the TV, pretending to be interested in her game, pretending not to notice the silent sobs shaking the brunette next to her or to see the quick move to erase the tears rolling on her cheeks. Standing up from the couch, she went to retrieve the second controller and offered it to Beca without sparing a glance in her direction.

Chloe had on several occasions mentioned that she and Beca were much alike, something she had dismissed as ridiculous, but now she could see where the redhead was coming from with that statement.

The little brunette was grateful for Aubrey’s false disinterest, she was embarrassed enough as it is to have so little hold on her emotions.

Just like they had done it a few weeks ago, they played silently in the hardest mode, the extra focus required was just what Beca needed to calm down and pull herself together.

“Yes!” Aubrey’s jubilation broke the silence for the first time in almost an hour.
“Ugh… I thought we’d never get that sucker,” Beca grunted about the boss they had just defeated.

“Tell me about it.”

All the tension was gone and they had slipped back into the comfortable familiarity they had built during all those months. Aubrey paused the game long enough to get them both something to drink then resumed to the next level.

“By the way, congrats on making it to the booth. Your shows are good and I must admit you surprised me a few times in the most pleasant way.”

The statement took Beca aback, tearing her eyes away from the screen she gave Aubrey a curious glance that didn’t go unnoticed.

“What?” Aubrey prompted still watching the screen.

“You… you’ve been listening,” the brunette stated the obvious with evident surprise.

“Of course,” the senior expression was the physical equivalent of the expletive ‘duh’.

At first slightly amused, Aubrey did a double take in the direction of the brunette only to realize that Beca’s astonishment was genuine.

“Of course I’ve been listening. You’re my friend Bilbo, just because we have a fallout doesn’t mean I stop caring, it only means that my congratulations and display of enthusiasm will be delay until we sort our issues out. Don’t you know how these things work?” she frowned with puzzlement. “And yes, I’ve said that you’re my friend, don’t make it weird.”

Beca knew they were friends, that shift had operated a while ago but it was overwhelming to hear it out loud. It made it more real, more potent. It was in the firmness of the statement, it showed how much Aubrey cared about her (something she had clearly underestimated).
The brunette grinned smugly opting for the least expected route. “You like me.”

“Oh my God,” the three words were enunciated with exasperation as Aubrey tore her eyes from the game too look skyward. “Which part of ‘do not make it weird’ didn’t you get?”

“It’s alright, I mean I can’t blame you. It’s hard to resist the Mitchell’s charm,” Beca amped up her teasing with a shrug.

“Oh shut up,” Aubrey snapped with exasperation.

“I’m irresistible, just say it…”

“Bilbo, I swear I will use this controller to beat you senseless into next week if you don’t stop talking.”

Beca raised a hand in surrender, biting her bottom lip in a feeble attempt to conceal her mirth. “Okay, okay, there’s no need for violence.”

They hadn’t stopped playing during the whole exchange. Beca chortled when the blonde muttered something under her breath, most likely some swearing. Aubrey was annoyed or at least she just made a show of it because they both knew the teasing was made in good spirit.

Beca had only teased because she had been afraid to lose the fragile grip she had on her emotions. The truth was she had never been at the receiving end of such a friendship, something solid that went beyond basic acquaintanceship, the kind you wanted to fight for tooth and nail to preserve through a lifetime.

Silence settled between them again. The little DJ took a deep breath before daring to speak her next words. “I’m glad to be your friend… that you’re my friend…” she stumbled.

Aubrey paused the game abruptly, slightly panicked Beca defended herself immediately. “I’m not being a jerk, I…”

“I know,” Aubrey cut her off forcefully, startling them both. “It’s…I…” she sighed in frustration.
She wasn’t sure what she wanted to say or rather how to say it, quite frankly she was certain to have reached her ‘being open and vulnerable’ quota for one day (or a year really).

She instinctively knew what to do but she was hesitant about it. This was Chloe’s territory, even now with years of practice with the redhead, initiating contact was still an odd prospect. She clenched and unclenched her fist, then her arm, taking life of its own, raised mechanically to wrap itself around Beca’s shoulders in the most gawky and uncertain way possible.

She brought the brunette against her side in the stiffest move imaginable but held on. Beca was more than surprised by the gesture, as always when it came to physical contact she immediately tensed but after a few seconds she relaxed and leant her head on Aubrey’s shoulder.

The embrace was uncomfortable and maladroit and clumsy and pitiful, but it was their first hug (probably the worst hug in history but it was theirs), and all things considered they were not making a total mess of it because it did conveyed what their words hadn’t.

Almost a full minute passed before they disengaged and sat up straight again, both looking ahead at the frozen screen.

“Right…let’s shoot stuff,” Aubrey offered immediately.

“Yup.”

xxxxx

With half of the student body gone for spring break, Beca had taken the opportunity to chill in another coffee shop. While her heart belonged to the Lighthouse, Bean Me Up was also a cool spot, it would usually be overcrowded (at least to Beca’s liking) so on the rare occasions she had come in the past she had always had something to go.

She was filling a little notebook with ideas for her next gig at the station, songs she wanted to play, next themes for the non-stop hour. She had not anticipated this brainstorming aspect of working in the booth, not to say she wasn’t enjoying it because she was. It was a great way for her to dig for songs she hadn’t thought about in a while or go explore new musical territories, not to mention it
gave her new material to work with on her own thing.

Unconsciously tapping her pen against the table while she read what she had just written, Beca looked up when she felt someone near her.

Graham Mitchell was standing next to her table looking nervous and hesitant. She felt anger bubbling just below the surface, she took a deep breath to hold it in though, after all she had been the one to set up the meeting.

“Hi,” the greeting was lukewarm at best, still Beca mentally patted herself on the back, at least it wasn’t cold.

Graham smiled nervously. “Hi,” he replied. He didn’t sit down until she gestured the place in front of her in a silent invitation.

Someone came almost immediately to take his order. Beca focused on her notebook again, adding a few things just to delay the impeding conversation. Graham used the time it took for the waitress to come back with his order to collect himself.

He had had a hard time to believe the invitation text she had sent him the day prior, so much so he had read it over and over for at least ten minutes before replying.

After their last conversation he had known they wouldn’t interact for a long while, in all honesty he had prepare himself for that long while to be counted in months (years even) rather than weeks.

He was terrified, he didn’t know what to expect, he did know that he didn’t have any room to mess it up though and that put quite a pressure on his shoulders.

Once his order was on the table, Beca gave him her full attention. They stared at one another neither knowing how to start the conversation.

“Thanks for inviting me,” Graham took the first step.

Beca simply bobbed her head.
“I don’t know what prompted you to reach out but I’m glad for whatever that is,” he added sincerely.

It wasn’t so much a what as a who. Aaron was the answer.

In the wake of their conversation Beca had admitted her wrongs, to Aubrey first, then to the Bellas. She had offered apologies and made amend. They had ended up spending an evening sharing things about themselves: fears, expectations, everything and anything really. It had been good for Beca to see that they were all struggling to navigate life. She now understood the point of allowing people to get close, it made the navigation suck that much less.

When they had confided in each other the subject of parents had come up several times which had led Beca to think about Graham. Her reflections took her back to her conversation with Aaron and how being right didn’t solve an issue.

She had spent hours thinking about it all, whether or not she cared about fixing said issue. Her relationship with Graham hadn’t been good for as long as she could remember, so did she really care to fix something that was never working to begin with?

The silence made the older Mitchell uncomfortable so he decided to dive in, there’s was not much point beating around the bush. “I know there are no words that could somehow excuse my actions… but I need you to understand that… the decision to keep those letters away from you wasn’t taken lightly…”

Graham knew this was the moment he was entering a mine field. Every word counted, he took a deep breath and hoped for the best.

“Far from me the idea to paint your brother under a bad light but… back then he wasn’t…”

“I know,” Beca cut him off. “I’ll make it easy for you. Aaron gave me the full story about what had happened the day he took off and what had followed.”

Beca was doing her best to reign in her ire, otherwise she knew they wouldn’t have a constructive conversation. She didn’t think she could stand Graham’s self pity though, so she opted to get them on track and skip to the core of the matter.
“Even he understood your actions. I still think you had no right,” she stated firmly. “But I get your point of view on the matter.”

He accepted her words with a bob of his head. Once again silence settled between them. He didn’t really know what to say. He wanted to beg for forgiveness but it was obviously useless, this whole thing would remained between them like a tenacious stain on white linen.

“Ever since I was seven years old, the only way to exist to your eyes was through academic performances.”

That hurt. A lot. Mostly because the accusation wasn’t too far from the truth if Graham was honest.

“Don’t get me wrong you’ve always been a good parent for the whole technical aspect of it. Providing roof, food and clothes and so on. That goes for her as well.”

Beca had no problem admitting that things were not that bad in their household, her parents were just utterly inattentive.

“You two were so caught up in your acrimony and loathing of the other that at some point you just stopped caring. Zack, Aaron and I were just a burden you had to carry until we could provide for ourselves, pawns in your little war, constant reminders of your failing marriage.”

Graham was ashamed to admit it but Beca’s statement was accurate.

“I want to believe you did your best, unfortunately it kind of sucked.”

Beca didn’t assume that parenting was easy, she couldn’t deny that her parents had partially dropped that ball though.

“The boys and I had to count on ourselves, we essentially went through the whole process of growing up and shaping ourselves as adults on our own.”
It was odd saying all those things out loud. Beca knew they hadn’t had a proper conversation for
years, but now she wondered if they’d ever had any to begin with. It was a sad assessment and at
the same time it illustrated perfectly her points.

She had put a lot of effort into pretending that she wasn’t affected by the slow and painful
deterioration of her family and now the almost inexistent family ties, but that was a lie. If she had
been able to push it back into the limbos of her psyche, it had always been eating at her like a
cancer.

“I needed you…I needed you when I could barely string two sentences together, I needed you to
care about the things that made me feel normal, I just needed you to be there.”

The words were cascading freely. It was like purging some poison out of her system. The more she
spoke the better she felt.

“I needed you then. I don’t need you now,” she shrugged.

Graham was not prepared for such verbal violence. Oxygen left his lungs suddenly as if he had just
received a brutal punch in the guts.

“There’s no getting back those years of neglect. You have Daniel for a do over and play ‘attentive
Dad’ with, but for me it’s too late. I’ve learnt to do without you for years and I can go on for a
lifetime,” she continued.

Beca was not trying to be mean. She knew her words were rough, but they were only the truth.

“I don’t need you in my life, Graham, you have to understand that.”

The older Mitchell tightened his jaw and looked away briefly to hold back the tears that were
burning his eyes.

“I want you in it though.”

Beca had thought long and hard, if she was honest with herself, she had liked their attempt at a
relationship. Even though they’d probably never have the dream father/daughter relationship, she could only hope that they’d have something stable that wasn’t based on antagonism.

“There are things we’ll never have, I’m at peace with that. I just want us to have something good.”

The relief was overwhelming, Graham raked his throat and he briefly pushed his fingers in his eyes to erase his tears. He was on the worst emotional rollercoaster ride. He had been high at her invitation for a meeting, then it turned into the steepest descent into listening to all his faults being thrown back in his face, he had known that he had caused pain but never fully grasped how much until now.

When Beca had said not needing him, he had wanted to plead his case, beg, but had been too stunned to even speak. And now she was offering what he wanted, yet another chance to mend their relationship.

“Considering everything that has happened, this will be on my terms.”

This was not a negotiation as far as Beca was concerned. She intended to be fair, but one thing was certain, she wouldn’t move forward unless Graham accepted everything with no condition.

It wasn’t about pride, she just had suffered enough because of him and his actions. She knew that such were not his intentions but that was irrelevant, only the consequences mattered in the end.

“First of all, I’m not a little girl anymore, you are to treat me like an adult. While you may have your opinion on them or disagree with them, you are to always respect my choices. This is my life, mistakes and all. If I ever need your guidance, you’ll be the first to know.”

The brunette wasn’t harsh for the sake of it. She just wanted to make sure that her words truly sunk in and resonated with Graham.

“No more lies, ever.”

The heat behind those four words could not be ignored. “When it comes to trust, you are treading on mighty thin ice and the next crack will break it for good.”
Beca paused. Hours of reflection led her to the conclusion that in order for them to have a real chance at a fresh start with a clean slate she had to accept the past, but also she had to ensure not to repeat it. She would lead and set the pace and maybe, with a little luck and a ton of effort, they could have a healthy relationship.

“This is the last chance I’m giving to this relationship. I will make efforts, I’ll fight for it but if it doesn’t work, then that’s that. I’m not letting you hurting me again.”

She took a moment to make sure she had said all she wanted. Satisfied that she had, she brought her point home.

“I can’t change the fact that you’re my father, but at this point we’re under no obligation to share more than genetics.”

Graham hated to admit it but in truth he had always been aware of his own failings as a father. It seemed to him that they had gone from happy family to related strangers in the blink of an eye.

Then circumstances had made it almost impossible for him to try and fix things, Zack was on the other side of the planet, Aaron was gone and to exchange more than ten words with Beca without turning it into an argument was almost impossible.

He had taken time for him to understand that his desire for relationships and his will to work on it didn’t matter if none of them was willing to make room for him in their life. Ultimately, it was not up to him.

Lucky for him, life worked in mysterious ways because now he was offered the chances he had always yearned for. First with Aaron, and now with Beca.

“I want you to know that I am sorry… for not being there for you,” Graham finally spoke. “I am grateful beyond words that you’re giving me yet another chance. I’ll never take it for granted… but I’m not perfect Beca, I can’t promise that I won’t do any mistakes…”

“I’m not asking for perfection Graham, just for your best at any given time.”

Graham had a wobbly grin when he heard the words he had told her many times while growing up.
“I can do that,” he nodded.

“Good.”

Silence settled between them again. They sipped their drinks, taking stock of their conversation, of the new start they were taking. The question remained though: where to go from here?

Graham decided not to over think things. They didn’t have much, no real common ground, but they had to start somewhere. So he chose the one thing he knew would talk to his daughter: music.

“I’ve been listening to your shows… you’re quite natural as a MC.”

Beca was surprised at that confession. First because having the night shift, she could hardly picture Graham staying up late and second because she hadn’t known him to like anything beyond classical music.

“Thanks.”

“A student of mine talked about it and asked if we were related last week. I’ve been listening ever since,” he expanded as if he had read her mind. “I may or may not have bragged about you being my daughter,” he added sheepishly.

Beca’s stare was hard and cold, but to his surprise the shadow of a grin stretched her lips. “That’s free publicity, can’t be mad about that.”

Graham’s breath of relief came out as a chuckle. He quickly thought of a question, too afraid that their meeting would end should silence settled between them.

“So, what is your favorite cover?”

Beca thought about it, she attempted to answer a couple of time then decided that for a music junky such as herself, it was a loaded question. “Can I make a top 5 instead?"
“Sure,” Graham smirked.

They slipped into an easy conversation, mainly because anything related to music was like a comfort blanket to Beca. There were a few awkward silences, but an hour went by before they parted ways.

As she was walking back to her dorm, she mentally reviewed the meeting. It had been emotionally draining and unpleasant, but they had eventually managed to take their first shaky step in the right direction. Though everything had yet to be done and there was hard work ahead, Beca felt hopeful. If anything, the last hour had served as a reminder that they didn’t know one another at all, more importantly it taught her that she really wanted to get to know Graham.

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Loud and urgent banging on her door woke Beca with a violent start. She rolled over to sit up, realizing a second too late that she was precariously perched on the edge of her bed, she lost her fight against gravity, landing painfully on the floor in a dull thud.

She cursed with a groan then uncoordinatedly got up with the intention to punch whoever was on the other side of her door.

She had assumed that she’d find a lost man in search for his bro, so she was more than surprised when Aubrey pushed her way in as soon as she swung the door open.

Panic forced her to focus, she couldn’t think of a good reason for Aubrey to barge in unless something bad had happened. The blonde did look frantic, Beca held her breath anticipating the worse.

“I’ve just received a phone call.”

There was a long pause, when nothing was added Beca narrowed her eyes at the senior.
“I’ve just received a phone call,” Aubrey repeated with a tone implying that Beca should understand the magnitude of her words.

Beca blinked and shook her head as if to make sure she was actually awake. When she understood that this was what had had Aubrey trying to knock her door down she felt her eyebrows almost reach her hairline.

“There better be a follow up to that statement or I will murder you.”

Beca’s panic was slowly morphing into irritation. She had come back from the station barely two hours ago, meaning she hadn’t slept for much more and Aubrey had just woken her up like the whole building was on fire just to inform her that… she had received a phone call…

Clearly, that was ground for murder, in fact she reckoned she could probably get away with it claiming self-defense (it would be a sad and premature end to their friendship but really, the blonde was asking for it).

“I’ve just received a phone call.”

Alright, that was it, strangling to death was happening. Beca was about to advance to execute her threat when Aubrey finally changed her record.

“…from the ACCA,” the blonde added as if frustrated that Beca didn’t get the point faster. “The Footnotes are disqualified… the Bellas are back in the competition.”

It took a few seconds for Beca to compute the information together. “No joke?”

“No joke!” Aubrey confirmed.

“That’s… that’s awesome for you guys.”

The blonde recoiled slightly as her expression shifted immediately, watching Beca with evident
confusion. “Us guys?” she tilted her head silently asking if she had heard the brunette correctly. “And what exactly do you think you’ll be doing for the next three months besides working your ass off for the final?”

The question threw the little brunette for a loop. Sure she had apologized to the girls but the fact remained that she had walked away from the group and essentially quit at the semi-final. Granted there had been no point discussing that matter since the Bellas were done with the competition then, but she had assumed that she was no longer a Bella.

“Well… I thought… I… assumed that…I…”

Aubrey’s eyes narrowed a little more after each word, Beca felt herself slowly squirm under her gaze, so much so she stopped talking.

The blonde pursed her lips for a few seconds as if pondering her next words. “For the sake of not slapping sense into you, I’m going to put that brain fart on the lack of sleep,” she informed Beca. “Now, I’m going to spread the word while you get proper rest.”

As abruptly as she had walked in Aubrey started to walk away, she opened the door but turned around to face a stunned Beca once more. “Oh and when you wake up come by the apartment, take what you need to spend the night, Chloe’s coming back tomorrow we need to plan a proper welcome.”

Beca simply nodded at the issued order.

“That’s awesome for you guys,” Aubrey repeated with a dumb high-pitched voice. “I swear Bilbo…” she shook her head in exasperation as she walked away.

Beca, decided there and then that she was way too tired to process everything. She just let herself fall on her bed and let Morpheus take back to Zzzland.
Chloe grinned as she neared the door of the apartment. The surgery had gone well and the hospital stay had been okay, but she was longing for the comfort of her place and the people she cared about.

After fear, anger was the feeling she despised the most. If she had an ‘easy-going’ nature, she was not one to let people push her around (ever) therefore anger had its purpose, it was the indispensable fuel when she needed to put her foot down.

There had been arguments during which she had said everything she had needed to, so she had no reason to hold onto said anger.

The time apart and radio silence had been necessary because she had been angry. Now she needed to recharge her battery. For some people that meant being on their own, for her it meant getting her fix of hugs and affection.

She couldn’t wait to get in and hug her best friend especially since they had parted on bad terms and hadn’t had any contact beyond the text she had sent to assure Aubrey that the surgery had gone well. In all their years of friendship this had been the longest time they had spent apart without a contact of any kind. She had every intention to make up for it.

“…so one can wonder if they would have endured the passing of time or their music would be held as high had things been different… I mean if you think about it, their success and legendary status partly rest onto their untimely death. Who knows, maybe their next album would have been a musical catastrophe.”

Beca didn’t know how they had dove into a deep musical debate while shooting aliens on screen, but she was learning to go with the flow when it came to Aubrey and her. In fact she kind of liked that there was no logic going on.

“Perfect run, boo yah!” Aubrey exulted and offered her fist for a bump to Beca. She focused on their conversation again as the next level was loading. “Okay, I see your point but they were great musicians to begin with. Talent and genius don’t go away overnight so we can assume they hadn’t peaked yet.”
Chloe entered the apartment quietly, just as she was about to announce herself she was abruptly silenced by surprise when she saw both Aubrey and Beca having a casual moment on their own on the couch. Even to this day such a scene made her feel like she had walked into an alternative universe (to be fair though, considering the state of things between those two when she had left, the questioning was rather normal this time.)

She was pleased. If anything it meant that she had been heard. While she knew that where Aubrey and her were concerned all that needed to be done was a hug, for Beca it wasn’t that simple. She put her apprehension aside and focused on the positive, both of her favorite girls were there, that was enough to lift her spirits higher.

“True, but…” Beca trailed off, trying to make her point. “Okay, take ‘Grace’ for instance, it’s a great album by all mean, as in it’s a great first effort. That being said, personally I don’t find it mind-blowing good. In my opinion its cult status is only due to Jeff’s death.”

Aubrey pondered her statement with a pout. “Fair point,” she agreed with a tilt of her head. “It could have been a one album wonder.”

Caught up between the game and their debate, both girls failed to hear the redhead’s entrance.

“Hey there,” Chloe finally announced herself.

Two heads turned toward her instantly. Both Aubrey and Beca got up clearly surprised, Beca sighed and glanced at Aubrey.

“Worst, welcoming committee, ever,” she mumbled.

“Shut it,” Aubrey mumbled back before making her way around the couch.

There was a brief pause in her stride during which she gave Chloe a small grin that said she had been an idiot and was deeply sorry and would make sure not to make the same mistakes (they were at the highest level of non verbal communication by now); then she just closed the distance between them to wrap her best friend in a tight hug which was returned just as fiercely.

They both sighed in relief, they were both home now.
“Welcome back,” Aubrey whispered.

Chloe kissed her cheek and held onto her best friend for a moment longer before pulling away, a wide smile on her face.

She then faced Beca who was standing a couple of meters away, looking nervous and a bit lost. The little DJ took tentative steps toward her girlfriend, stopping short of any contact.

It’s not that she didn’t want to hug Chloe, she craved that contact, she just had no frame of reference to act right now. After the way they had parted didn’t know if she could just embrace Chloe as easily as Aubrey had, or if her gesture would be welcome.

“Hey,” she broke the silence.

“Hey,” Chloe echoed. She saw the effort for what it was, making the last few inches disappear, she took her girlfriend in her arms.

Beca slowly returned the embrace. She had never cared much for physical contacts before Chloe, now she was almost at a point where she needed them, or maybe she just needed Chloe’s touch, period.

Chloe landed a soft kiss on her cheek then broke the embrace.

Aubrey set them in motion, she took Chloe’s bag and moved out of the foyer. “I hope you’re hungry because we’ve made lunch.”

“Cool,” Chloe grinned following Aubrey further inside.

Beca joined them in the kitchen area where she and Aubrey had set the table. “We had a lengthy discussion about what you could and couldn’t eat, because we figured you may or may not have a sore throat still. We opted for soft, easy to swallow food,” Aubrey explained. “Bilbo, here,” she pointed her thumb in direction of Beca “wanted to make an entire lunch out of different flavored ice cream, lucky you I was there to put a veto on that.”
“Yeah, because you’re no fun,” Beca huffed. “I had my tonsil removed when I was a kid and I remember icy stuff helping a lot.”

Chloe chuckled at the banter, easily imagining the argument. “She does have a point,” she sided with Beca.

“Well, forgive me for wanting to eat healthy.”

They all took place at the table and shared a meal. The conversation was light. Aubrey finally informed Chloe about the Bellas being back in competition, then she updated her on things that had occurred during the spring break. Everything was seemingly back to normal, just like that.

“I feel like treating us for dessert, so I’m going to get our favorites and some ice cream,” Aubrey announced once they had cleaned the table.

Beca had known herds of pachyderms to be more subtle than the blonde. She felt panic rapidly rising up her chest. Aubrey gave her a stare that couldn’t be misinterpreted, it said ‘you better have sorted out your shit by the time I’m back’.

“I’ll be back in a few,” the blonde smiled at her best friend before making her exit.

Chloe let out an amused snort, if she wanted more time before confronting Beca, that plan had just been thrown out of the window.

“Want to help with the dishes?” Beca broke the silence first.

She didn’t feel near ready to talk to Chloe, which is why Aubrey had been right to corner her, still she needed a moment to collect herself.

She started to wash. Chloe stood up by her side, picking up a clean rag she waited to be given things to dry.
“How’s your voice?” Beca timidly glanced at the redhead.

They had not brushed the subject during lunch. “I don’t know,” Chloe shrugged. “I was advised not to speak for a few days, which I did. This is actually the longest I’ve spoken since the surgery.”

“You barely said anything,” Beca pointed out.

“Guess, I’m being cautious,” Chloe pursed her lips. “I have yet to try singing… but hum… I think I’m still too afraid to find out if I have lost that.”

Beca nodded in understanding.

Silence settled between them. Beca tried to think about a way to start then figured it was useless. She was bad at this and it was going to suck any way so she might as well wing it. She finished washing the plates and cutleries, dried her hands then leant against the counter while watching Chloe finishing her part.

“So… I’ve been a massive jerk.”

Chloe smirked at that. “You could say that.”

Taking a deep breath Beca let her words flow. It was awkward and she wasn’t sure she was being clear but she was being sincere. She tried to explain how she was out of her depth, how this whole ‘having people who care about her and whom she cares about’ was still new to her, how she didn’t always know how to navigate through that uncharted territory (because she never had to before and was ill-equipped for it, if at all) and how old habits were hard to fight.

Chloe listened attentively, never interrupting. She let Beca struggled, not out of spite or payback but she didn’t want to put words in the other girl’s mouth. Beca had to do this and she had to do it alone because there was too much at stake, her heart on top of that list.

“I… I hate talking, but I …” Beca was clenching and unclenching her fists as she spoke. “But I’m starting to understand that it has its purpose…”
The brunette felt like she was trying to keep her head above the surface in a raging water. She kept repeating herself she could do this, she had to.

She let out a shaky breath. “I’m sorry, for hurting you and acting like an idiot” she paused. “I’m not saying I’ll be good at the communication thing overnight… but I’ll learn and I promise I’ll always try,” Beca assured firmly. “As uncomfortable and… unpleasant as it is… the idea of losing you is much… much worse.”

Chloe waited, when it became apparent that Beca had said everything she needed to, she finally spoke.

“Apology accepted.”

It probably seemed like Chloe was easily forgiving but it was not the case. She had wanted to be heard by her girlfriend and Beca had just confirmed that her message had been received loud and clear.

She saw relief wash over Beca’s face as she went on. “I can appreciate everything you’ve just said… I needed to hear that.”

“I meant it,” Beca immediately defended herself.

“I know,” the redhead reassured her, putting a gentle hand on her cheek. “I know,” she repeated and Beca nodded. “It’s nice to hear you say these things… but this is one of those things where actions speak louder than words, you know what I mean?”

Beca nodded again. “I’ll be very loud from now on.”

That made Chloe smile. “Okay.”

Chloe took a step closer to her girlfriend. “It’s hard for me as well, you know? I’ve never been this close to someone… except Aubrey but I’ve known her for most my life,” she hesitated to say more but pressed on. “You have my heart in your hands Beca.”
There was no point denying that fact now, she had told Beca she loved her prior to leaving. “As terrifying as the idea is, I trust you to… treat it with care.”

The thought was paralyzing in itself. Beca didn’t feel anywhere near deserving of such a precious gift and trust. It was overwhelming and her deepest fear was not to be up to the task. Her instinct told her to run for the hill, but she ignored it. Chloe was worth fighting for, besides at least they could be terrified together because her heart was definitely in the redhead’s hands as well (and she was fine with that). If anything Chloe had proven herself to be worthy of trust more than enough.

She inhaled deeply, steeling her resolves. She might not be worthy now but she’d do everything she could to get there. “I will. I promise, I always will.”

There was no room for doubt in her voice and that was enough for Chloe to finally relax. Now she was convinced they’d be okay.

“Good,” she replied. Leaning in she delivered a long kiss then hugged Beca fiercely.

The brunette wrapped her arms around her waist and buried her head in Chloe’s neck, inhaling, filling herself completely with her scent, she had missed this.

“I’ve missed you,” she voiced her thought out loud, holding Chloe tighter.

“I’ve missed you too.”

They remained like this for a while, then moved to the couch where they stayed in each other’s arms, making up for the past few days.

That’s where Aubrey found them when she returned with pastries and ice-cream in hands.

“You seem to have work things out and I’m glad, I am, but you better not have had make-up sex on the couch, I really don’t want to burn it.”

That made both of the other girls laugh which soon turned into collective mirth.
“Chlo?”

They had spent a quiet afternoon with Aubrey, then they had gone out for a walk before coming back for dinner. The three of them had watched a movie, then Chloe and Beca had gone to bed where they had talked quietly for over an hour.

Beca couldn’t sleep though. At first she just needed the reassurance that things were back to normal with Chloe. Now, however, she knew it was more than that. It was about the one thing she hadn’t said.

She loved Chloe and she wanted to tell her that much.

She hadn’t said anything, not out of fear but because those words had somehow lost their meaning. First spoken in an argument it felt like they would always be tainted with bitterness or a reminder of a bad moment.

She didn’t mind the lack of romance or cuteness or mush or whatever people expected of such declaration, what mattered was that the moment hadn’t been theirs. That moment was lost and would never be again because it was the first time.

She had ruined that. There was no way to go back for a do-over. If she said those three words now Chloe might think she only did so out of some obligation, not because she felt it.

Thinking about it, she had never given any real value to those words or rather they had long cease to have one. She used to hear them right before being deceived by whoever said it.

Of course context was everything and she knew it was different with Chloe but she couldn’t help thinking that her own utterance of those words would (in part) sound like an apology, a plea for forgiveness.
She loved Chloe in a way she couldn’t described. And using the standard declaration not only seemed trivial but also weak. Maybe there were just no words to describe love, so why try? Or why stick to the usual ones?

“Nuh-huh, I’ve called dibs on the little spoon fair and square,” the redhead mumbled playfully.

Chloe was in need of affection and today she wouldn’t budge, she was already preparing her best puppy face if Beca tried to sweet talk her into switching position.

“I know,” the reply came in a chortle.

There was a long pause, sensing that something was off Chloe turned around to face Beca. In the dimly moonlit room, the brunette’s stare was somber, enough to make her apprehensive.

Beca cupped her cheek delicately. For a few seconds she watched her thumb moving against her skin then she looked at her again.

She opened her mouth but there was a slight hesitation, then a subtle grin played on her lips, her gaze sharpened before her word launched. “Back at you.”

Chloe frowned, the words seemed random and were completely out of context.

Just as she was about to give voice to her confusion, the pieces clicked together, unexpectedly taking her breath away.

The words said were not actually the ones spoken.

When in a relationship there were three words one was hoping to hear and dreading to say. Three words that could be the root of extreme elation or unconditional despair. They were the definition of playing Russian roulette, like jumping off a cliff not knowing whether that thing around your shoulders was a simple backpack or a parachute.

Because of the many books, songs, movies, pictures and what not celebrating those words, there was this unconscious ideal vision of the first time they should be professed or heard and the feeling
they would elicit.

While not being a hopeless romantic, Chloe had had expectation for those words, for the first time she’d utter them to Beca and the first time she’d hear them back. That vision was sickeningly sweet (rainbow and unicorn sweet).

The reality had not been anywhere near the vicinities of that vision, or romance or intimacy for that matter.

She had had time to come to terms with the fact that that first time would forever be flawed, a crumbled line on an otherwise picture perfect relationship.

It only now occurred to her that she had been wrong. That first time was just a perfect reflection of Beca and her as an item. From the start, they had never followed any logical step, all of their firsts had been botched before being amazing.

Their first kiss? An utterly forgettable contact meant to get her attention and make her shut up. The second one? Fireworks.

Their first time? The most underwhelming dive into intimacy. The second one? The equivalent of a nuclear bomb of white hot flashes of pleasure and sensory overload.

The first time she declared her love? A resigned statement while she was just giving up fighting.

Funny the power words could hold, after all they were just that, words. Successions of letters forming a sound to which someone gave a meaning and the rest of the world agreed to.

Beca hadn’t used the three magical words that were held on a pedestal.

Nope, she had instead uttered the most mundane combination of words. Yet, there was not a single doubt about their meaning or the depth of the emotion they were encompassing. Beca didn’t need to say more, Chloe could take the wild, the thunderous beating of her heart as a sure indication that the words had resonated in all their glory.
Somehow, in the most unexpected fashion, in her own unique, awkward and perhaps dorky way, Beca had relegated her first confession to a distant memory. The words she had used were simple, plain even, but ultimately they were perfect.

Most importantly, those words were theirs and will always be.

The sheer amount of love washing over Chloe right now was so potent it’s a miracle she had any space left for oxygen. She felt so much to such a degree she couldn’t help the tears filling her eyes nor did she care about them. Her smile was trembling when she replied “Back at you, too”.

The little DJ beamed knowing that her words had been received loud and clear.

Chloe kissed her with fervor and in moments their bodies translated those words in the language only they could understand.

xxxxx

“Alright Bellas, as you know the ACCA Gods have kindly bestowed us with a second chance,” Aubrey announced solemnly to the group. “I’ve just given you our battle plan.”

Every Bellas looked at the sheet of paper they were holding then glanced at one another with subtle grimaces. There was a long pause before one of them dared say something.

“Aubrey… that’s the exact same routine,” Cynthia-Rose cautiously voiced everyone’s thought.

“Yes, it is,” Aubrey confirmed. “Because that’s the only plan I ever had for us this year,” she nodded. “Clearly, that plan sucked, so here’s what we’re going to do with it.”

The blonde tore her paper into pieces and threw them in the trash can she had set nearby. “I’ll be damned… that felt good,” she mused to herself.
She looked up only to find disbelief on every face. “Well, go on,” she encouraged them.

There was hesitation as the girls briefly wondered if Aubrey was under influence, but then one by one they started to abuse their sheet of paper, tearing them apart, crushing them, stomping on them, overall killing that routine any way they could and it was an absolute blast.

“Yes, finally!” Fat Amy cried with both her fists in the air, her natural flare for dramatics only served to make everyone laugh.

“Alright… there went that routine,” Aubrey called everyone’s attention back on her. “Now, I’m not going to lie. I don’t have a plan,” she turned to Chloe with hopeful eyes.

“Don’t look at me,” the redhead chortled. “I’m right there with you.”

Chloe didn’t know what they should do and at the moment she didn’t know if she could be part of any plan anyway because she had yet to try out and see if she still had vocal abilities. She was elated to be among the Bellas right now, but there was dread in the pit of her stomach for this might be the last time she truly belonged with them.

“Beca?” Aubrey asked when she noticed the little brunette had tentatively raised her hand.

“I know that this is the moment when we should be brainstorming and figuring out a routine but… I was thinking we should skip this in favor of something…fun.”

Beca held her breath. Far from her the idea to upset Aubrey or not to take seriously their current turmoil but she had an idea she thought would federate everyone, if the blonde would accept to go with it that is.

Aubrey tightened her jaw to force her mouth shut, whatever had been her first response, she swallowed it. This went against her nature, relinquishing control was just not something she did.

Spring break had provided her time to reflect on the errors of her ways. She had misguided everyone in her quest for a do-over at the finals, but she had also tried to fit in Margo’s shoes the way the former captain had ordered her to.
When she had passed the baton Margo had made it clear that she didn’t have either of her and Chloe in esteem; she had reigned over the Bellas for four years with an iron fist and a poisonous tongue (she wouldn’t address any of them except to critic or put down). When they had taken over Aubrey and Chloe had sworn they wouldn’t be like her. In the end Aubrey had followed Margo’s path, sure she wasn’t verbally abusive but she had acted like a little tyrant just the same.

To repeat the same pattern and expect different results was madness, it was time to change even if that meant doing something counter instinctive.

One of her greatest failure this year had been to forget that everyone had a voice and that voice counted. It was time for her to start listening and be open to the girls’ ideas. Beca was offering her the perfect opportunity to start on that new path.

She took a deep breath to push back her controlling impulses. Her next words stunned every Bella, in fact they wouldn’t have been more stunned if she had suddenly given birth to a unicorn. “What do you have in mind?”

Even though they had had their talk, Beca was still pleasantly shocked at the reply. Chloe for her part couldn’t have been prouder of her best friend.

“Oh…” Beca had half envisioned to fight in order to plead her cause so she needed extra seconds to get her footing back. “Uh…We need to take it outside.”

And with that they all left their rehearsal space, following Beca to an unknown location.

Beca lead them to the empty swimming pool where the Riff Off had taken place. Lucky them no one was there. The pool was old and in need of repair, but at some point it had been claimed by the different singing groups on campus for its amazing acoustic. It was hard to say when it had occurred, but eventually the Faculty had forgone the reparation, and accepted it to be an unofficial second auditorium for the musically inclined.

“I don’t know about you guys but for me, the Riff Off is when we found our voices as Bellas.”

Beca’s statement was met with nod of agreement.

“That night was fun,” Fat Amy concurred.
“It was freaking epic,” Cynthia-Rose nodded.

“Yeah, right until we were robbed,” Aubrey snorted. Once again her words earned her astonished stares. “What? It’s true!”

If at the time she had only focused on the loss and the fact that Beca was prone to go rogue, Aubrey could now admit that their loss was questionable and their performance had been quite awesome.

“Anyway, since this is where we first came together as a group, I thought it would be the perfect place to celebrate being back into the competition. So let’s just have fun and bring that magic back,” Beca finally laid out her idea. “Bree, name a song.”

“Just the way you are by Bruno Mars,” Aubrey replied almost immediately.

Beca nodded with an appreciative grin then she sent them off. Every girl found their harmony and within seconds they were in synch. The brunette glanced at Chloe who had yet to join in and after a brief hesitation the redhead finally launched on the verse. The relief washing over her was evident once she realized that what she had feared the most had not come true. She still had her voice, to say she was happy at that moment would be the greatest understatement ever.

The brunette couldn’t help the smile on her lips when she heard Chloe sing. Focusing again she started to sing Nelly’s song over the other girls. If they were taken aback the Bellas took the addition in stride and soon a natural division occurred so that both songs mashed smoothly together.

They were singing and it was glorious.

Aubrey was seeing the proverbial light. She only realized now how much she had failed to listen. How could she had missed this? How could she had been so adamant to smother that spark?

There was something electric in the way their voices mingled, it went beyond just having good voices. They had never sang songs this way yet no one was at a loss as to what to do, each one of them instinctively knew the best way to keep the balance of the music and harmony. It was all organic and natural.
It was so amazing she had goose bumps, she felt high and enlightened on the verge of a musical orgasm.

When the songs came to an end, they were all ecstatic, it had been a long time since they’d had a blast singing together.

“Everybody bring it in!” she called excitedly.

They all put their hands together and finally harmonized their battle cry. There was a collective gasp of surprise, all the attention turned to Chloe.

“What the hell was that?” Fat Amy asked.

The redhead was as baffled as anyone else at the sound that had just came out of her mouth. “I don’t know, I’ve never made that sound before.”

She had been nervous about singing and had been elated to find out that she hadn’t lost anything, but apparently she had gained a little something.

Lilly’s mouth moved, Beca who was close to her nodded in agreement which prompted everyone else to look at her expectantly. “She said it was as awesome as it was creepy, like you had channeled the Devil,” the brunette voiced the other girl. “And she’s right.”

Chloe narrowed her eyes at her girlfriend but didn’t really protest because truth be told she was a little crept out herself.

Beca continued. “Now, I don’t know if you’ve just channeled Barry White or the Devil, but if that wasn’t just a one time thing, this could be good for us.”

“Yeah!” Cynthia-Rose concurred catching Beca’s drift immediately. “It means you can hit the bass notes!”
All the Bellas focused on Chloe, talking animatedly almost all at once, trying to find out how far Chloe’s new belt went.

Aubrey stayed aside next to Beca, she could feel a tingle coursing through her veins igniting a creative fire. Her mind was racing with the endless possibilities laying before them. So far it had only been about singing a couple of songs and ensuring a clean transition in between, but this… this mashing up idea was just revolutionary. It was so simple and obvious it dumbfound her that she had never considered it before.

“Bilbo, don’t let it go to your head but you’re a fucking genius,” she whispered to the brunette.

Beca snorted half amused, half taken aback by the sudden praise. “Thanks… I guess.”

“Can we sing again?”

The brunette raised an eyebrow with a smirk. “You’re the captain.”

Aubrey nodded then went to the other girls with a renewed energy, for the first time she felt confident in their group, she had finally figured out (with the help of Beca freaking Mitchell no less) how to get rid of Margo’s specter and be their own Bellas.

xxxxx

Chloe had always known that Aubrey and Beca would get along once they’d understand that they were very much alike. Sure they had started to get along as Beca spent more time around since the two of them had gotten together, but even then there had been an underlying tension between them, some topics were never to be broach in order to maintain peace.

Obviously those two had talked and worked out their issues during spring break, though she was curious Chloe didn’t ask either girl about it. She was just happy to witness their new dynamic, more carefree, and open. They always teased one another, of course, that being said things were definitely different; they were still learning to get to know the other but there was clearly an understanding of how the other’s mind worked.
Chloe couldn’t be happier about this new development, especially now.

They were constantly working on the new Bellas’ routine. That meant a lot of the rehearsals were spent brainstorming about the songs they’d use, then it was about writing down the arrangements to mash them smoothly, adding to that a dance routine. It was disheartening at times because they’d agree on a song and work on it only to realize that it couldn’t work with every other songs on their list, the realization sending them back to square one.

The only reason Aubrey hadn’t gone through a full nervous breakdown from the intensity of it all was because this time she not only relied on her as a co–captain (something she hadn’t really done all year, save from the choreography part), but she was also leaning on Beca. The brunette had a way to keep the blonde grounded and snap her out of any stress crisis.

The blonde was even more demanding during rehearsal, but there was a new surge of energy from the novelty of their routine and the fact that everyone had their say in it. Before, Bellas would pray for the rehearsals to come to an end, now it was hard to put an end to rehearsals. Everyone wanted the routine to be perfect, but more importantly they were taking a real pleasure on working on said routine. It was theirs, and for the first time it didn’t feel like they were just copying former Bellas, they finally had their own identity.

The Bellas spent more time together outside of rehearsals as well, creating even more cohesion in the group which in itself brought forth a new found confidence. Nowadays they often joked about being ready for world domination (and they were almost there).

“Oh my… I think we got it… we have our final set list,” Beca stated after checking yet again the blending of songs and the transitions.

“Bilbo, do not trifle with me,” Aubrey warned. They had been working on this for weeks and there was always something out of place. Though she had faith in their ability, she couldn’t help but stress about the fact that after a month of intensive work they had yet to have a locked routine.

“I’m not! Look…” Beca started to make a rough rendition of the whole set.

Aubrey took it all in and double checked silently. “I could kiss you right now.”

“I’m right here,” Chloe reminded her jokingly.
“I have enough kisses to go around,” Aubrey simply countered. “Bring it, Bilbo.”

The two girls exchanged their own little celebratory handshake (the result of so many hours spent playing video games together).

“Boo yah!” they singsong in unison.

Chloe simply shook her head with a grin. Yes, she loved their new dynamic but it was still hard to believe it was real.

“Now we can find the perfect dance routine to match!” Aubrey exclaimed.

“And we will,” Chloe cut her off immediately. “But for now we deserve a treat, so let’s put it all aside and go out. Come on, we need a break.”

For a second Aubrey was about to protest, but as part of her new policy, she took a deep breath and let go. Things could wait, Chloe was right about them needing a break.

“Might as well call the others, the more the merrier.”

“That a girl!” Chloe beamed.

xxxxx

The big day finally arrived.

Aubrey (with the approval of Chloe) had forbidden any rehearsal for the past two days. She wanted the girls to preserve their voice and energy. She had been able to be comfortable with such a decision because for the first time she felt confident. She knew they had work their asses off, and
there was nothing more that could be done to perfect their routine. No matter what happened today, she knew they had done everything they could to be ready for the final and put together the best routine possible.

They were backstage watching one group go after the other. The competition was no joke, everyone was bringing their A game. This time however no one was feeling dread grow exponentially at every performance. They were excited about going out there to show what they had created. The underlying tension was a mere manifestation of their impatience.

Right now they were just chatting and joking around quietly to pass the time. Beca noticed that Aubrey was standing in a corner away from the rest of the group. Fearing she might be experiencing some panic attack she discreetly left the other girls and walked to the tall blonde.

“Are you okay?”

Aubrey had been so lost in her thoughts, the question startled her a little. She was surprised to see Beca looking at her with concern.

The blonde put a hand over her chest, her heart was beating a iota faster than it should and she was slightly breathless, she nodded nonetheless “Yeah.”

“Aubrey,” Beca called out gravely. “Forget… all this for a sec,” she gestured their surroundings. “Are you okay?”

She now knew how the other girl’s mind worked and she understood the pressure she put on herself to reach perfection. As her friend though, she cared more about Aubrey’s well being. Yes, they were in final, yes it meant a lot and yes there was a lot at stake, but ultimately as far as she was concerned it wasn’t worth getting sick over.

The blonde was a bit taken aback by Beca’s solicitude, not that it was weird, they did care about one another, but usually this is the kind of exchange she’d be having with Chloe.

She grinned reassuringly at the little brunette. “I’m nervous,” she admitted. “But it’s the good kind of nervous.”

“You’re not going to be sick, are you?”
“Nah, don’t worry. I’m ready.” Aubrey nodded. “We are ready. I just need to…” she inhaled deeply, held her breath a few seconds before exhaling. “You know…” she didn’t have the words but she knew Beca had understood. She just needed a moment to herself.

“Alright,” Beca acquiesced once she was sure the other girl was well.

She returned to the other girls and watched yet another group going on stage.

The Treblemakers were up next which meant it was also the Bellas’ ten minutes call.

The Bellas wished them luck as they stepped in to take their marks on stage. Once more Beca left their side to go to Benji who had stayed behind while the rest of his group was getting ready to start their set.

He glanced at her as soon as she was at his level. He was so nervous Beca could see his hands shaking.

After Bumper’s defection (rumor had it that he had been hooked up to sing with John Mayer), Benji had been given the chance to join the Trebles’ ranks which had been a dream of his. Beca had been the first person he had broken the news to, and she had been beyond herself with excitement for him, one egregious mistake of college universe was finally being repaired.

Ever since the night of Stacey’s sorority party, they had grown very close to one another. Benji was quirky and gauche with people, something to which Beca could relate to. Once he was at ease though it was hard not to enjoy his company. He was quite a brilliant young man, and Beca spoke of experience because they had spend hours on end creating music together, many of her original creations now featured his voice.

Beca had always felt protective of him, he was just shy enough not to realize how great he could be when in his element.
“I don’t think I can sing,” he quickly confessed. He thought he could feel a golf ball lodge in his throat, no matter how hard he swallowed it just wouldn’t budge.

Beca smirked. “Of course you can, you’re babe,” she said confidently like it was something obvious.

Benji looked at her confused, clearly not understanding her words.


The way his face lit up at her words, the little chortle of relief he let out was enough to make her smile. Benji couldn’t have dreamt of a better confidence boost. His ‘thank you’ was heartfelt, and he knew that Beca also heard what he didn’t have the words to say.

“Come on, you got this,” she held her fist and he bumped it with his.

The Trebles had started singing, with one last nod she left him alone so he could collect himself before his cue to join in.

“This is it,” Chloe stated when the Treble’s performance came to an end. “I love you awesome nerds,” she beamed at the group.

“Okay, everybody bring it in,” Aubrey held her hand out. “Let’s show them how it’s done,” she said confidently. There was no need to for long speeches, they were ready.

They harmonized and lined up, getting ready to come onto stage. Aubrey took a deep calming breath, struck by an epiphany at the last moment she put a hand on Beca’s shoulder to hold her back. She handed the Bella’s diapason wordlessly to the brunette.
When she felt Beca about to speak she cut her off. “Lead the charge,” she said firmly. “I’m not asking.”

Beca had been about to ask if she was okay but saw nothing but calm determination on the blonde’s face. “Aye, aye Captain,” she nodded.

Aubrey finally saw the big picture. It wasn’t about her, about her chance at a do over. It was about the Bellas and what they had accomplished. Once again they were the only all female group in final so just going through the entire routine would be enough to have them leave a mark, regardless of the competition results.

Ultimately, it was time for her to let go of the past, and focus on this very moment. She couldn’t think of a better way to do that then to fully relinquish control.

She passed Beca by to take her mark on stage. Humbled by the display of trust the brunette followed. With a glance Beca made sure that everyone was in position before giving the A.

Showtime.

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Their performance was but a moment. One, O so glorious moment.

They were in complete osmosis, alive, animated by a force that no word could encompass. Their energy spreading like wild fire in the audience.

They were simply mesmerizing.

The crowd soared once they reached the final note, standing up to ovation them. The Bellas took a few seconds to bask under the applause, the sound resonating violently through them sending shivers down their spine as if they were holding a live wire.
“Oh, I’m so proud of you!” Aaron’s embrace was tight as he lifted his sister from the ground. “Mumble, that was a–freaking–mazing!!”

“Alright, put me down,” Beca laughed at his enthusiasm.

She still couldn’t wrap her head around the past hour. They had been on stage, they had killed it and they had actually won.

It hadn’t fully sunk in yet, the girls were just surrounded by friends and the other groups congratulating them. Beca was half convinced that this was some vivid dream. In any case she was in no hurry to come back to reality.

Aaron gushed over their performance, and how proud he was of his baby sister. Beca was smiling like she didn’t know how to stop. She had once called *a capella* singing and *a capella* competition ‘lame’. She was gladly swallowing back her assessment. She had no words to describe what she had felt back on stage, or what she was feeling now, but it was nowhere in the orbit, or the galaxy even of ‘lame’.

Aaron kissed her cheek before leaving her to go congratulate Chloe. Beca found herself facing Graham who had been standing aside watching his children interact with an irrepressible fondness.

“Congratulations,” Graham broke the silence.

“Thanks.”

“That was… I mean… that win was well deserved.”

“Yeah… I’m not…” she shook her head with snort of laughter. “I just can’t compute it all yet.”
“I can imagine,” Graham nodded in understanding. “Well, I’m not going to hold you back too long, I think your friends are waiting for you to celebrate.”

She bobbed her head. “Thanks for coming.”

“I wouldn’t have missed it,” he grinned. “That was a dope performance,” the use of slang and the awkward hand gesture illustrating his words made her laugh.

“Trying too hard there Dad,” she smirked.

There was a bit before her brain registered what she had just said. The euphoria of the moment had made her slip, shocking her completely. She didn’t know where that had come from and it felt very weird like she had spoken in tongue.

Graham was knocked off his feet for a second, he saw the exact moment she realized that she had called him ‘dad’, he couldn’t remember the last time that word had left her mouth.

Not wanting to ruin the moment or just fearing she’d take it back (clearly she wasn’t happy or comfortable with it) he immediately launched on something else pretending she had never said anything. “We’re still up for lunch on Monday with Aaron?”

Beca blinked, still trying to process what had just happened. “Uh… yeah,” she replied in a daze.

“Great, I’ll see you then,” Graham said hastily. “Go on and have fun, see you on Monday.”

“Yeah…” the brunette echoed her last response before walking away.

Not wanting to dwell on the last few minutes she immediately focused on her friends. Distraction came easily when she spotted Kimmy–Jin, Cho and DJ in the crowd surrounding the Bellas.
“Alrighty, dessert will be ready in a few.”

Aaron stood up from the table to go in the kitchen.

“Do you need help?” Beca called.

“Nah, I’m all good.”

Nodding, Beca stood up as well, she grabbed her bottle of soda and went on the balcony. After a brief moment of hesitation Graham decided to join his daughter outside.

The three Mitchells were making slow progress on their relationship. In the past months they had shared more meals or coffee than when they all lived under the same roof (two hands were enough to count those moments that should say how bad things were in the past). While Beca didn’t mind interacting with Graham alone, Aaron’s presence helped a lot. It was a comfort, to have an ally kept her calm and grounded.

“So…ready for LA?”

The question shocked Beca into silence. “You held your end of the bargain, I fully intend to hold mine,” he added in hope it would keep them on neutral ground.

In all honesty Beca had surprised him, but in retrospect that surprise was only a testimony of how little he knew his daughter then. He hadn’t expected her to really try or if she did, he had figured she wouldn’t see it through which is why he had made his offer to let her drop out after a year.

He now knew that his daughter was headstrong when it came to accomplishing her goals. He didn’t rejoice in the idea of her dropping out. He knew for a fact that she had excellent grades, so really she had everything to gain in stay enrolled. There was also the fact that she had been involved in something, and made an effort not to be her usual loner self. He really wished she could see how good all this was. LA wasn’t going anywhere, it could wait.

Unfortunately he had no say on the matter. Even though their relationship was better, it was still too fragile for him to argue with her about major life decisions, and he had to be very cautious on
the way he tackled such a subject to express his opinion for they were still learning how to communicate properly.

There was a long silence. Graham assumed that she didn’t want to talk about this with him, so he didn’t push.

Beca had thought long and hard about her next course of action. Yes, at the beginning of the year she had wanted nothing more than getting out of here as fast as possible. In her head, nothing could have made her change her mind or enjoy the whole College thing.

She wasn’t ready to admit that Graham had been right about her possible enjoyment of College though, so she opted for the rational approach.

She took a gulp of her soda before speaking. “I’ve had a meeting with Alvin Baxter a couple of days ago.”

Graham was clearly lost and confused by her answer but he kept his mouth shut rather than making any comment.

“He’s the director of the center where I broke the window…” Beca elaborated. “He has a friend who owns a club, he’s been listening to my shows and… he offered me a three nights tryout as a DJ…if it goes well and he likes my performance it may turn into a regular thing.”

“Oh,” Graham replied dumbly.

“There’s that… plus I think I’m really hitting my groove at the station,” Beca continued. “I have a few ideas I’d like to explore.”

The oldest Mitchell kept his enthusiasm in check, what were the odds of things aligning with his own wishes for his daughter? And yet, it seemed to be happening.

“Music a tough industry,” she kept on. “and I still need to work on my craft… I have the opportunity to do that now and get immediate feedback… I mean… I’d be a fool not to take advantage of such opportunities so… I think I’m going to stick around next year… for now.”
She finally answered her father’s question with a shrug.

Graham was happy to hear it. He had hoped from the beginning that she’d find a reason to stay. At first just to get a degree because he was old fashioned when it came to academic education. As things progressed he just wanted a chance to keep working on their relationship, and distance wouldn’t really help in that department.

“It does sound good,” he agreed. “I’m glad as long as you have a plan.”

He still did not really understand or fully agree with her professional prospects but that didn’t matter, at this point he was just glad to be involved in her life and kept up to date with her plans. Besides, he was learning to be more open minded about her interests. He could only wish for her success on her chosen path.

“Are you nervous about the club thing?”

“A bit… it’s always different to work a live crowd… but I like a good challenge,” she shrugged.

Silence settled between them again. It was still awkward but as their ability to hold a conversation was steadily improving, silences were starting to be a bit more comfortable.

They didn’t talk further until Aaron came to get them for dessert.

“Don’t take it the wrong way, but if I didn’t know better, I’d start suspecting you were on drugs,” Beca reflected out loud with a smirk.

She was at Chloe and Aubrey’s, playing with the blonde on the couch while Chloe was in her room getting ready.
“Oh… do you feel the awesomeness?” Aubrey exclaimed gaily when she took the winning shot, which made Beca laugh.

“Normally, this would be about the time I’d make a witty, slightly abrasive come back, but I won’t because I agree with you,” the senior beamed while continuing to tear enemies on screen.

A week had elapsed since the ACCA final and she had yet to get down from the high it had put her on. There was absolutely nothing that could erode her mood. One could easily think that she had absorbed Chloe’s bubbly, shiny and ever positive mood. She was smiling all the time, she was catching herself not to break into song for any occasion (like she was stuck in some Disney movie) and she felt an irrepressible urge to hug everybody just to share her good vibes.

She had figured that it was only the universe balancing itself. With the stress and pressure she had put on herself about the Bellas and the competition, she had spent most of the year on the negative end of the spectrum mood wise; now that she had live through the final with the most amazing outcome, it was only normal that she’d be on the positive end.

Life would come at hers with the usual little annoyances and worries soon enough, in the meantime she fully intended to enjoy every second of her happy–beyond–measure high with no restraint or apologies.

“This is going to sound corny as hell but, what I like the most is not the win but how we won and who we won with,” Aubrey confessed. “I don’t think I’d have enjoyed winning half as much last year… I don’t know… the other Bellas… things were just different then, less enjoyable,” she shrugged.

“It almost sounds like you’re grateful for last year incident,” the brunette teased.

“You know what? I think I am… almost,” Aubrey conceded.

Of course it was easy to feel that way now that they had won, even all the drama that had preceded their victory made the whole thing even more epic when viewed through the lens of success.

The blonde shook her head at the screen when Beca missed an easy action. “I’m so happy I don’t even mind your poor gameplay.”
“Oh give me a break, it’s the first time I miss anything,” Beca pouted.

“Awww Bilbo… you’re so adorable I could hug you right now,” Aubrey said as she playfully pinched the other girl’s cheek.

“Dude! Not cool!” Beca protested.

The beam on Aubrey’s face showed how much she was enjoying herself. She did cut Beca some slack and loaded the next level of their game.

“By the way,” Beca spoke again as if picking up some unfinished conversation. “I’d like to formally apologize for calling the whole thing lame.”

Aubrey snorted. “Apology accepted, but I won’t apologize for calling you a bitch.”

The brunette just chuckled. “I wasn’t expecting you to.”

“You know… I’m bewildered at how far we’ve come from that first exchange.”

“Goes to show that the laws of probabilities are meant to be defied… like that shot right here, boo yah!”

“Fair enough,” Aubrey gave a pout of appreciation bumping her fist with the brunette’s.

“I’m ready!” Chloe finally joined them in the living room.

They were going to Stacey’s sorority where the Bellas had planned a proper party to celebrate their victory.

“You look… wow.”
The goofy look on Beca made the extra time she had spent getting ready well worth it.

“Thank you, I wasn’t aiming for anything lower,” she winked at her girlfriend then grabbed her hands. “Let’s go.”

The house was packed, everyone was high on energy, there were games and dancing going on, the party would make everyone’s book as epic, that was for certain.

Beca usually didn’t like crowded place, but even her was having a great time.

“There you are!” Chloe exclaimed as she joined her side. “Are you having fun?”

“Yup.”

“Cool,” Chloe pecked her lips.

“Do you want some more jiggle juice?”

“Nah, I’m good for now. Thanks.”

They were both leaning against a counter, facing the space used as a dance floor. “Am I imagining things or does it look like Aubrey is about to…”

“Eat Jesse alive?” Chloe finished with unconcealed mirth. “Not your imagination.”

Chloe had always found it very entertaining when Aubrey let her hair down. The blonde was not one to beat around the bush so when she liked someone she felt it was mutual, she went straight for the kill.
“Uh… I’d have bet on her going for Unicycle after lifting up the ban.”

Chloe laughed because Beca wasn’t far off her marks. “That was a good bet, but much like me she has a things for dorks.”

The redhead watched Beca chuckling, she waited for the spark of realization to ignite in her eyes. When the brunette frowned and opened her mouth to most likely protest, Chloe kissed her senseless. On pure reflex, Beca grabbed her hips for balance leaning into the kiss and returning it just as fervently.

“You were about to say something?” Chloe asked coyly after pulling back, smiling at Beca’s dazed expression.

“Uh…” the brunette’s neurons temporarily ceased to fire (a regular occurrence when kissing Chloe).

The redhead kissed her gently again, then grabbed one lapel of her shirt. “Come on, you promised me you’d dance.”

“Can I point out that I did that under duress?”

“Oh duress, really? I didn’t hear any complain then, if anything I clearly remember getting encouragements from you.”

“My point exactly… you could make me promise my first born using your… charms!”

“Not my fault if you’re not friend with Will Power.” Chloe stuck out her tongue.

“Ah ah… aren’t you hilarious.” Beca rolled her eyes at one of their many private jokes.

“Yes, I am.” Chloe nodded with a wide smile, pulling gently onto the lapel she was holding to drag Beca forward.
After talking to her father during their lunch at Aaron’s, something had occurred to Beca. His offer to reduce her ‘academic sentence’ to a year should she at least try to make an effort had had a butterfly effect with the most unfathomable repercussions, starting with crossing Chloe’s path.

That first encounter at the activity fair had been the catalyst for many things. It was hard to imagine what things would have been without Chloe. The redhead was at the origins of many things and she also was the source of changes in Beca.

If it hadn’t been for Chloe, Beca wouldn’t have tried out for the Bellas; she wouldn’t have opened up and be more involved with people, she wouldn’t have forged so many friendships, she wouldn’t have gone out of her comfort zone, she wouldn’t have handled the emotional rollercoaster ride that was this year. All that was amazing in itself.

More importantly, the redhead was at the core of her happiness.

Chloe had set her world ablaze with her stellar personality, burning down most of what she used to be only to make room for her to grow emotionally.

Sure much was left to be done and learnt, but Chloe had shown her a path, and she was learning to trust others, allowing herself to be vulnerable at times. It wasn’t easy and struggling was normal. Considering her starting point, she wasn’t doing too bad for herself. It did help a lot to know that the redhead was by her sides should she feel lost or need support.

Last but not least Chloe had put faith in her, entrusting her with her heart. Beca was blessed with the most precious gifts one could receive: selfless, unadulterated love.

She felt that love at every moment. It was in the way the redhead would make her smile with simple words or the smallest gesture; it was in the way she accepted and understood her emotional constipation and social inaptitude; it was in the way Chloe never tried to fix her but stood by her as she was figuring out fixing herself; it was in the way she pushed her out of her comfort zone; it was in her silly jokes and that unquenchable thirst for hugs and affection.

Simply put, Beca felt loved in all her awkward, dorky, broody, sarcastic and imperfect glory.

Beca felt incommensurably lucky. She was sensible enough to be aware of that gift and never to take it for granted.
She did all she could to embosom it, be deserving of it and most importantly give it back a thousandfold every day.

That unconditional love she felt for Chloe was terrifying by moment and exhilarating at all time. She wouldn’t trade it for anything.

Chloe turned around when Beca rooted her feet on the ground effectively stopping their progression toward the dance area. The redhead didn't get the chance to do or say anything as Beca gently framed her face with her hands before capturing her lips for a long kiss.

"Back at you."

Beca didn't think she'd ever grow tired of saying those words or seeing the spark it ignited in her girlfriend's eyes.

Chloe gasped and for a few seconds she forgot how to breathe. Then she felt a familiar warmth spreading through her as love surge forth in her chest (with almost painful intensity). She could feel herself glowing, so much so she was certain she could light up the room.

Grabbing Beca's second lapel, she pulled the brunette back in for a kiss, pouring all her heart's content in it.

"Back at you," Chloe echoed breathlessly when their kiss came to an end.

Beca beamed, she knew she'd never get tired of hearing those words.

She kissed Chloe again, momentarily forgetting where they were. Lucky her, Chloe had the good sense to pull away before they'd get caught up in the inevitable lustful haze.

"Nice try at distraction by the way, but you're still going to dance with me," Chloe teased.

"Ugh..." Beca snorted in mock annoyance. "If I must."
Chloe rolled her eyes at her girlfriend’s over dramatic tone.

"I don't know about dancing, but I'll gracelessly sway next to you all night." Beca pointed out. "The things I'd do to make you happy, woman"

"Oh woe is you," Chloe mocked her. "Come on, if you’re a good sport, I promise I'll make it worth your while"

The mischievous wink and smirk were enough to send a pleasurable tingle down Beca's spine and make her knees buckled slightly. Chloe hooked her fingers into one of Beca’s belt loop and walked them on the dance floor.

Life had been quite a mercurial mistress the whole year, taking her to new heights of joy, yet throwing mean punches that had knocked her flat out, the whole ride sprinkled with surprises (good and bad). In this moment though, Beca could say that Life was good and the whole College thing wasn’t so bad after all.

Once on the dance floor Chloe started to move gracefully with fluid motions, Beca did her best to follow her girlfriend’s steps. She was no good dancer but she was determined to swing enthusiastically all night long for making Chloe happy was all the incentive she needed to do almost anything.

Yeah, Life was good.

The End

Chapter End Notes

It’s done, yay!

I hope you’ve enjoyed the story.

Once again thank you very much for reading, for the reviews and the kudos. Thank you for sticking around for so long.
Immi, thank you for your precious help and input, I wouldn’t have managed to make it through without you.

As I have mentioned there will be a sequel, I’m not even going to attempt predicting when that first post will occurred, but I hope it’ll be before 2020.

Thanks for reading

Cheers,

Frosty

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End Notes

For the record, I have nothing against Quidditch IRL, as a matter of fact the very few games I’ve played/watched were quite fun.

Well, I shall be back with an update soon.

Thanks for reading.

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